



Save the Children



Children Speak Out



Trafficking Risk and
Resilience in
Southeast Europe

Regional report
July 2007

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Foreword

Over the past 5 to 10 years, there has been considerable attention given to the issue of child trafficking in Southeast Europe by governments, international organizations and civil society organizations. Legal frameworks have been adopted at country levels, strategies and action plans have been developed and institutions established, largely founded on international and regional conventions to combat human trafficking. A number of NGOs, donors and international agencies are operating alongside governments to raise awareness and provide assistance to at-risk and trafficked children. These efforts have been hampered, however by a lack of reliable statistics on the extent of and the trends in child trafficking. There is also a lack of knowledge of specific factors which may increase the risks of child trafficking and any efforts to develop effective interventions are therefore mainly based on assumptions and "educated guesses" about the actual risks and most appropriate interventions. There is, however continued evidence emerging to indicate that the numbers actually are rising and that due to the clandestine nature of trafficking, we may be only seeing the "tip of the iceberg" making it all the more urgent that we have a better understanding of the issue.

Save the Children's Child Trafficking Response Programme (CTRP), Phase Two is a three year project aimed at providing support to at-risk and trafficked children in Southeast Europe. The programme includes Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, The UN administered province of Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. A comprehensive research programme was started in March 2006, involving hundreds of children and adults from different communities across the region in order to learn more from children themselves about the factors which expose some of them to a greater risk of being trafficked, as well as children's own strengths and resiliencies in the adverse conditions many of them face. Participating countries published their own country reports in May and June 2007 and these include the views and opinions of key adults including parents, teachers, social workers and others, all of whom are mainly responsible for the welfare and protection of children. Country reports also give recommendations to governments, policy-makers and practitioners on how the safety and security of children at risk of being trafficked can be improved.

This report presents the collective views of children across the region who present their fears as well as their hopes and dreams and give valuable new insight and understanding to anyone who is committed to improve children's lives, protect them from abuse and exploitation and help them fulfill their aspirations. The recommendations to improve the welfare and security of children at risk as presented in this report are also formulated by the same children.

Save the Children will be using this analysis as well as the country research publications as a resource for developing interventions which are hopefully more targeted and appropriate to the circumstances of the children most at risk to trafficking. In doing so we apply principles of good practice in line with guiding documents including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Many thanks to all the children and adults across the region who have participated in the research and made this report possible. We owe it to them and many other children in the region whose rights are constantly violated, to increase our efforts to minimize the risks that children are exposed to so that they can be better protected against child trafficking.

Sincerely,



Stephen Ashby

Programme Director
Save the Children, Albania

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Gratitude must be extended to a range of actors who have provided various forms of assistance and support throughout the research process. Funding was provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Oak Foundation.

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At the national level, staff from Save the Children and partners including Animus Foundation and Partners Bulgaria, facilitated the coordination of the research project. The dedication and hard work of the lead researchers and their research teams in each of the 7 countries/entities must be applauded.

The input provided by key informants from state and non-state institutions and organizations at national and local levels elucidated the phenomenon of child trafficking. Particular thanks must be extended to the children who were involved in this research project. It would not have been possible without the insights, enthusiasm and active participation of hundreds of children across Southeast Europe in the design and data gathering phases of this project.

Acronyms and Terms

CTRP	Child Trafficking Response Programme
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
Kosovo	The United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RAE	Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian

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Executive Summary

This research report provides an in-depth analysis of children's perception of risk and resiliency in respect to trafficking. In addition to prevention, protection and reintegration strategies, Save the Children's Child Trafficking Response Programme (CTRP) conducted a qualitative, participatory and child-centered research project in seven countries/entities in Southeast Europe, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and the United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo¹.

This research was designed, managed and led at the regional level and was undertaken by approximately 40 locally-appointed country coordinators² and researchers who conducted literature reviews, individual interviews and focus group discussions with 876 respondents which included 618 children and 258 key informants (state and non-state actors at national and local levels). The children involved in this research included those working and/or living on the street, children in institutions and shelters, juveniles in conflict with the law and youngsters from socially marginalized and poverty-stricken communities. These children have been identified to be at risk of being trafficked in the existing literature and by key informants. Hence, this research sought to build on this knowledge, revise commonly held assumptions and deepen our understanding of risks and resiliency from children's perspectives.

Seven national reports were launched in May/June 2007 which contain in-depth contextual information about these issues from the perspective of key informants and children. This regional research report focused on the latter by providing a thematic analysis of the data derived from various groups of children living in diverse communities across Southeast Europe. These themes include risk and resiliency, social supports, safety and danger, decision-making and power, hopes and dreams, and evidence-based policy. These themes were analysed in light of an ecological and cumulative model that accounts for macro (socio-economic, cultural, political), interpersonal (relationships with parents/caregivers, peers, community members, state and non-state actors) and individual level factors.

This report reveals the manner in which children's perceptions of trafficking are influenced by the messages that they receive from others (adults, children, institutions, media etc.) which they actively interpret in line with their own experiences, beliefs and value systems. Although children were not asked specific questions about trafficking unless they introduced the issue themselves, many described its mechanisms and processes. They highlighted coercion and deception as the central means by which children are trafficked. Aside from this, their comprehension of deception or what they describe as being "tricked" or "cheated" is mediated by their own understanding and decision-making abilities in contexts characterised by adversity, the challenges that they face at macro and interpersonal levels and their wants and needs.

Children suggest that traffickers manipulate these needs and wants by making promises or offering them tangible or possibly intangible things they desire. These desires are influenced by their emotions, the challenges that they seek to overcome, their position in society in relation to others,

¹ Hereafter referred to as "Kosovo"

² The coordinators are affiliated with Save the Children Alliance offices in Southeast Europe and in the case of Bulgaria are attached to Animus Association Foundation and Partners Bulgaria Foundation.

and the manner in which they are treated by adults and other children. Children argue that despite the fact that these offers may turn out to be false, they make a decision after weighing up their options which eventually lead to unintended and unwanted consequences such as coercion, exploitation and trafficking. They do, however, argue that their decisions cannot be seen apart from an absence of options, which hinders their ability to do otherwise and thereby facilitate trafficking mechanisms and processes.

In their accounts of these experiences children provided unique insight into how they perceive risk and resiliency in their everyday lives. The resiliency that they exhibit is evident in a number of situations where they develop complex strategies to survive and cope with adversity. The success of these strategies hinges on a number of interpersonal and individual factors related to social supports, a high sense of self-efficacy (sense of power in relation to others), courage, planning and decision-making skills. Strategies are said to fail if children are physically weak, possess a low sense of self-esteem or have limited knowledge, experience and information. All of these can affect their ability to perceive and weigh up options. Each of these risk and resiliency factors rests on other individual, interpersonal and macro factors including age and constructions of childhood including gender and sexuality, knowledge and skills, education, experience, physical wellbeing and constructions of health/disability. Social supports at the level of the family, peer and community influences and a sense of social exclusion related to ethnicity, institutionalized living and behaviour that flouts social conventions and norms, were also important risks and resiliency factors.

Each of these risks and resiliency factors are highly individual, contextual and situational in that they differ for children in different situations, facing different types of adversities and challenging situations. It was discovered that the interaction and accumulative effect of macro, interpersonal and individual factors and processes have a significant effect on children's risk and resiliency. This hinders causal claims about risk and trafficking and makes it challenging to identify specific children who are at risk. Nevertheless, this report argues that children's perceptions need to be considered when attributing risk factors to anti-trafficking activities.

In general, this research found that children's perceptions of their strengths and vulnerabilities are reflected in their descriptions of trafficking. Children's feelings, fears and daily experiences are also reflected in their views of the violence and exploitation that trafficked victims face, the emotions that are attributed to these victims and the explanations that they provide about traffickers' behaviour. Hence, the trafficking messages that they receive are interpreted differently depending on their own experiences, needs, beliefs and value-systems. This is also evident in their accounts of their escape strategies from violent people and risky situations which appear in their accounts of trafficking survivors.

Under the theme evidence-based policy, children have described their direct and indirect contact with state institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, and on this basis have made a list of recommendations that pertain to them in situations of adversity and for children who are at risk of being trafficked. Children generally feel greater responsibility that action should be taken to overcome the risks. Their criticism also includes policy-makers, practitioners and front-line workers accountable for reducing and alleviating the risks that children face.

The recommendations centre on respecting the protection of children's rights including the importance of listening to and valuing children's opinion about their needs and wants while creating

avenues or forums where children can express themselves. This involves receiving support and counselling from adults and children alike who have faced similar challenges, increasing and enhancing children's options, access to information and skills in relation to recreation, education, health, migration and employment as well as raising children's awareness of trafficking mechanisms and processes and providing them with a practical means of protecting themselves.

Instead of simply "scaring children", they called for support in terms of enhancing their strengths, developing their decision-making skills and equipping them with practical information about how to escape and survive a potential trafficking situation. In general, children suggested that their protection from trafficking and other adversities should be prioritised and that a range of players need to take responsibility for undertaking this, with the assistance of children themselves.

This report reveals the importance of children's participation. Their involvement in design, sampling, information-gathering and dissemination phases has enabled them to exercise ownership over the final product. Not only will versions of national reports be adapted for children in local languages but throughout this report children's perceptions have been prioritised. It is believed that by doing so this report will have practical value for policy-makers, practitioners and front-line workers in state and non-state institutions, who instead of developing policies and programmes *for* children, should do it *with* children to ensure that they are informed and not misguided and will not inadvertently enhance the risks that children face. The first step in this regard involves listening to children. Therefore, this report stands as one forum where they can express themselves and speak out.

Introduction

Background

In September 2005, Save the Children started Phase Two of the regional Child Trafficking Response Programme (CTRP) in concert with seven countries/entities in Southeast Europe, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and the United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo. CTRP Phase Two followed an initial pilot-phase from 2002 to 2004.

Phase Two recognizes that child trafficking remains a serious concern in this region but that there is limited understanding of what trafficking means to children, why some children are more likely to be trafficked and which interventions could help prevent children from being trafficked. Therefore, aside from prevention, protection and reintegration strategies, Save the Children has identified participatory, child-centered research as a priority in order to develop effective interventions.

The aims of the research project were:

- To determine how to identify the children, families and communities most at risk of trafficking, and to document examples of what has worked and what more is needed in preventing trafficking
- To understand the processes of trafficking, including children's understandings of these, why some children are trafficked and what protects other children who are in danger of being trafficked
- To use this understanding, and Save the Children's experience and that of partner organizations to define and build more effective anti-trafficking responses

This research project commenced in March 2006 following a series of regional workshops. It was designed and led at the regional level by the Regional Research Advisor and was carried out by 40 country coordinators and researchers who have worked with the support of the regional management team. At the regional level the management team included the Programme Director, Programme Manager, Programme Advisor, Research Advisor, Data Analysts and Information Coordinator. At the national level, research teams included Save the Children country coordinators and other programme partner's coordinators, led by researchers and field researchers.

Data from the field informed both national and regional reports. National reports were launched in May/June 2007 and are available on CD-Rom as an accompaniment to the regional report. The data was analysed independently at both national and regional levels. This regional report was compiled using data, which was directly translated from local languages into English. It is derived from fieldwork involving 876 respondents, including 618 children and 258 key informants across the seven countries/entities.

Structure

This report has been divided into two components. The first component will provide an overview of the research design, methods and process. The second component will provide the findings and recommendations of this research.

Chapter 1 will provide a general review of existing academic and NGO literature on risk and resiliency in respect to child trafficking in Southeast Europe. It will not provide an overview of policies and practices in this field but will concentrate on research that has been conducted, the methods that have been used, as well as the insights, weaknesses and gaps that have emerged in the findings on risk and resiliency. In addition, it will not offer a detailed contextualized analysis as this in-depth information is only available in the national reports (See CD-Rom).

Chapter 2 will describe the manner in which the conceptual framework underlying this research project sought to overcome the gaps that exist in current literature. It will introduce the themes that have governed this research namely, risk and resiliency; decision-making, choice and power; social support mechanisms and processes such as exploitation, migration and coercion. It also concentrates on safety and security (physical, economic and social) hopes and dreams as well as evidence-based policy. Despite the fact that their action is constrained by a range of factors, it will be argued that children are able to make decisions and act on them, even in contexts characterized by adversities such as poverty, violence and exploitation.

In Chapter 3, the manner in which this conceptual framework influenced the research methodology will be described with particular attention to the research process, and the importance attached to child participation, reflexivity and relationships. Children were active participants in the research process in that they influenced its design as well as the sampling and data gathering methods used. These methods include participant observation as well as interviews and focus group discussions with children and key informants (state and non-state actors at national and local levels). The findings from the sessions with key informants were analyzed in the national reports in light of the specific country context. This regional report will concentrate on children's perceptions which will be discussed in the second component.

Chapter 4 of this report is dedicated to the findings derived from children's perspectives. It is broken down into sub-sections that concentrate on the trafficking messages that children receive and interpret, and their perception of the mechanisms and processes of trafficking. In addition to coercion, children highlighted deception or what they describe as being "tricked" or "cheated" by offers of attention, entertainment, material goods, employment, travel abroad, marriage, education, friendship, compliments and care. The report will analyze these mechanisms in light of the experiences that children in this study face in their daily lives. It then describes children's accounts of "escape strategies" and how their own experiences with violence and adversity have affected their perceptions of trafficking victims' ability to escape and survive.

This is followed by a discussion on the effects of violence that children face and the manner in which this has mediated the effects that they attribute to victims of trafficking. It also describes the institutional and organizational support that children in this study received – as they perceive it - when confronted by these adversities.

To conclude this section, a list of recommendations made by children in relation to their own lives, and those of potential victims of trafficking follows. As the report has aimed to enable children to speak for themselves, no additional recommendations will be provided. Children's recommendations center on increasing their capacity to cope with risks as well as the responsibility of state and non-state actors to reduce these risks. The conclusion provides a general summary of the main issues that have emerged in relation to the research themes and questions as expressed by children.

Although this study is not representative, it does offer detailed insight into the perceptions of children, which have thus far been ignored in the field of child trafficking. Children's central complaint was that they are often denied a voice and that they have little say regarding issues that affect their lives and few people listen to them, trust or support them. Hence, the central aim of this report is to enable children to "speak out" about their vulnerabilities and strengths generally in relation to trafficking.

Chapter I

Literature Review

There is a plethora of research that provides a useful overview and situational analysis of the issue of child trafficking. This chapter provides a general overview of existing literature on risk and resiliency in the context of trafficking in Southeast Europe. More detailed and contextualized analysis can be found in the seven national reports. By highlighting the macro, interpersonal and individual risk factors that have been identified in academic and NGO reports, this review analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of research that has been undertaken in this field. This analysis serves as an introduction to the conceptual and methodological framework of the CTRP regional research project which has sought to build on these strengths and fill in the gaps in understanding.

In the search for useful information about how trafficking affects children's lives and why some are more vulnerable to trafficking than others, a number of gaps are evident in the literature. One of the reasons for this is that the aims of existing research and the methods employed rarely go into any deep analysis beyond surface information. Much of this research is dependent upon secondary data and the repetition of material. As a result, a number of conclusions are drawn and statements made which are based either on the thoughts and beliefs of adult respondents (the police, government officials, NGOs) or on statistics that in some cases are out of date and in other cases are at best "guesstimates".

This criticism should not be seen to undermine the many valuable efforts and interventions that have been undertaken to address the issues faced by vulnerable children and the existing studies which have, in their own way, contributed towards helping us learn about the complexities of the issue. However, there remains an overall lack of understanding regarding children's realities, their needs and the possibilities for action towards improving their lives (Caouette, undated). Furthermore, there is a lack of rigorous questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions. This could be that the data in the field of child trafficking generally arises in the context of advocacy and campaigning so that knowledge is organized around our own requirements for particular kinds of facts rather than the actual lives and needs of trafficked and vulnerable children (Ennew et al, 1996).

We need to move beyond stating that trafficking is a problem and preparing evidence that sensationalizes it and the lives of the children involved towards looking at how well we are dealing with the problem. Policy approaches and programme responses should become more evidence-based, drawing on the results of relevant research and evaluations. Evidence-based policy is essential because numerous interventions have failed to fulfill their objectives or have come short of making any improvements in their recipients' lives. This is because few attempts to ascertain the needs of recipients and evaluate impact in light of these needs have been made and there is little cooperation and coordination among a range of actors. Also there is a tendency to focus on quantitative and/or cost-efficiency outcomes. In general, more emphasis tends to be placed on "conventional wisdom" rather than validated knowledge when structuring interventions. Hence, we need to know much more about the causes and impact of trafficking, not only on the survivors but also their families and communities and all those affected by it (Laczko 2005).

Methodological approaches

There are a number of difficulties associated with gathering data on children who are trafficked. One of the central problems is that there is often a conflation or confusion of the concepts and terms surrounding illegal migration, hazardous work practices and trafficking, despite numerous internationally recognized definitions and conventions in this regard. Many communities, families and children are not familiar with the term “trafficking”, nor do they regard some of their practices as examples of exploitation and/or trafficking. Given the stigma attached to this label, victims of trafficking may not want to come forward and risk social exclusion practices in the form of labeling, humiliation, and ostracism. Their involvement in illegal practices might also prevent them from disclosing their identities and activities, as they may fear incarceration and deportation to their country or towns of origin. Not only are these victims hard to reach and rescue from trafficking situations, and in many ways are “hidden” from researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, but methods used to understand their involvement in trafficking are often limited or flawed as emphasis is placed narrowly on prevalence figures and routes, and victim profiles that look at the child in isolation from the family and community context. In addition, where it exists, service providers’ deep knowledge on these issues is often not translated into policy or programming to the extent possible.

A literature review carried out on the commercial sexual exploitation of children by Ennew and colleagues provides a particularly critical overview of what it sees as “*poor quality research*” characterized by “*badly thought out and applied research methods, poor data and inadequate analysis*” (1996:29). While dated, the review does list some “*common errors*” of research method and analysis, which are relevant to, and echo criticisms made about current research on child trafficking (Kelly, 2002, 2005). These errors relate to who conducts research, the methods employed and the type of analysis that is conducted.

Ennew (1996) argues that much “research” is carried out by lawyers or activists with no background in research, whose activities are best described as “fact-finding” and who accept as fact what would be thrown out of court as hearsay evidence. Furthermore, the quality of the data is affected by who collects it. Children’s willingness to share rather sensitive and personal information with a researcher is contingent upon how they perceive the researcher, and the quality of the researcher-respondent relationship that has been established. For instance, children are likely to be intimidated by law enforcers who are often tasked with interviewing them (Dottridge 2006).

Limanowska (2005) argues that local actors should be involved in the data gathering process. More specific to our research, Dottridge calls for increased child participation in research on child trafficking. In particular he argues that there are “*no examples of children being directly involved in the design of the prevention initiative*” (2006). Instead he points to the manner in which children have been informed about trafficking initiatives. In a few cases they have been consulted in monitoring and evaluation and they have acted as assistants in education-related activities. However, they tend not to have been involved in the initial stages of project design and implementation. An independent evaluation of the first phase of the CTRP project found that children’s participation in general anti-trafficking activities was valuable because it ensured that adults increasingly took children’s opinions into account, the ability of children to protect themselves was enhanced, communities expressed a greater degree of ownership over the project and programmers had a better understanding of the situation (Ginzburg 2004). Despite this “added value” children’s active participation in research on child trafficking still remains rarely encouraged.

With regard to sampling techniques, it is argued that research on exploitation and trafficking is often biased because researchers gain access to research subjects by means of institutions, projects and other programmes (Ennew 2006). Their findings may therefore be skewed by factors such as children's willingness to please institutional staff or avoid negative repercussions and the possibility that both adults and children exaggerate problems in order to attract greater project advantages.

Furthermore, samples are also likely to be twisted because they are drawn from what Ennew (2006) describes as "*unsuccessful child prostitutes*" (or street/working children for that matter) whose activities have attracted the attention of helping or controlling agencies. Research often centers on these groups of children because they are easier to access.

Aside from this, information is generalized to represent large populations or is subjected to inappropriate quantitative analysis. Researchers rely on single-method studies often on anecdotes that are passed off as case studies. Far too often the only social science method employed is the questionnaire survey which is a poor method when used with children in different contexts, particularly where sensitive subjects such as sexuality and abuse are concerned (Ennew 1996). These surveys do not capture the diverse and highly contextualized and individual manner in which maltreatment is defined or experienced. In addition, the information gathered is seldom cross-checked (sometimes called "triangulation") by using other methods, or by comparison with other studies and secondary data. Very poor quality and out of date official data such as census material, police and other authority records, birth records are used to underpin the quality of this research. Hence, the level of methodology research on child trafficking is often limited.

Research and prevention

Research tends to be focused on children who have been identified by the police and shelters as having been trafficked. As a result, research with a specific focus on the prevention of child trafficking is frequently neglected. As Limanowska argues, "*While many institutions are trying to assist trafficked persons, the opinions of the potential victims are not always taken into consideration*" (2005:65). This view has also been expressed in the latest SEERIGHTS report which stated, "*The evidence which is needed to develop useful prevention strategies is still missing and further research is necessary. This is especially in regard to the relationship between poverty, discrimination, child abuse and neglect and trafficking as well as the demand for trafficking*" (Cited in Dottridge (2006:13)). Dottridge (2006) argues that this evidence needs to inform the identification of children who are at risk of being trafficked and that this is a useful approach to prevent trafficking.

Research (2003) conducted in Serbia under the framework of the CTRP concludes that "*a comprehensive research to define the most vulnerable groups of children as potential subjects to trafficking should be conducted as a foundation for a more structured approach to trafficking prevention in order to address the root causes in a most structured way*" (Cited in Ginzburg, 2005: 37). On this basis Ginzburg argues that research should be designed to elucidate "*how and why*" children are trafficked and/or leave trafficking situations (Ginzburg, 2005: 48).

This need for research to understand the root causes has been reiterated by a number of state and non-state actors.³ This term "root causes" has become a buzz word in various anti-trafficking circles and yet there have been few attempts to define what is meant by this term or how it can be conceptualized and researched.

In order to conceptualize these causes, Dottridge (2006) refers to three main categories: immediate, underlying and structural/root causes. On this basis he concludes that the risks or vulnerabilities associated with trafficking cannot be seen in isolation from the risks associated with other forms of exploitation and violence. As a result, he argues that it is necessary to conduct research with groups of children who may be at-risk of exploitation and violence generally, in order to understand risks associated with trafficking more specifically because “*much could be learned from children who are not trafficked when others in their circumstances are*” (Dottridge, 2006: 27).

Dottridge adds that it is also equally important to undertake research on “*protective factors*” in order to understand why some children are less likely to be trafficked (2006: 27). Ginzburg’s (2004) evaluation of the first phase of the CTRP states that more clarification of terms such as “*vulnerabilities*” and “*protection*” are necessary:

“The definition of vulnerabilities to trafficking, the identification of specific groups of children at risk, and the Programme’s capacity to reach these children are among the greatest challenges faced by Save the Children in phase II. It indeed appears, at times and in parts of the project that preventative measures rest on assumptions which are not clearly spelled out. Two questions can thus be raised. The first is how are vulnerable groups defined and identified? And secondly to what extent are they really, in the end, the prime beneficiaries of Save the Children’s efforts?” (2004: 36)

Hence, we need greater clarity in terms of our definition of “at risk” and how we identify children who may be more at risk of being trafficked and those who may be more resilient in this matter. The subsequent section discusses the manner in which these risk factors are defined in the literature.

Macro risk factors

Poverty

Poverty is cited as a “root cause” in a number of studies and in the prevention initiatives of numerous state and non-state actors⁴. A number of reports suggest that the majority of assisted trafficking victims are unemployed, have low levels of education and few professional skills. They point to ethnic minorities who live in rural areas where there are high levels of unemployment as being at risk of being trafficked. Limanowska (2005) highlights the following reasons behind poverty in Southeast Europe: armed conflict, the transition from centrally planned to market economies with cuts in public spending, inadequate economic reforms and social welfare systems. It is said that this has led to a collapse in social security systems, a rise in male unemployment and migration. These factors have been discussed in detail in the CTRP national reports.

Although there is a wealth of information on the causes of poverty, there is little in-depth understanding of how they relate to trafficking risks and resiliency for children in particular.

³ See for example, the OSCE Action Plan which recommends data collection and research, and greater analysis of “root causes”. The Statement of Commitments of the 4th SPTF Regional Ministerial Forum in 2003 included a commitment to systematically collect data on child trafficking in the area of prevention. UNIFEM’s regional programme on “women’s economic security and rights” focuses on the importance of data analysis to understand the “root causes” of trafficking (Limanowska 2005).

⁴ For instance, it is listed in the SPTF National Programmes to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (National Plans of Action) Background Paper, the UN Convention on Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights “Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking” developed by UNOHCHR (2002).

Limanowska (2005) argues that there is a dearth of research on the relationship between poverty and socio-economic inequalities, discrimination, child abuse, neglect and trafficking. Furthermore, there is little understanding of what enables some families to cope with poverty, the effects of poverty on interpersonal relationships such as intimate partner violence or on individual behaviour such as alcohol abuse, migration and so-called “risk taking” (see below). In general, there is no explicit link between children who live in situations of social and economic poverty and trafficking.

In fact, some authors have found that poverty is not necessarily a significant risk factor. For instance, Surtees (2004) found that more identified victims of trafficking reported “average” living conditions. She adds that in Moldova people identified as trafficked for the purposes of begging reported having a low socio-economic status but she explains that this correlation of economic background and trafficking vulnerability is not surprising since begging itself requires having a “poor appearance” (Surtees, 2004: 10). In fact, one report suggests that although poverty is generally considered to be an important push factor for migration not all child migrants are poor: “empirical data shows that intending migrants do not usually have a very low financial status... in terms of an objective measure of income there is no difference between families with vulnerable girls and the average household” (El-Cherkek et al, 2004 46). So a greater understanding is needed of the relationship of poverty to migration specifically and migration to trafficking generally.

Migration

Migration is frequently cited as a factor that puts children at risk through their precarious immigration status. It is held that children may have migrated with their families or voluntarily on their own but may end up in foreign countries without any protection, and so become extremely vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking (ECPAT 2004:30). Many children are not aware of their rights, they lack information and do not know the legal procedures for traveling abroad and the risks related to migration. In addition, it is suggested in a number of studies that success stories from those who return and idealized notions about living abroad encourage risk-taking (El-Cherkek et al, 2004 Renton 2001, ECPAT 2004). Hence, the existing literature suggests that migration may enhance the risk of trafficking.

On the other hand, the role of migration in terms of risk is multifaceted. It is too simple to see migration only in terms of risk, as in some cases, children may, through migration, actively take themselves away from vulnerable situations. For instance, they may run away from home to escape violence and poverty. So in this sense, their migration and desire to improve their lives might be a sign of resiliency and not risk per se.

There is little understanding of the reasons behind child migration. It may be socially acceptable in a particular community, it may be a means of escaping poverty or conflict and/or it may be a means of earning income and fulfilling interpersonal responsibilities through the return of remittances (Surtees 2005). Very little attention has been paid to how living in a context where there are high levels of irregular migration affects children, who may become involved in trafficking (Kelly 2005). It is therefore necessary to understand the social context, and the political, socio-economic and cultural factors as well as the processes informing this context in order to ascertain whether migration is seen by children, families and communities as a “normal act”, before one can state that migration is a risk factor for trafficking (Surtees 2005). In many of the communities in which research for this project was conducted, migration has become normative and acceptable in the face of poverty and rising socio-economic inequalities. So one needs to understand how

this has affected the incidence of trafficking. In communities where migration is so common, how can one automatically identify all child migrants as at-risk of being trafficked? Instead, more emphasis needs to be placed on how this culture of migration is played out at interpersonal and individual levels in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of risk and resiliency.

An interesting point is made by Kelly (2005) who suggests that as well as looking at the vulnerability of children who migrate we should also consider the far greater numbers of children who are left behind when their parents seek employment elsewhere. She points out that these children are vulnerable to neglect and mistreatment by the adults, in whose care they have been left, especially when parents do not and cannot remit money for their care and upkeep.

This conclusion could be backed up in research carried out by Terres des Hommes which quotes a study that estimated that in 1999, 150,000 children in Albania had been abandoned by one or both parents and were being helped by their extended family (LaCava & Nanetti, 2000 in Terres des Hommes 2005:7). Again, further analysis and research is needed in order to find out whether these children are at greater risk of trafficking: is it because they are subject to violence, exploitation and trafficking at the hands of their relatives or other people, or because they try to join their parents abroad, and in the process are trafficked?

In the context of Southeast Europe, Limanowska (2005) argues that the effect of broader political and economic processes related to EU accession on migration and trafficking has not been explained. In addition, the effect of protracted conflict and social dislocation on children's risk to trafficking is not understood or adequately discussed in the literature on child trafficking. However, it is not clear how conflict in this region and political transitions have affected children's migration patterns generally and their risk and resiliency in relation to trafficking more specifically. The effect of the growth and impunity of organized crime and the West's increasing demand for cheap labour and sex services all play into the hands of organized crime also needs to be considered regarding children's migration patterns and their risk of being trafficked (Limanowska 2005).

Cultural factors

Surtees argues that trafficking needs to be seen as “*a cultural and historical event*” (2005:22) and be analyzed in light of traditional social practices. In Southeast Europe, the Roma (and Egyptian/Jevgjit) are considered to be a group particularly at risk of trafficking. It is often unclear whether this is related to certain cultural practices (e.g. early or arranged marriages, child labour, migration patterns) or the daily discrimination that this group faces. This discrimination is manifested in their lack of access to education, employment and often lack of personal documents. These cultural practices are often seen in isolation, without looking at how they are affected by the socio-economic and political context and by the actions of adults and children themselves. Furthermore, there is the risk that our own ingrained prejudice distorts the actual evidence, when highlighting the Roma as an “at-risk group”. The differences that exist within this group, in terms of language, culture and socio-economic status, are often ignored, as are the strengths that exist at the level of the community, family and the individual. Instead, emphasis is often placed only on the vulnerability of Roma children to trafficking.

An IOM report states that “*In terms of ethnic background, it appears that young Roma women [in Romania] are more exposed to trafficking in human beings than the rest of the population*” and that “*there is a high probability for young Roma women to be vulnerable to trafficking, as well as for those girls*

who abandoned school before high school graduation” (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003:5, 41). This report was compiled on the basis of information collected from 854 people in households which had at least one unmarried daughter living with the family, who was aged between 15 and 25 years, supplemented by information provided by eight focus groups in three locations (Bucharest, Pascani and Sighisoara). The report implies from observations that a disproportionately high number of Roma girls and young women are trafficked based on the information collected but it does not present evidence to support this claim. Therefore it is impossible to know whether the observation applied equally to children and adults or whether it was based in part on the prejudices of either the authors or their informants (Dottridge 2005).

Another ILO-IPEC report has been quoted as showing that 14.6 per cent of trafficked minors were of Roma ethnicity, but in fact the report concerned presents information about an unrepresentative sample of 55 children who were questioned after being trafficked, eight of whom said they were Roma (2003:20). This evidence consequently does not show that a disproportionate number of Roma children are trafficked either abroad or within Romania. In view of the high level of prejudice which exists against Roma minorities in Romania and other countries, it seems important to establish whether there is objective evidence that disproportionately high numbers of Roma girls are being trafficked before developing prevention programmes which are targeted specifically at children of Roma origin.

Interpersonal risk factors

Even when the social context is taken into account, little attention is directed at understanding why particular groups of children within a particular geographical area or social group are at a greater risk of being trafficked as Dottridge (2006) argues. Surtees notes:

“We need to think beyond general social categories and situate our interventions in the specifics of victim’s lives and experiences. Identifying these specifics may allow us to identify resiliency factors required to combat trafficking. A more carefully situated analysis may also allow us to identify risk factors amongst other social groups, such as class, religious and culture groups” (2005: 21).

Much of the existing research on this phenomenon fails to account for the highly contextual, situational and individual nature of trafficking and in particular the manner in which a range of economic, socio-cultural, legislative and institutional factors at the macro level affect interpersonal relationships.

In the familial context, there is a dearth of research on parents’ complicity in trafficking and exploitation. Research carried out by Terres des Hommes (2005) found that children were more likely to report that their parents were knowledgeable about the decision for the child to migrate, while parents generally indicated being unaware of this decision. Based on children’s comments, parents were usually aware that children were going to be working abroad mainly in Greece and Italy and were involved in the negotiating process. Children justified their parents’ action on the grounds that poverty had affected their parents’ abilities to make other choices. However, this does not provide information about whether parents are involved in migration per se, or actually complicit in the trafficking process.

Further ways in which the research suggests that relationships within the family can put a child at

risk are through abuse and family violence. The family environment can act as a “push factor” when considering children’s own decision’s to migrate (El-Cherkeh et al, 2004:45). These families are frequently described as “dysfunctional” (See Ginzburg 2004) and are said to be characterized by non-nuclear households, single parents, poor intergenerational and gender communication and high levels of violence (Surtees: 2005).

In the first phase of the CTRP, Save the Children identified the following risk factors as encouraging the risk of trafficking: children who suffer family violence and abuse and children who lack family support and protection (e.g. children in institutional care, separated children). Nevertheless, there does not appear to be any conclusive evidence to suggest that being exposed to higher than average levels of intimate violence or abuse is a key risk factor when it comes to trafficking (Ginzburg 2004).

For instance, with reference to Bulgarian minors who were trafficked, Surtees stated, “*Most reported coming from “normal” family environments without violence or conflict*” (2005: 6). Many children grow up in households where violence is used as a means of punishment. One cannot automatically assume that these children are all at risk of being trafficked. Instead it is more fruitful to understand the meaning attached by children to this violence and whether they regard it to be legitimate or illegitimate, just or unjust. The risk factor may not be violence per se but the “unjust” manner in which it is metered out, as it is viewed by the child. This is contingent on the quality of the parent-child relationship, as well as values and practices related to child-rearing and discipline in a particular culture.

The failure to interrogate assumptions surrounding normal families and care-giving practices, leads to simplified and often demonizing understandings of risk. For instance, in some communities single-headed households are the norm. The Kosovo national report (2007) suggests that this is related to the effect of armed conflict where many women were widowed, whereas the Romanian report (2007) attributes it to poverty and the migration of parents for work. Instead of stating that all children living in single-headed households are at risk of being trafficked and thereby denigrating the efforts of single parents who struggle to care for their children, it is important to look at the strengths of family support systems and the involvement of relatives and the wider kin network in child care and income-generation.

The risk factor might therefore not be “dysfunctional” or interpersonal factors but poverty that leads some children to work to supplement their parent’s income. In the context of work though they might be in jeopardy of being trafficked. Studies that fail to account for the social context when focusing on risk factors at the level of the family do not elucidate these complexities.

Individual risk factors

Gender

There has been increasing acknowledgement both in the literature and among practitioners that assumptions about gender and trafficking need to be critically analyzed.

Trafficking is frequently associated with the sexual exploitation of females but this obscures a reality where boys as well as girls are frequently trafficked for other purposes including forced

labour and begging (Surtees 2005). Emphasis is placed on patriarchy and the manner in which femininity is constructed and related to risk in terms of early and/or forced marriages and vulnerability to sexual violence. On this basis, it is said that girls are at more risk of being trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation. This is often the case because women and children have historically been placed in the same category when attempting to understand human trafficking.

As a result, Dottridge (2006) argues that the trafficking of men and boys is neglected. There is an overarching focus on sexual trafficking and the needs of particular groups of children are ignored. In terms of the former, there is little understanding of the manner in which socially constructed understandings of masculinity are played out at the interpersonal and individual levels. For instance, the pressure to live up to the standards and requirements of manhood by earning income and acting as breadwinners supporting their households might enhance the risk that boys are more likely to be involved in exploitative work practices particularly in the area of physical labour.

Limanowska states that there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that men from Moldova were trafficked mainly to Russia to work on construction sites and Albanian men were trafficked to Greece and the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia to work in the agricultural sector (2005: 27). Yet there is little recognition of the trafficking of boys for the purposes of begging, forced labour and even sexual exploitation.

Educational achievement

Low educational attainment is frequently cited as a risk factor determining whether children are at risk of trafficking or not. For instance, a Terre des Hommes report states that “*dropping out of school*” is an important sign or an “*alarm bell*” that a child will be trafficked (Dottridge 2006: 55).

A report by ECPAT states that “*Roma children rarely attend school and therefore they have very high levels of illiteracy*” (ECPAT, 2004:28). Information collected in Romania by ILO-IPEC is reported to show that “*almost 30 per cent of Roma children between the ages of seven and nine and 17.2 per cent of 10-16 year-olds have never attended school*” (Kane, 2005:11). This suggests that significant numbers of Roma children are working full-time while still of compulsory school age. However, neither of these findings actually demonstrates a link between being out of school and being trafficked. All it illustrates is that this minority does not value formal schooling either because they are discriminated against in the school environment because they have to work given high levels of poverty or because they do not believe that education will assist them to find employment at a later stage given discriminatory labour practices. Victim profiles that focus only on educational achievement at the level of the individual do not elucidate these macro socio-economic factors.

A report on vulnerability to trafficking in Romania states that “*education should be considered an important factor influencing vulnerability... it shapes professional abilities and is a control institution imposing specific rules and norms...*”. “*It is obvious that the higher the degree of education and the longer the period spent in school the more it constitutes a protection factor for vulnerability to trafficking*” (El-Cherkeh et al, 2004: 40). However, this connection is not always obvious.

It is always important to look at the wider context in relation to the level of education in the rest of the country. Is this the situation just for victims of trafficking, or is it simply the situation across

the whole country? There are some cases where victims of trafficking have higher levels of education than other children in their villages and the reasons why they find themselves in vulnerable situations is because they knew more, they had more ambitious dreams and wanted a different life (Rossi 2005).

In many cases what is missing is further analysis or evidence to illustrate exactly how and why education can be a protective factor. As Dottridge points out, school education does not guarantee that a child will not be trafficked but it can reduce a child's vulnerability or exposure to the circumstances in which trafficking may occur (2004:29). These issues need further exploration.

Age and risk-taking

Adolescent risk-taking and so-called delinquency is also frequently highlighted as a factor that enhances the chances of trafficking. For instance, in the first phase of the CTRP in Croatia it was noted that "*Children with behavioral problems are high-risk groups for child trafficking. Children with behavioral problems are often close to the criminal milieu. They spend more time on the street and they are often coming from poor and multi problem families*" (Cited in Ginzburg 2004: 48). However, the extent to which this is likely to enhance the risk of trafficking is not demonstrated.

An IOM study carried out in Romania looked at the relationship between environmental (i.e. socializing) factors and individual personalities as a way of interpreting risk (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003). Based on a study of young women aged 16-25, the research suggested that vulnerability to trafficking is primarily shaped by a "*strong desire to seek a job abroad and also from a propensity to break official and informal rules*". The description of the vulnerable groups in terms of values and attitudes suggests that these girls are rather independent, even risk-takers, able to cope with uncertainty. They do not feel close to their family and do not believe that the family is the most important thing in their life. However, this research also listed the following as factors contributing to risk in the case of these young women not valuing education They included the lack of trust in public institutions and coming from a background of domestic violence plus neglect (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru: 2003:5-8).

However, the idea that a propensity to take risks might be a strong factor backed up by research carried out by Barnardos in the UK (2005). This study identified several factors that together put young people at greater risk (and which mirror those found in the IOM research above). These include, physical or sexual abuse within the family, being disengaged from education in their early teens, being hungry for attention, being keen to escape childhood and be regarded as adults (2005:17).

A number of these studies focus on adolescents' biological proclivity to engage in "*risky behavior*" without looking at the structural factors that ensure that their behaviour is a reasonable and rational response to hardships associated with gender, ethnic origin, generational discrimination and social exclusion (See De Sas Kropiwnicki 2007).

For instance, adolescents might be willing to take risks such as running away because they do not agree with the rules and constraints set by their parents or they may be seeking to escape home violence. They might rely extensively on their peers, given absent or inadequate parental support, advice and protection. They might consume alcohol or take drugs as a means of coping or dealing with daily adversities. Furthermore, instead of focusing on their so-called "*delinquent behaviour*"

and willingness to flout familial and social norms, attention should be directed to a manner in which many adolescents assume important responsibilities within their families. So they often migrate for the purposes of work to fulfill these duties. For instance in Romania, Dottridge states that it is legitimate for adolescents to take on jobs (2005: 36). Ginzburg argues that “*identifying the lack of a “sense of responsibility” as a root cause of trafficking implies that it is a weakness or fault within the victim which explains (to a certain extent at least) the trafficking episode*” (2004: 46). Instead it is necessary to understand risk-taking in light of interpersonal relationships and responsibilities, all of which are influenced by the social context.

Mechanisms and processes

Child trafficking tends to be defined by the majority of international organizations in line with the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2003), known as the Palermo Protocol, which states that any child under 18 who is recruited or moved from one place to another to be exploited is considered to have been trafficked, even if no element of coercion or deception is used during recruitment or transportation⁵ (Dottridge, 2006: 17).

Anderson argues that child exploitation is often treated as synonymous with child trafficking (Anderson and O’Connell Davidson 2004); the latter by definition involving coercion and direct threat of harm. Anderson and O’Connell Davidson (2004) argue that many working children are described as being trafficked and without choice because we cannot conceive of them working. Similarly, children engaged in prostitution often tend to be classified as trafficked children because we cannot conceive of them making a decision to sell sex. Hence, more definitional clarity around the concepts of exploitation and trafficking are necessary.

Limanowska (2005) states that only a minority of victims in shelters had been trafficked across borders against their will. They decided to migrate because they believed in false promises of employment made by their trafficker. Even though deception was involved, one cannot deny the fact that some children made a decision to go with a person who turned out to be a trafficker. Even though their decision led to a range of unwanted and unintended consequences, their choices cannot be ignored. As has been argued these choices are related to the macro and interpersonal contexts within which children act.

In general, when referring to the exploitation of children, there is an overall emphasis on children as “victims” (Ennew 1996: 16), yet perhaps we should question whether this is a useful term to use when trying to understand how children find themselves in trafficking situations. The use of the term “victim” is too often used within a context that implicitly suggests powerlessness. In fact, most trafficking victims continue to exercise agency (that is to say, they make decisions and choices), but in contexts where their options and possibilities are severely constrained (Kelly 2005: 254). If we continue to see trafficked children or those who are at risk of being trafficked only as “victims”, then we risk overlooking their roles as decision-makers, the options that they perceive to be available and the actors that influence their actions. This significantly weakens our analysis of the causes of child trafficking.

⁵ See Article 3, paragraph (a) of the [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children](#), which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

As Surtees states, “We also need to increasingly access information about children’s decision-making processes – who they consult (peers, teachers, parents, etc), at what point they make their decision and how we can reach them before their decision has been made” (2005: 20). It is therefore important to understand decision-making and influential macro, interpersonal and individual factors at each of the phases in the trafficking process.

Following Cusson a recent study emphasizes the importance of accounting for children’s motivations in the context of trafficking and how these are linked to a child’s opportunities, goals and resources (physical, social, cultural, cognitive, affective) (Shuteriqi et al, 2006: 23). It is suggested that Albanian children may be motivated to work in Greece to fulfill the goal of helping their families by showing what they are capable of achieving (resources). However, once in Greece the situation may differ from what was imagined. So for instance, children may decide to migrate for the purposes of work to support themselves or their families:

“The child might have wanted to follow an uncle or an acquaintance because he/she wanted to do something for his/her family, to contribute to the family income, to show that he/she could make it alone, to be as able as others, etc... It is only after this initial agreement that the child (and his/her family) are misled by the trafficker but he who is now a “trafficker” in our eyes was initially a “friend” in the eyes of the child” (Shuteriqi et al, 2006: 24).

This denial of children’s choice is also related to the categorization of the trafficker-victim relationship only in fixed terms without looking at the shifting manner in which power is negotiated and played out in these relationships. Surtees reported that most minors who were trafficked “reported few problems and no physical abuse on a day-to-day basis” (Surtees 2005: 7). A number of authors highlight the role of trust in mediating these relationships. A child who trusts a person who turns out to be a trafficker (and may be a family member, relative or a friend) might describe their relationship in positive terms (Surtees 2005: 9, Dottridge 2006: 35; Shuteriqi et al, 2006: 25). It is important to understand how this trust is generated, earned and manifested when attempting to understand the mechanisms and processes behind trafficking generally and exploitation more specifically.

Dottridge argues that dependency is often perceived as exploitation. “Younger children, of necessity rely on an adult or older child for basic needs such as meals and shelter, and, in turn, they do as they are told” (2006: 19). In other words, these relationships are influenced by values associated with reciprocity, duty and obedience. These values may themselves be linked to the cultural context and the manner in which childhood is constructed. Interpersonal and macro factors therefore need to be considered when attempting to understand risk and resiliency in relation to trafficking. In order to overcome these gaps in understanding, Save the Children’s CTRP developed an in-depth, participatory and child-centered research project to understand why some children are at more risk of being trafficked and others not, in particular social contexts. The conceptual framework and methodology was designed in a manner that sought to build on existing knowledge on this phenomenon and fill in the gaps of understanding that have been described in this literature review.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

To supplement the discussion on trafficking mechanisms and processes, prevention and research strategies, this section will briefly describe the key concepts underlying this research project, with particular reference to the notion of “child”, “risk and resiliency” and “agency”.⁶ It will then reveal how these concepts have fed into the research aims and objectives.

Child

“Child” has been broadly defined in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as a person below the age of eighteen years, who is accorded special rights and protections by virtue of his/her age. This research project accepts this age categorisation for the sake of practicality and consistency, although rejects accompanying assumptions that are sometimes made about children’s competencies and what childhood is or ought to be.

These assumptions often relate to a particular understanding of childhood that has informed institutional, NGO and academic responses to children’s deprivation and exploitation thus far (Hoyles and Evans 1989; Archard 1993; Jenks 1996; Boyden 1997). This understanding constructs children as incomplete, dependent human “becomings” (Lee 2001) who by virtue of their moral, cognitive and affective incapacities require a stable, peaceful and playful childhood in which they can depend upon adult duty-bearers (Quortrup 1997). This ideology of an “authentic childhood” has become institutionalized in the spheres of politics, economics, medicine and law and has amounted to a global standard of child rearing and child welfare (Rose 1989; Scarre 1989; Boyden 1997). It is evident in international law⁷ and has increasingly dominated the aid and development agenda (Jenks 1996; Woodhead 1997).

In academic circles, there has been what James and Prout (1997) describe as an “*emergent paradigm*” on childhood in which the universality of this notion has been debunked. Sociologists suggest that children are not simply acted upon by parents, institutions and social norms (Parsons 1951) but play an active role in negotiating their development (Solberg 1996; Corsaro 1997; Solberg 1997). Anthropologists have revealed that the notion of childhood itself varies from culture to culture (Mead 1928; Benedict 1934; La Fontaine 1986; Harkness and Super 1991). Developmental psychologists have found that perception, motivation, learning, emotion and cognition are all dependent on social contexts and economic and social practices (Vygotsky 1966, c1962; Harre

⁶ Further details about the conceptual framework can be found in De Sas Kropiwnicki, Z (2007), *The sex trade hierarchy: The interplay of structure and agency in the decision-making processes of female adolescent prostitutes in Cape Town, South Africa*. University of Oxford: International Development Studies. D.PHIL doctoral dissertation.

⁷ Child rights theorists argue that children as a category deserve special protection. As human beings children have fundamental or non-derogable rights, but as children they are entitled to derogable rights by virtue of their age, as outlined in the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was ratified by 191 state parties. The provisions of the CRC apply to all human beings under the age of 18 unless the child lives in a jurisdiction in which the majority is attained earlier in which case the state in question bears the burden of justifying specific lower age limits.

1974; Ingelby 1974; Bronfenbrenner 1979; Harre 1986; Cole 1995; Miller and Goodnow 1995).

Hence, one cannot assume the existence of a universal concept of childhood, given the diverse manner in which childhood is socially constructed, the varied nature of the multiple environments in which children develop and their various roles and responsibilities in relationships with others. The child is therefore a unique individual with multiple capacities and talents given his/her particular competencies, personal characteristics and the nature of his/her activities and practices in a range of social, cultural and economic settings, within which he/she acts and is acted upon.

Risk and resiliency

Children's understanding of experiences is influenced by their individual characteristics and by the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which they live. One cannot assume that a particular factor is risky for the child because the notion of risk itself is specific to both the individual and the context. More efforts need to be made to qualify such claims while accounting for the cumulative effects of a range of risk factors and the existence of possible moderating and mediating factors which might enhance children's resiliency in the face of adversity.

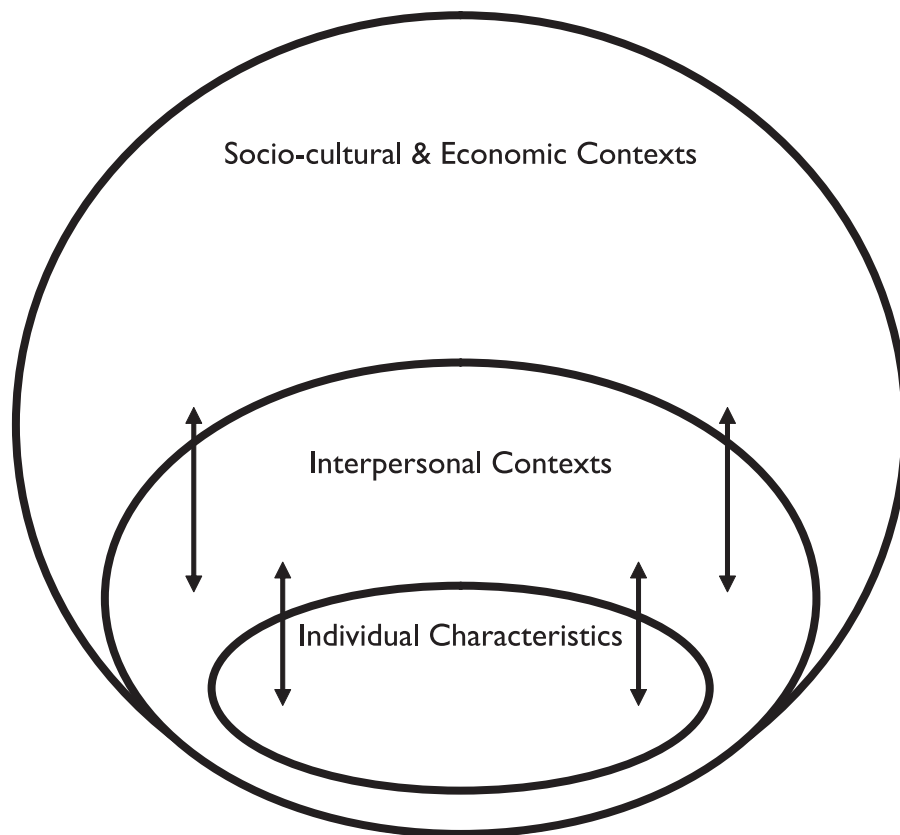
Psychological research that has emerged suggests that the effects of adversity on children are not as bad as originally supposed and that many children are durable and proactive (Boyden 2005). For example in the context of war, in terms of psychological trauma, estimates of clinical trauma are lower than expected (Swartz and Levett 1989; Garbarino and Kostelny 1996; Seeley, Clarke et al. 1996; Straker, Medelsohn et al. 1996). In terms of moral development researchers in Northern Ireland discovered that children's social and moral concepts are resilient. Robert Coles, a Harvard University psychiatrist, argues that social crisis can even stimulate moral development in some children (Gibson; Boothby and Knudsen 2000) by strengthening their empathy for human suffering, altruistic sentiments and enhancing their commitment to serve other victims of violence.

In order to understand children's relationships with their multiple environments and the interaction of different risk and resiliency factors when they face adversity, it is useful to adopt an ecological systems approach as conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner (1979). It included the following:

- The immediate environment within which children act and are acted upon (e.g. home, school, shelter, streets)
- Their relationships with significant others such as parents and peers
- The social settings that influence their behaviour (e.g. parent's workplace)
- Wider belief systems and opportunity structures (e.g. socio-economic and cultural context)
- Temporal transitions in the socio-historical setting: how society has changed over time

According to such approaches, multiple influences on individual behaviour can be best understood as operating at different levels. Particular characteristics are nested within contexts of interpersonal relationships which are in turn nested within socio-cultural and economic systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 1995, 1998) (Figure 1). Ecological perspectives such as this have been critiqued on several grounds including the difficulty of defining the levels with precision (Dawes, Kafaar et al. 2004) and the problems associated with categorising factors neatly in relation to causality. For example, poverty impinges on the ability of a family to subsist and thus affects everyday life

in complex ways. Behaviour is co-determined by different sources of influences - not simply one-way causation between levels (Bandura 2001).



In addition, child trafficking victims do not fit into a homogenous category and there are multiple pathways leading to trafficking, which involve a complex array of factors. Hence, a cumulative rather than ecological model will be developed. This cumulative model will not place artificial boundaries between risk factors but will attempt to capture the complex interaction of a range of factors at the macro, interpersonal and individual levels that bound children's decision-making. For example, the socio-cultural and economic context will affect parents' employment practices and the manner in which they relate to their children, the norms and values that the children grow up with and the type of options that they have available. These factors will influence what decisions they make and how they act in this context.

Agency and decision-making

The notion that being an agent means being able to make rational decisions is frequently used to exclude children from the category of agency. This has been supported by developmental psychology which suggests that children do not have the cognitive capacity to make rational decisions. As mentioned above, it is important not to make assumptions about children's capacities and capabilities given the highly individual and contextual range of factors at work. This research project will focus on the idea that the term agency is related to intentionality. In other words, it involves being able to make a commitment to act on one's environment and motivate this with action. It will draw on the work of Bandura (2001) which highlights the following components of agency:

Forethought is the ability to set goals, anticipate likely consequences and the capacity to structure one's actions in ways that are likely to produce desired outcomes and avoid detrimental ones. It involves weighing up various options before making a decision. Outcome expectations are largely constructed from observed relationships between the environment and people's actions. In other words, after watching others, the agent will have some idea about what actions will lead to what outcomes. Self-evaluativeness and reactivity involve monitoring one's behaviour in line with one's goals and standards which are rooted in a person's value system and personal identity. These judgements are based on the agents' abilities to reflect upon their thoughts and actions. They are related to the social norms that one draws upon. Self-efficacy is the foundation of human agency. It is the belief that one is capable of exercising some measure of control over one's own functioning and environment or whether one is capable of exercising power in relation to others. These efficacy beliefs allow individuals to exhibit resiliency in adverse conditions and shape the type of activities that people choose to engage in.

Although individuals do not have direct control over the social conditions and institutional practices that affect their everyday lives, they continue to seek their well-being, security and valued outcomes through the exercise of proxy agency. They try to get those with resources or expertise to secure outcomes on their behalf. For example, children may turn to their parents in the same way that citizens turn to their governments to act for them or they may turn to their peer group for support. This is particularly important because it shows that even though children may not always possess the power to act directly on their environments, they are still agents who can make decisions and act with or through others. The outcomes of a decision may be unintended or unwanted but this does not mean that the children do not make decisions and are not agents.

Hence the nature of human agency is based on intentionality, forethought, self-evaluation and self-reflection. It is exercised directly by proxy or in a collective manner. The manner in which it is exercised cannot be seen apart from the social context, which impacts upon children's aspirations, sense of efficacy, personal standards, affective states and self-regulatory standards (Bourdieu 1990, p.56). Children do not simply acquiesce to received notions as there is a range of personal variations in interpretations, enforcements, adaptation, circumvention and resistance to these institutions, hierarchies and discourses (Benjamin 1988). This interplay can be conceptualised as a "bounded agency". Giddens argues that the structure constrains or enables agency through the interplay of meanings, norms and power (Giddens 1984, p.15-30).

This structure influences social norms that influence socio-cultural practices which are by no means fixed or rigid but are affected by a range of historical, socio-cultural and economic processes. It also influences an individual's positioning in multiple relationships and hierarchies. Each position affects what opportunities and options that are perceived to be available and what outcomes they seek (Morriss 1987). Children act by weighing up their own power against those of others (Morriss 1987), utilising what they perceived to be the available resources and drawing upon norms and values (Giddens 1984; 1991). This is undertaken to seek a desired outcome and to negotiate, support or challenge their positioning in relationships and in particular the manner in which power is distributed (Foucault 1990). They often develop complex strategies in order to exercise this resistance although these strategies and decisions are all influenced by their emotions, feelings and desires.

In general it needs to be emphasised that the overarching theme of agency or decision-making with respect to children who might be at risk of being trafficked, must not be mistaken for

indifference towards the plight of exploited and/or trafficked victims, or an attempt to condone these abhorrent practices. Any attempt to deny the fact that they are subject to various forms of violence and exploitation is spurious, and at best, suspicious. Many cannot escape the poverty, discrimination, violence and pain that characterize their lives but they do however, struggle to survive and cope with these adversities.

Research objectives

Aim 1:

- To develop an in-depth and holistic understanding of the complex interplay of factors operating at the level of the child, family and wider community that increase some children's vulnerability to trafficking while protecting others
- To understand which particular children or groups of children are more likely to be trafficked
- To develop an understanding of the types of interpersonal relationships and associated roles and responsibilities that place children at risk of trafficking
- To ascertain which belief systems or social norms support trafficking with particular reference to those pertaining to childhood, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and violence
- To understand the precise mechanisms by which structural adversities (such as those associated with poverty, racism, gender inequity and conflict) may lead some at-risk children to be trafficked
- To determine whether common risk and resiliency factors can be identified across a range of contexts

Aim 2:

- To illuminate some of the processes and mechanisms by which children are trafficked
- To shed light upon the actors directly and indirectly involved in these processes (including traffickers, third parties, and others), their relationships with trafficked children, and how it is underpinned by certain socio-economic and cultural factors
- To increase understanding of the links between trafficking, migration and experiences of exploitation
- To examine children's decision-making in the context of trafficking and in particular what perceived choices they have, what outcomes they seek and how they go about attaining them
- To understand how children experience trafficking and what trafficking means to other at-risk children
- To evaluate whether child trafficking as perceived and constructed by policy-makers, practitioners and academics reflects the views expressed by children themselves

Aim 3:

- To increase knowledge within CTRP of the strengths and protection mechanisms that exist among children themselves, their families and their communities
- To develop understanding of the support and protection needs from the perspectives of children, their families and communities
- To provide information in order to develop a base-line assessment which can be used to monitor and evaluate future anti-trafficking responses

- To develop specific pilot activities in each country in response to increased understanding of existing needs, effective community prevention and protection measures

Evidence-based policy

- Has Save the Children's (and its partner organizations) current interventions been identified by the children, their families and wider communities?
- If so, have these interventions led to any changes – positive or negative – in their lives?
- If positive, what interventions were particularly successful and why?
- If negative, what reasons were provided by the respondents?
- Did the respondents suggest possible ways of improving the success rate?
- Did the respondents regard this research project as necessary or relevant?
- How did this research affect their lives? Was this affect positive or negative?
- How will this research have a longer-term bearing upon their lives?
- How will the findings of this research be used in policy-making generally?
- In particular, will the needs identified in this research be used to assess existing and future projects? In other words, will this research amount to a needs assessment? Will the findings produce indicators that can be used to measure the success or failings of projects? Will this research amount to a baseline study that will enable future comparison in order to ascertain the success of projects over time? Will this research inform the monitoring and evaluation process?

Chapter 3

The Research Process

In April and May 2006, each researcher participated in a 5-day training course on the research framework, methodology and ethical protocol. These methodological tools were piloted with children in each identified community and were constantly adapted according to the children's recommendations. In addition to conducting an in-depth, country-specific literature review, these researchers were responsible for conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants at national and local levels, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with children, and focus groups with children.

The Regional Research Advisor monitored this progress through monthly reporting, field diaries, regular field visits and daily communication. National reports were launched in May/June 2007, including in-depth contextual information found in these reports. The field data was translated into English and analysed at the regional level. The findings of this analysis can be found in this regional report. This section will describe the research methodology that was employed. It will highlight the feedback received from respondents and draw on extracts from researchers' field diaries and interview observation sheets.

Relationships and power

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, experiences and decision-making of the children in this study, relationships were given primacy in the research process (Oakley 1981; Nencel 2001). In this sense, research was conceptualised as a process, which was constantly negotiated by researchers and respondents (Jones 1985).

Given the fact that both researcher and respondent play a role in setting, negotiating and contesting the research process, the methodology was designed to allow for flexibility in terms of format, time-frame and geographical location. Frequently, children are not included in the research process. Instead research on children's experiences of adversity is conducted for children or on behalf of children. This exclusion rests on certain assumptions about children's ability to recognise and express their needs and interests, particularly in contexts where they experience violence, exploitation and trafficking (Solberg 1996; Ennew and Boyden 1997; Woodhead and Faulkner; Christensen 2000; Punch 2002). By failing to move beyond this model, children's voices are rarely heard. This serves to reflect and maintain their so-called "powerlessness" (Kitzinger 1997). As a result little is known about how migration, exploitation and trafficking affect children's perceptions and decision-making.

As relationships were given primacy in this research it is impossible to produce more generalised conclusions since the findings reflect the relationship that researchers developed with each child in this particular context. This was not perceived as a limitation given that the guiding premise of this research is that "*personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives*" (Oakley 1981).

The child respondents constantly tried to exercise power over the research process, even though they were young and subject to various forms of hardship. Children's willingness to participate in the research was contingent upon their own needs and interests and also upon their perceptions of the researchers and whether they felt confident about placing their trust in them. Children developed a range of strategies to protect themselves and to test this trust. For example, they misrepresented events in their lives to gauge the researchers' reaction. They tested the researchers' authenticity and promises of confidentiality and in this way attempted to exercise some control over the research process. All efforts were made to give an opportunity for children to have some say and power over the research design and fieldwork.

Children's feedback was constantly incorporated into the research methodology initially through a period of piloting and subsequently through constant feedback. Children themselves became the key drivers of the sampling technique, the interviews and focus groups.

Although this study is not representative, it does offer detailed insight into the experiences and understanding of children in a wide-range of settings. The study was not designed to be generalized and representative, but sought specifically to listen to children, portray their views and insights, and highlight their strengths and survival strategies – all of which are frequently ignored or discounted.

Sampling

Field research was conducted with children living and/or working on the streets, children living in state institutions (e.g. homes for children without parental care or centers for children in conflict with the law), internally displaced children in state camps or social centers, children in shelters who have witnessed or experienced violence, children from socially marginalised groups and identified victims of trafficking.

These children have been identified in existing studies on child trafficking and in key interviews as "at risk groups". The respondents in this research were selected in this way for a number of reasons. Given the difficulties faced with identifying victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking, this research used existing understandings of this phenomenon to identify groups of children who may be "at-risk of being trafficked". In this way it sought to build on the existing understanding of risk and resiliency so as to use the insight garnered by professionals and researchers who have been working in this field. On the other hand, it also sought to question whether the assumptions, beliefs and ideologies, underlying policies, practices and studies on this phenomenon reflect the views of children themselves.

In doing so, it sought to arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of factors that expose some children to the mounting risks of trafficking by highlighting the individual and contextual nature of risk and resiliency at the level of the child, family and community. In other words, simply because children were identified as "at risk" by key informants, this research sought to understand whether they are at risk or perceive themselves to be at risk of trafficking and whether particular children within these so-called "at risk groups" are more resilient or perceive themselves to be more resilient. When faced with various adversities that could include poverty, violence, exploitation and trafficking. Researchers did not ask questions about trafficking unless children introduced this issue. This was in order to ascertain whether it was even regarded as a

challenge for children who are frequently labelled as “at risk”.

In total, 876 people participated in this research, which included 618 children and 258 adult key informants. The following two graphs illustrate the gender and age break-down of the respondents by country/entity.

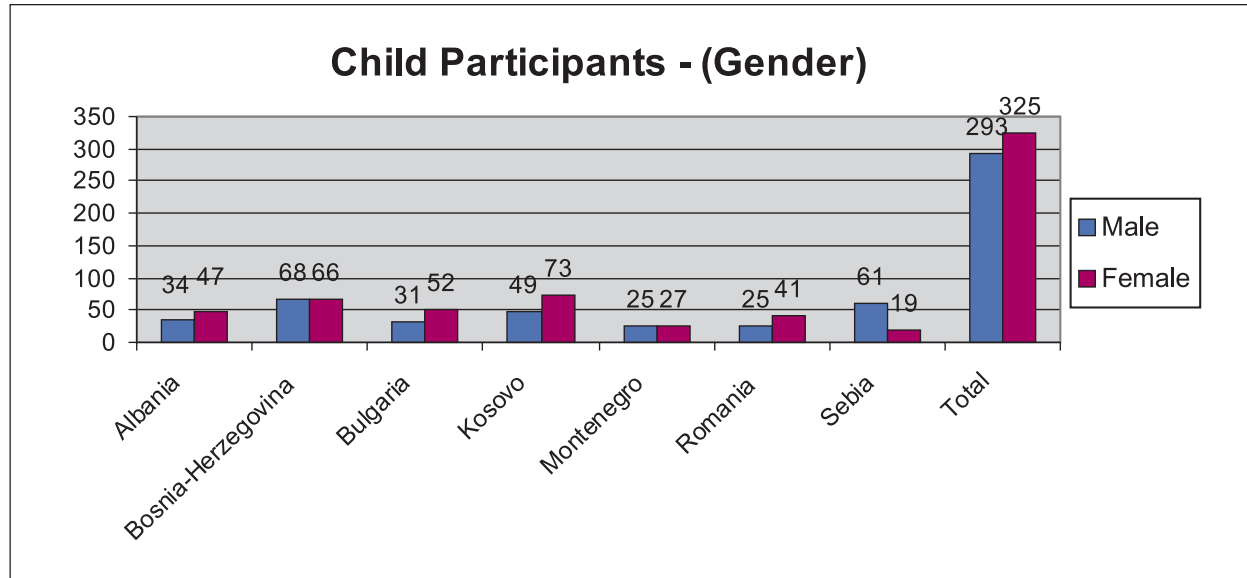


Figure 1: Sample breakdown of child respondents by gender

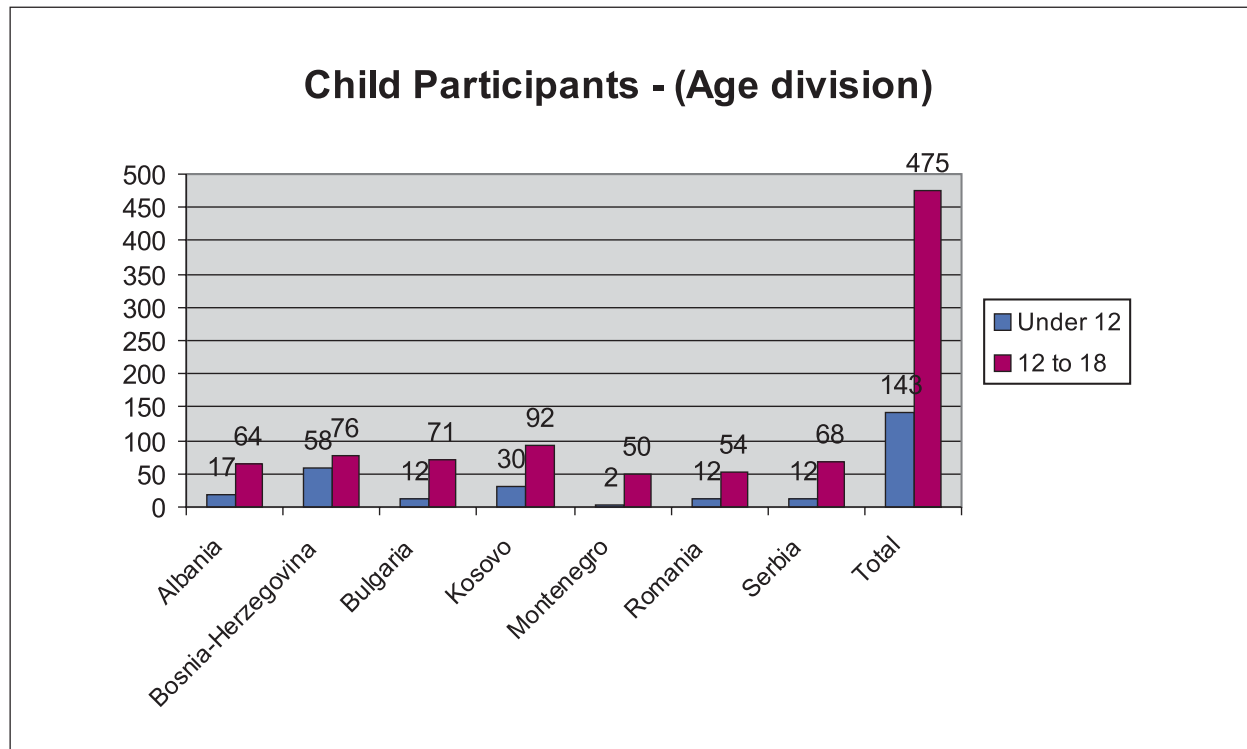


Figure 2: Sample breakdown of child respondents by age

The table below describes the amount of interviews and focus groups that were conducted across the region. This is accompanied by a graph that details the break down per country/entity.

Key informant interviews	130
Child interviews	268
Identified victims of trafficking	12
Focus groups with children	97
Focus groups with adults	12
Total	519

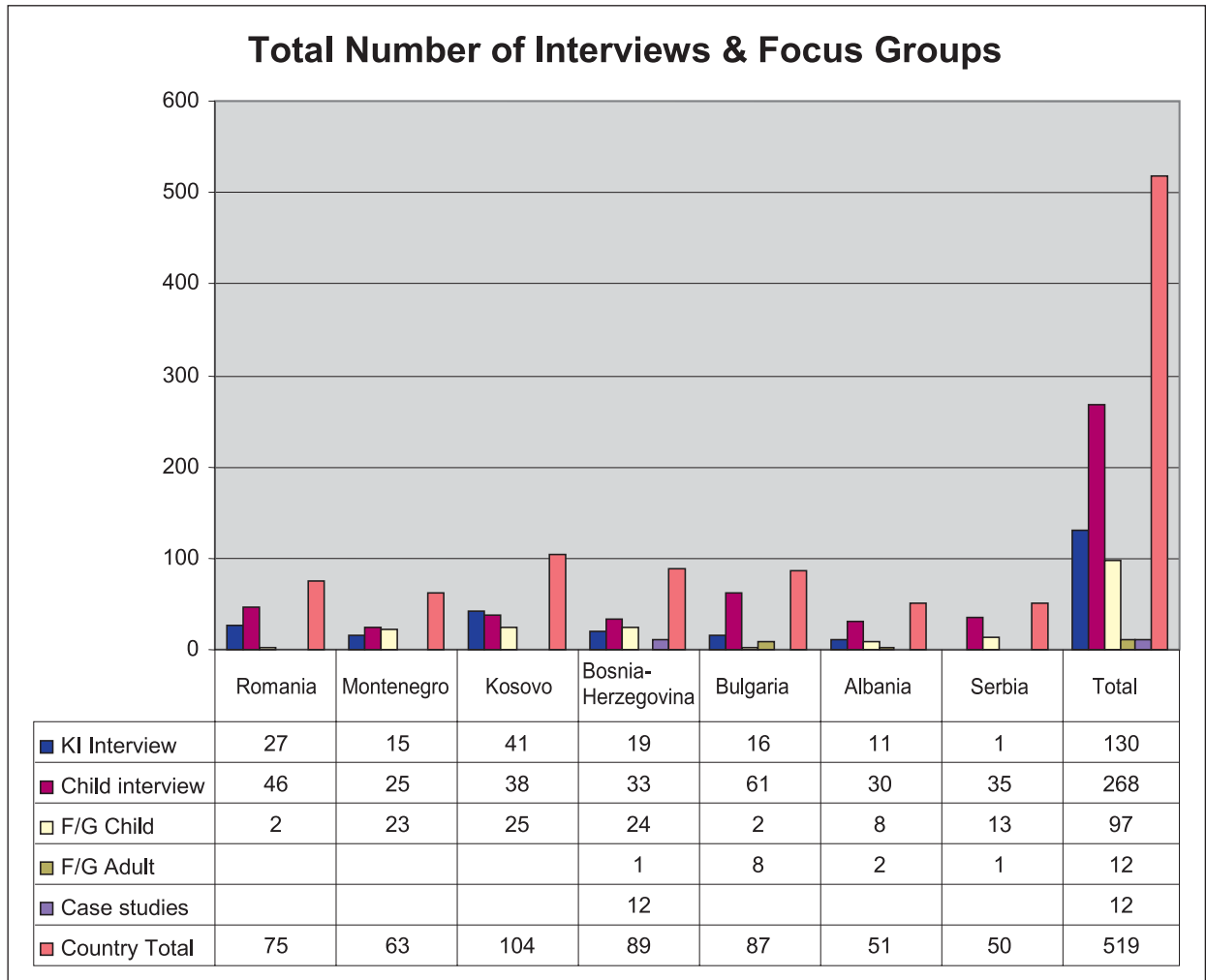


Figure 3: Interviews and focus groups per country/entity

It is important to note that no specific sample size was set at the outset of this research project given the use of the snowballing methodology and the emphasis placed on deepening our insight into children’s lives through qualitative techniques, rather than fulfilling certain quantitative sampling requirements. Hence, the amount of interviews and focus groups that were conducted in each country/entity differs according to children’s willingness to participate in the research. The researchers’ ability to interview children and the amount of time that was spent informally in each research community interacting with particular children was limited. These issues will be discussed in greater depth in this section.

Some of the children were accessed by means of snowballing. Snowballing has elsewhere been used in recruiting respondents from populations that are difficult to access such as criminals and

drug-users (Inciardi 1977; Kaplan, Korf et al. 1987; Faugier and Sargeant 1997; Atkinson and Flint 2001) and in the field of prostitution (McNamara 1994; Maher 1997; Nencel 2001; Sanders 2005). These so-called “hidden populations” are engaged in illegal activities and therefore not readily accessible within the mainstream communities and institutions.

As it is very difficult to access certain groups of children who migrate frequently and are subject to various forms of exploitation or at risk of being trafficked, snowballing was selected as the sampling method. It was very slow and time-consuming because it relied on both the respondents’ willingness to contact each other or share information and the quality of their relationships with each other (Atkinson and Flint 2001).

Researchers had to constantly sell this research project and build up high levels of trust with their respondents so that they would be willing to provide advice or further contacts. Incentives were not used to encourage this process (Watters and Biernacki 1989; Heckathorn 1997), for several reasons as it might turn respondents into informers and thereby place them at risk. It also could create conflict and jealousy within peer groups as well as obliging respondents to participate simply because they feel that they are being “paid to do so”. Also it might raise respondents’ expectations.

Another challenge associated with this sampling technique is that it depends on the existence of children’s social networks and thereby introduces a level of bias (Griffiths, Gossip et al. 1993; Atkinson and Flint 2001). All attempts were made to minimise this unavoidable bias by making contact with individuals from a range of populations and organisations. Initially focus groups and interviews were held with key informants, then focus groups in shelters and institutions with children. At each interview or focus group, key informants and children were asked for referrals which created multiple chains of contacts in diverse situations. This enabled children to drive the research process as they had the power to decide whether they would introduce researchers to their peers or other children who they perceived to be at risk.

Key informants

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key informants were designed to fulfil a number of purposes, namely to understand the state of trafficking in a particular socio-economic, cultural, legislative and institutional context and to ascertain why particular children are more likely to be trafficked than others. Also to facilitate access to high risk children, and to determine whether their opinions and perceptions coincide with those of children and researchers.

Key informants included state and non-state actors, as well as individuals who are in contact with particular children (e.g. parents). The interviews with key informants provided useful information about macro (socio-economic, cultural, institutional, legal) factors that may influence children’s decision-making. They revealed the extent to which the views of policy-makers and practitioners do not reflect those of children particularly where it pertains to children’s abilities and capabilities. The findings from these interviews and focus group discussions with key informants are not included in this report. A detailed discussion of their perceptions can however be found in the seven national reports which condense their comments within particular socio-economic, cultural, legislative and political environments. Nevertheless, the manner in which the key informants experienced and perceived the research process will be described in this section.

Key informants provided immense support to the researchers in the field. They gave up their valuable time to provide insightful information about the research themes. Furthermore, they introduced researchers to children and other actors and thereby facilitated the snowballing process. They also permitted researchers an opportunity to spend extensive periods of time in their institutions and shelters and provided various types of support during focus group sessions and interviews. Without their enthusiastic participation this research would not have been possible.

Despite these successes, a number of challenges were identified by researchers. Certain key informants could not be accessed. State representatives, for example, were not always available over the summer or were unable or unwilling to participate in this research. In addition, there was often conflict among organisations or between state and non-state bodies within certain communities for recognition and resources. This made it particularly important for researchers to consult all stakeholders. In a focus group conducted in Bulgaria with representatives from Roma communities the researcher noted how tension between representatives from different communities, genders or social classes, affected the discussion:

“In the first half of the discussion there was a loud argument about the origin and the character of the Millet community. Taking in mind that these are leaders who work together and who tried to overcome the differences between each other we can see how deep the conflict between these two communities is.⁸ He respects strictly the hierarchy and avoids saying his opinion except if not personally asked.⁹ From time to time I had the feeling that she wanted to say something but is restrained because the men were speaking”.¹⁰

Many key informants were concerned about the use of recording equipment and the manner in which this information would be used. In numerous cases researchers complained that key informants were withholding certain valuable pieces of information. It was evident that many did not want to be critical of their organisation or institution, and run the risk of compromising their own position. Furthermore, many key informants were concerned about the potential risks that they may face to their own safety if they discussed criminal activities in their communities. In a number of cases, key informants initiated background checks on the researchers in order to establish that they were authentic and not working in cahoots with criminals or with the media.

Field researchers also encountered challenges when interviewing key informants who doubled as gatekeepers in particular institutions. These gatekeepers would often only provide access to certain children or would demand bribes for facilitating access. Gatekeepers often prevented researchers from interviewing identified victims of trafficking. They were often very protective of the children in their care and did not want to jeopardise their own relationships with them. Some key informants had negative past experiences with other research projects, and this affected their willingness to participate. In Bosnia-Herzegovina as a researcher noted, *“The respondent¹¹ has bad relationships with other NGOs which work on trafficking and violence against women and children and this was the real reason for her initial reserved attitude and wariness as well as for her refusal to give an interview for similar research”.¹²*

⁸ Bulgaria - Community Leader in Millet area.

⁹ Bulgaria - Community Leader

¹⁰ Bulgaria researcher

¹¹ Bosnia-Herzegovina - Representative from police

¹² Bosnia-Herzegovina researcher

The researchers found that if they had worked with or developed a relationship with key informants in the past possibly spent time informally with them or conducted multiple interviews, they might be more enthusiastic about participating in this research project. Furthermore, researchers noted that Save the Children's good reputation in some of these communities ensured that key informants were more willing to cooperate.

As a researcher in Kosovo stated, *"The interview proved to be more than cooperative and this was mainly because this research was organised by Save the Children, an organisation for which the interviewee¹³ showed great respect and since they have been supported by some other projects related to child participation after the war"*.¹⁴

Many researchers stated that key informants wanted direct remuneration or immediate assistance in return for participation. In Kosovo a researcher noted: *"Initially she¹⁵ was very kind and warm until the moment I told her that there isn't any direct help for her NGO from this conversation but instead there perhaps be indirect help from all this. This kind of response put her off the research and required a consultation"*.¹⁶

Another researcher in Kosovo stated that a key informant¹⁷ *"is disappointed with NGOs and other organisations as all they do is visit them, telling they are doing a wonderful thing with these children, promising help but almost none even come back or send anything"*.¹⁸ Despite the fact this research project could not offer immediate benefits to key informants or the children in their communities, many key informants believed that it is a valuable effort because it provides insights into children's perspectives and experiences.

Focus groups with children

The format of each focus group depended upon the themes that the researchers were attempting to uncover and the activities chosen for this task. Activities that were developed at the regional level were adapted by national researchers through a process of piloting. The approach and particular activities selected were tailored to suit the participants, their particular age, gender, culture and so forth.

Theatrical and art activities were found to be particularly useful in gathering information. The researchers were flexible and often adapted activities to suit the children's preferences. As one child stated, *"I feel tired now and the pantomime at the end was great, it's great that you promised we'd do it and we did"*.¹⁹ A researcher from Kosovo described how she acted while giving a child the opportunity to select the venue for the interview: *"During the meetings the girl wished to sit in the places where she usually sells, meaning in highly frequented cafes where she is selling peanuts and chewing gum. During the activity she wanted to be someone who sits there and waiting for her to be served by other for change. The interview went very well, and she sang songs during the interview"*.²⁰

¹³ Kosovo - NGO Head

¹⁴ Kosovo researcher

¹⁵ Kosovo - NGO Head

¹⁶ Kosovo researcher

¹⁷ Kosovo - NGO Head

¹⁸ Kosovo researcher

¹⁹ Montenegro - Focus Group interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child.

²⁰ Kosovo researchers

In general the field researchers received positive feedback from the children who participated in these groups. They found the activities enjoyable and stimulating, and were happy to share their feelings, thoughts and perceptions with interested adults.

Many enjoyed the fact that they could keep their drawings and posters, and even suggested that this was a source of status within the peer group. For instance, one child stated, *“I had a great time on the days when you gave us those magazines and pieces of paper, so we made nice posters for each room. We put them up, some even asked us for some more, but we didn’t have any more. We had a really great time”*²¹. Another child stated that she wished that instructors (social workers) followed the researcher’s example by consulting them: *“There, I happen to have this idea, since you came here and asked us about the nice things and the ones not nice, the things we liked and disliked. The instructors could do the same from time to time, and then they could design things for us according to it”*²².

Despite the success of this method, the researchers encountered a number of obstacles. With the guidance of the regional team, these researchers revealed ingenuity and creativity in their attempts to overcome these challenges. For one thing, it was often difficult to find suitable venues in which to conduct these focus groups, especially when working with children living or working on the street. In addition, with regards to children living in institutions, in many cases it was obvious that they were simply repeating the messages that they had already received from psychologists and adults in that particular institution. Alternatively these gatekeepers only allowed certain children to participate or insisted on being present during the focus groups. According to the researchers this had a significant effect upon children’s responses. As a researcher in Bulgaria stated,

*“Although the personnel were asked to choose children aged 13-17, most of the participants were 11-12 years old. Also the management of the institution said the psychologist of the institution must be present. These factors had negative effects on the abilities of the participants for concentration in the group work as well as on their freedom in participation in the discussions”*²³.

To overcome this, the researchers often had to negotiate with staff and spend lengthy periods of time in the institution to gain trust. In addition, through the snowballing sampling technique they attempted to contact children’s peers who were not living in institutions.

It was often difficult to select children to participate in focus groups. Many of the researchers divided the groups on the basis of age or gender but they still noticed differences related to nationality, ethnicity, language, educational level, abilities and skills, financial status, personality, self-confidence and past experiences. For example, one researcher in the United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo stated:

*“In this group I had children with social differences. These were children from families in good economic conditions and children from villages. Children from villages are quieter due to traditional education. They are also more closed. They don’t like to speak about their personal problems but they follow discussion. I found also more discipline and better grades on these children. Females are shy except one that was from town.”*²⁴

²¹ Montenegro - Focus Group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

²² Montenegro - Focus Group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child,

²³ Bulgaria researcher

²⁴ Kosovo researcher

In Bulgaria the researcher noted that some of the girls were in fact more expressive than boys: *“Three clear positions formed in the group part of the girls were more talkative and they often took over the discussion. The boys were more moderate and passive while the girls with Roma origin were passive and felt isolated”*²⁵. In Montenegro some of the girls felt more comfortable to talk to other women: *“I think it’s good to talk to girls, no one has talked to us like this. It can help us to think more about life and choose our company better. We’d need to talk about everything several times, this was short. I could often spend time like this. That’s my opinion”*²⁶.

There were often one or two children who remained withdrawn, appeared to be bored and refused to participate in particular activities, yet wanted to take part in the focus groups. Researchers also had to contend with power dynamics within the group. In some cases, children mocked or teased each other, would compete for attention, or exaggerate stories to impress each other. They would repeat each others’ answers or deliberately interrupt each other. Some children were self-conscious about their participation and constantly sought the researchers’ approval. As one Bulgarian researcher stated, *“When they finished a task some of them asked the facilitators: “Did you like it?” Or “What is good?””*²⁷.

Some of the researchers found it difficult to cope with this diversity and create activities to suit each child, whereas others found that it stimulated discussion about “difference”. A researcher in Montenegro notes:

*“This diversity did not present a hindrance. On the contrary, it proved to be the factor that contributed to obtaining different views of the world and reality... In this sense, it was a diversity that enriches the contents of the discussion rather than a hindrance that would cause tensions and distance group members from one another”*²⁸.

In order to overcome some of the tension that existed between children within focus groups, children were often divided into groups or pairs and researchers attempted to relax them using a range of ice-breakers and warm up activities. They also encouraged the children to suggest activities that they preferred so that each child had a say over the focus group agenda (see below). Furthermore, they conducted multiple focus groups with children in order to ensure that they were comfortable with each other and with the researcher. Unfortunately this was often hindered by the fact that many children migrated for the purposes of work or travelled during the summer vacations with their families²⁹.

Some researchers found it difficult to facilitate large groups of children, particularly when children exhibited disruptive and aggressive tendencies. A researcher in Bulgaria stated that *“the general impression is of cacophony and chaos... We noticed lack of skills for cooperative work, marked by lack of tolerance towards the other members of the group, chaotic and unruly behaviour, low frustration threshold, difficulties in following instructions and keeping rules”*³⁰. In order to overcome these challenges, researchers adopted a number of strategies including rules that were created by the children themselves. These included *“do not interrupt others”, “do not shout”, “do not eat in the*

²⁵ Bulgaria researcher

²⁶ Montenegro - individual interview, 15 year old girl IDP camp

²⁷ Bulgaria researcher

²⁸ Montenegro researcher

²⁹ Bulgaria - focus group interview 15 years old girl, school child.

³⁰ Bulgaria researcher

group”, “do not answer phones” etc. The children also set the punishment for transgressions of these rules. Those included hopping around on one foot, standing on a chair and singing a song in front of the others.

Researchers also preferred working with smaller groups of children with whom they had interacted informally in the past because they found that it was easier to give individual children more attention while maintaining group order and enthusiasm. They described these children as more comfortable, cooperative and enthusiastic about participating. Nevertheless, many researchers found it difficult to contain the size of the focus groups as numerous children wanted to participate. As a researcher in Montenegro stated,

“In the beginning I had some problems, because there were many children in front of the room that I had not arranged a session with, but that wanted to participate. I even offered to come the next day to spend some time together, draw, talk, but this was all in vain because they wanted to do it right away. Out of revolt, mad and angry, they thumped on the door”³¹.

Researchers also adapted their activities to ensure that children remained interested, focused and eager to participate. They tried to tailor activities to suit the personalities and preferences of each child. They shortened focus groups when children were tired or had problems concentrating. In addition, they found that having food or drinks in the room was a major source of distraction for children, so these were only distributed in breaks or after the focus group.

The children were fascinated by the microphones and recording equipment and constantly tried to play with them when the researchers were not looking. As a result, a number of researchers creatively employed this equipment in their activities; for instance, by recording children’s dialogues and playing it back to them in the format of a radio interview. Although children enjoyed being recorded, many were concerned about confidentiality issues. In her feedback one child stated, *“It went real fast. I felt nice, it’s great when you are asked questions as if in a live broadcast, and you have that machine as well. But I would have not thought about talking to you like this if you hadn’t told me this information was not to be publicised, with my name included.”* When asked to explain, she stated: *“Because some reporters often come here and I don’t like to talk to them because they present us in a way that makes everyone pity us. And that’s stupid - if we don’t have parents it does not mean we are the ones who need their pity. When they record us then all of Montenegro pities us”³².*

This reveals the degree to which children define the extent and nature of their own participation in research projects. Children may decide not to participate because they have had negative experiences with researchers or reporters in the past. Nevertheless, many children were happy to participate as long as the material was kept confidential and their names are not released to the public. This was stipulated in the research ethical protocol and all efforts have been undertaken to ensure that these protocols have been followed by field researchers.

Children actively assisted in designing focus groups. In each session, they provided recommendations for future focus groups. For instance with regard to venue, a child in Bulgaria stated, *“I feel a little tired and sleepy, I suggest that the next time we do it in the open”³³.* In contrast, a child in Kosovo

³¹ Montenegro researcher

³² Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child.

³³ Bulgaria - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, school child

stated that if he could do it differently: *“I would gather all the children in the streets and I would do some activities with them, or find a place where they could go and play... do something, as long as they don’t stay in the streets”*³⁴. Some children encouraged the researchers to use more activities. For instance, a Montenegrin child complained that there was *“too much talking, nothing useful”*. Another stated, *“This talk is very difficult, I am not able to join in. Let’s play something”*³⁵.

In contrast, some children preferred the discussion component of the focus groups. As one child in the same group stated, *“It’s really easier when we talk like this at least for the moment, perhaps we should do it more often”*³⁶. This reveals the extent to which it is difficult to please all respondents within the same group, although efforts can be made to ensure that activities are more interesting and lively. Some children preferred talking in the format of interviews. As one child stated, *“It’s nice to talk to you like this than in the group. Though the workshops are great as well, but it was somehow nicer than this”*³⁷. Another stated: *“I prefer the two of us talking to having another friend of mine here with us”*³⁸. As a result, many children who participated in focus groups were also interviewed by the researchers.

Semi- and unstructured interviews with children

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were the main methods employed in this research. These tools were used to construct life histories and case studies, the former focusing on the children’s perspectives, understanding and feelings, and the latter on processes, mechanisms and events in the children’s lives (Dela Cruz, Protacio-de Castro et al. 2001).

A semi-structured interview has been likened to a guided conversation, in that it is informal and relaxed but driven by certain key themes and guidelines. The researchers were trained on how to be open and honest about the research objectives, the desired outcomes, their limitations and background. They were aware that they were asking children to share potentially sensitive things about their lives and that they needed to create a trusting space for them to do so. As a result, all efforts were made to interact with their respondents before conducting a formal interview in a relaxed and informal setting.

For instance, researchers had coffee with their respondents, took them swimming or walked through the park with them. In addition, multiple interviews with each respondent were conducted to develop rapport and give them an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences. When deciding upon the instruments for these semi-structured interviews the researchers were guided by the research objectives, themes, the interview context and the appropriateness of the line of questioning. The feedback that the researchers received from the children was overwhelmingly positive. For many children this was a new experience and one of the few times that adults had taken their opinion into account.

For instance, a child in a camp in Montenegro stated: *“I think it’s good to talk to girls. No one has talked to us like this. It can help us to think more about life and choose our company better”*³⁹. Another child

³⁴ Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

³⁵ Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child.

³⁶ Montenegro - focus group interview 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁷ Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁸ Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁹ Ibid.

in this camp stated: *“I think when someone wants to help children have a better life or cares how children live, then it is necessary to talk to children. I think it’s good that it’s done that way. It’s very nice to have someone ask us something and talk to us about the good things and the bad things in our lives. All those who came to our camp talked to the adults, nobody talked to us. Nobody asked us what we liked and whether anyone could or wanted to help us and give us what we liked”*⁴⁰.

A child in Kosovo emphasised that she enjoyed her interview: *“A talk like this was something I was missing for a long time now. I needed to talk to someone, someone young”*⁴¹. Many stated that this is related to the fact that they are children and their views are often ignored. This is evident in comments such as: *“It is very nice that you talk to children like this and it’s not just circling some answers, like someone could get your opinion based on that”* and *“I’d like to be able to talk this openly with a grown-up person”*.

Many children attested to the positive effects that this research has had on themselves and on other children. Others stated that it made them consider how they could go about helping themselves or others. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“I felt nice, and it’s great you made me think about the things I would do if I were president of an organisation concerned with children living in homes.”*⁴²

It was frequently stated that this research can help other children in the future. As a child in Bulgaria stated, *“I think it will be useful for young people. About the risks for working abroad, about life here the information, I think, will be useful for people who work with young people and for the young people themselves. I think that the greatest advantage will be if there are more people with whom youths can talk and ask for help”*⁴³. It is said that this research will be *“important for parents”*⁴⁴ and that *“maybe something good will come out of it and things would be better for some children”*⁴⁵. The children frequently referred the researchers to children whom they thought that this could research could help.

As a child in Montenegro stated, *“What do you think, perhaps you could go and talk to the father of these children that work in the streets, maybe he’ll listen to you, you could explain that it’s not good for children to be working in the street and so on, you’d be able to tell them that well. Or go and talk to the parents of those boys that are not behaving well and are doing all kinds of things in the camp and in the town, and talk to them”*⁴⁶.

The children also attempted to use the researchers as a mouthpiece to express their own views and get their needs met. For instance, one child in a camp in Montenegro stated: *“Well, I have seen that you care about children and you would like to know what our concerns are. So maybe you could go to this organization and ask them, ask X”*⁴⁷, *why he won’t build us this playground to play football and he promised but he keeps lying to us. We went to him, he keeps making promises, but won’t do anything. Perhaps he’d do something if you talked to him and asked him, perhaps he’d do as you say”*⁴⁸.

⁴⁰ Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp.

⁴¹ Kosovo - Individual Interview, 8 years old girl, street child.

⁴² Montenegro - Individual Interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴³ Bulgaria - Individual Interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴⁴ Bulgaria - Individual Interview, 17 years old girl, school child

⁴⁵ Montenegro - Individual Interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The names of all respondents (and persons referred to by them) have been replaced by “X” to protect their identity

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In other words, children hoped that researchers would act on their behalf in the short and long term. In terms of the former, they hoped that researchers would speak to other interveners about their immediate needs but then also secure longer term benefits for them and other children in their communities.

Despite the positive feedback that researchers received, they encountered a range of challenges with this method. First, it was often difficult to find a suitable venue for the interview to be conducted. In schools researchers complained that interviews conducted in the teachers' offices were constantly interrupted. In Kosovo, the researchers found that interviews were halted because children had to stop and work (car washing, begging etc).

In Albania interviews were sometimes conducted in cafés to get away from the “noisy” environment in children’s homes. In Serbia, researchers conducted interviews with children living and working on the street in local parks. These were frequently interrupted by passer bys. In Kosovo, a researcher described an incident where she was interviewing a girl but was suddenly interrupted by family members who prohibited the interview on the grounds that “*there was nothing to say and the girl would not understand her anyway*”. The researcher tried to calm the situation down and asked to continue the interview in order to better “understand the child’s wishes, and her daily activities” explaining meanwhile what “*was the research about, and what could be changed in children’s life...*”⁴⁹

This quote reveals the importance of obtaining parents’ or caregivers’ consent, as has been set out in the research protocol. Not only does failing to consult a caregiver break ethical codes of conduct but it can also hinder the success of an interview as is evident above.

A child stated that her father was quite conscious about confidentiality issues and set parameters on her participation: “*Dad said that we shouldn’t go out in front of the cameras, otherwise we can talk to you*”⁵⁰. Another researcher in Kosovo stated: “*I would also like to mention that the mother was very happy with the activity in which her daughter is involved in this initiative. In the beginning she was a little bit sceptical because she thought that this activity had something to do with the media, so she feared that it would make things only worse for her daughter as she has been raped*”⁵¹.

As this research dealt with a number of sensitive topics, it was imperative that the researchers did not risk exposing children to further stigma or dangers. In order to be aware of these potential risks researchers spent lengthy periods of time with respondents.

Time is needed to create trust and develop a safe space within which children will share their experiences, insights and feelings. Some researchers stated that they received contradictory information from their respondents and that this may be related to fear or mistrust. Some respondents tried to impress them by presenting themselves as a hero, using ready-made phrases heard from older people or describing situations “*more the way [they] want things to be and not the way they are in reality*”⁵². It was stated that some children “*wouldn’t talk to strangers no matter what*”⁵³.

⁴⁹ Kosovo researcher

⁵⁰ Kosovo - Individual Interview, 9 years old girl, street child

⁵¹ Kosovo researcher

⁵² Bulgaria researcher

⁵³ Kosovo researcher

With this in mind, most researchers conducted multiple interviews and spent between one and three months in their local communities. They also attempted to build trust with children by spending time with them informally. For instance, a researcher in Kosovo noted: *“Initially she felt reluctant, shy and withdrawn, but after some time of informal discussion she felt very well and open to discuss about the themes of the research. We had a walk on the way to shop where we got some drinks which was very relaxed and we were speaking about daily life of the children in that area. On the way back our activity continued and went very well”*⁵⁴.

In their field diaries researchers noticed a significant shift in levels of trust over the time that they spent with their respondents and this affected the quality and validity of the data received.

As this was such a new experience to them, a number of children were initially hesitant about being interviewed. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“I had a nice time, I don’t know what to say. When you invited me, I got really scared, wondering what you would ask me about and whether I would have the answers. And I did, didn’t I?”*⁵⁵

They frequently highlighted their own insecurities and fear of being chastised or corrected for expressing their point of view. This has an effect upon children’s confidence in their ability to express themselves.

As a Montenegrin child stated, *“I don’t know what I could tell you and what is important to your research, I sort of think anything that comes to my mind is stupid and useless to you... Well, I felt good while talking to you. But I think I was not able to tell you everything properly and answer all the things you asked me about”*⁵⁶.

This had an effect upon the quality of interviews with children, as a researcher in Albania observed: *“The interview went well. She was very enthusiastic to talk to me in the beginning. Then after hearing some of the questions she looked a bit tense as she was trying to give “correct” answers”*⁵⁷.

In general however, the children appreciated the fact that researchers adopted a non-judgmental attitude towards them. For instance, a Romanian child stated: *“I like the fact that there haven’t been questions such as “Oh, how are you, what are your faults?” I’ve spoken once about my faults and I’ve noticed it’s wrong to tell somebody about your faults or qualities... these were good questions”*⁵⁸.

A number of researchers found that their respondents shared more information when the tape-recorder was switched off and as a result and often on the behest of children themselves they discarded dictaphones and other recording equipment. Some researchers found that children could not understand their questions and this tended to be related to their age, language, education level, listening and comprehension skills. As a result, the researchers adopted children’s language or terminology and employed various activities as a supplementary means of gathering information.

Children were constantly encouraged to provide comments and recommendations to researchers, who then adapted their approach accordingly. Researchers were trained to conduct semi-

⁵⁴ Kosovo researcher

⁵⁵ Montenegro - Individual Interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized, child

⁵⁶ Montenegro - Individual Interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁷ Albania researcher

⁵⁸ Romania - Individual Interview, 10 years old boy,

structured interviews with various themes in mind, while enabling children to lead the interview. Nevertheless, a child in Serbia still found some of the questions to be challenging: *“Some things are interesting, some are not. Some questions, because I don’t know the answers to some of them, and I know to some others... For instance, you asked me earlier how could politicians help children and I didn’t know”*⁵⁹.

Another child in Kosovo complained about the length of the interview: *“There are too many questions, sometimes I felt like in school”*⁶⁰. Some children found the content of the interviews to be problematic. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“Some questions were hard because they made me recall my past but all in all they were OK.”*⁶¹.

Researchers were trained to conduct and close interviews sensitively but some children still found it difficult to discuss some of the adverse experiences they have had to deal with. One of the children criticised the questions related to decision-making and choice saying: *“I felt good, however, there were some questions that I started to get angry about, I’m sorry about that, it’s just because no one understands us and everyone thinks we can do this and that. No one realises we don’t have that much choice”*⁶². This child felt that questions like *“what do you do or decide in your daily life?”* simply draw attention to the fact that he doesn’t have much to do or much decision-making power in relation to others. Some children suggested that the researchers should focus more on different themes. For instance a child in Romania stated that more attention should be directed to the difference between boys and girls.

This reveals the importance of consulting children when designing research tools. If their opinions are not taken into consideration at the design phase of a research project, interviews will not elicit in-depth information about their experiences and perceptions. In general, the children suggested that researchers should continue to consult with children.

Reflexivity and ethics

The researchers described their field experiences in positive terms. For many, it was an opportunity to learn more about children and how they perceive their problems and strengths. It was an opportunity to share experiences and information with representatives from local communities and for some it was a period of personal growth in which they questioned their own assumptions and belief-systems.

A few researchers did, however, encounter ethical dilemmas. As has been mentioned, they were guided by a regional ethical protocol and were trained on how to discuss personal and potentially painful issues with children as well as how to close sensitive discussions and/or provide further support and referrals. When suspected cases of child maltreatment occurred, many had to carefully consider whether intervention was necessary, particularly when children themselves did not regard the situation to be negative or dangerous. In these instances ethical guidelines were followed and the child was consulted while the researchers actively discussed their concerns with their line managers at Save the Children.

⁵⁹ Serbia - Individual Interview, a 15 years old boy, street child

⁶⁰ Kosovo - focus group interview, 10 years old girl, school child

⁶¹ Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, shelter child

⁶² Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

For example, one country team encountered serious child protection concerns in an institution. The tension was relieved through collaborative efforts and extensive negotiation with staff members, researchers and Save the Children personnel. This example highlighted the difficulties faced when conducting research on such a sensitive topic concerning children who are potentially very vulnerable.

A further challenge that many researchers encountered in the field was that of expectation-raising. It is important to bear in mind that “researchers are sometimes seen as akin to pimps, coming into the field to take, then returning to the campus, institution or suburb where they write up the data, publish and build careers on the backs of those they took the data from” (O’Neill 1996, p.132). As this research was being undertaken under the banner of Save the Children or its partner organisations, children and their families and wider communities expected direct or indirect assistance in return for participation in this research project.

The ethical protocol underlying this research project discourages any remuneration or direct assistance to participants. Children who take part in focus groups are rewarded for their participation at the end of the session with food or other tokens of gratitude such as books, notebooks, pens and children who are interviewed receive guidance, advice, referrals, transport etc. When necessary. Most simply what is wanted is someone to listen to their story and in this sense this research project proved to be potentially empowering, while others called on researchers’ advice. However, no financial payment was provided to children as this would raise their expectations, distort the respondent-researcher relationship and oblige/force respondents to participate. Researchers emphasised the longer term benefits of this project and in particular, the fact that future interventions will be based upon children’s input, thereby benefiting other children.

Many researchers felt handicapped in their ability to help their respondents but felt that this research will have added value in terms of assisting children in the longer-term. As a Montenegrin researcher stated, “At the end of the workshop I was overwhelmed with the children’s anger and discontent of their life. I was truly sad and asking myself what I could do for them. I was comforted by the hope that this information will really be taken into account in creating a national policy for protection and improving the children’s lives.”⁶³

On the other hand, another researcher in Montenegro stated that she was sceptical about the extent to which future interventions will assist children, and that these doubts had an impact upon her data-gathering processes: “I often have such contradictory thoughts about what we are able to offer them. Can we really give them any essential and lasting help or influence... There are more arguments in favour of a negative response, so from time to time I lose any credibility in my own eyes to discuss the future with these children. It is good that this occurs only in some moments. I am aware of the responsibility and the limits of my influence. I return to real capacities and my consciousness brings me back on track, saying that I am not omnipotent.”⁶⁴

For many researchers it was difficult to accept that they were not in a position to assist their respondents living in impoverished, violent and socially marginalised communities.

⁶³ Montenegro researcher

⁶⁴ Montenegro researcher

From the outset, researchers were asked for reflexive review and how their own characteristics, backgrounds and perceptions affected the research project. Many of the researchers were trained as social workers, psychologists and teachers, and often found it difficult not to approach the children from this angle. It was discovered that sharing the same characteristics as the respondents aided the research process. For example, a researcher from a particular Roma community in Kosovo found that his background facilitated access, helped him to build trust and assisted him in understanding the responses of his respondents. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the researchers often found it difficult to understand the experiences of their Roma respondents because they have “little direct experience of social exclusion” (Bosnia-Herzegovina report 2007). Female researchers described how they found it easier to interview girls.

As a researcher in Albania stated, *“Being a woman facilitated the research process in several ways. In such communities there is a huge obstacle in meeting with teenage girls. Given my gender this was made easier than if there was a male researcher instead. This made the girls also more open and share more with the researcher. However, this was not always true. Teenage boys were more hesitant to join the focus group activities. This might be due to many factors but researchers’ gender played a considerable role. They could have been less hesitant and more active if the researcher was a young man”*⁶⁵.

Age was another factor that affected the data-gathering process. An Albanian researcher stated that *“Being young helped a lot in building relations and confidence with children. However, being young was not always appreciated by adults (key informants) who often consider life experience very important and young people as not enough experienced to deal with important issues”*⁶⁶.

Their own personal relationships also influenced research experiences. As a researcher in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated: *“As a mother, I find it difficult to talk to a child aged as my daughter but with totally different life paths”*⁶⁷. A number of the researchers were social workers, psychologists and teachers by training and found that this affected the manner in which they interacted with their respondents. As a researcher in Montenegro stated, *“I sometimes fear that I am switching from the role of the researcher to that of a psychologist”*⁶⁸.

The researchers attested to the value of this research. They stated that it helped them to be tolerant and learn about others⁶⁹. Throughout the research process field researchers were encouraged to question their assumptions and beliefs. Such assumptions often appeared in the terms that they employed, such as “anti-social”, “delinquent” and “dysfunctional”. At the preliminary workshop held in October 2006, it was emphasised that children who live on the streets are not anti-social because they navigate social relationships and networks on a daily basis.

Single-headed households cannot be described as “dysfunctional” or “broken” because this description is based on normative assumptions about ideal forms of parenting, child-rearing and household structures. In addition, researchers were encouraged to avoid the assumption that all Roma children are “at-risk” simply because key informants and existing literature describes them as such; instead, they should constantly question stereotypes by focusing on risk and resiliency factors, and by focusing on particular groups of children within Roma communities that might be

⁶⁵ Albania researcher

⁶⁶ Albania researcher

⁶⁷ Bosnia-Herzegovina researcher

⁶⁸ Montenegro researcher

⁶⁹ Bulgaria researcher

more at risk (e.g. children living on the streets). In the field they were confronted with the differences that exist within Roma groups in terms of culture, backgrounds, traditions and socio-economic positioning. For instance, the researcher in Albania noted that this research made her question her assumptions stating: *“The greatest benefit has been that of getting to know and have a better insight of the Roma/Egyptian community. This helped me understand their way of living and their mentality. It also helped me to overcome certain prejudice and obstacles I had before going into the field”*⁷⁰.

Researchers also started to think critically about the passivity that they attributed to child victims. Many were impressed by the strength and resiliency that the children exhibited. As a Bulgarian researcher stated, *“During the interview the strength that the boy showed when speaking about the events helped me to stay calm but when hearing the interview later I couldn’t believe my ears. It shows the great risk for the children in the neighbourhood”*⁷¹. Hence, it is important to bear in mind Nencel’s insightful comment: *“Because the research group is envisioned as vulnerable, it is often assumed they find it difficult to protect themselves, overlooking the fact that most vulnerable people are continuously protecting themselves and are usually more experienced in this area than the anthropologist”* (Nencel 2001, p. 80). On a daily basis these children survived in the face of poverty and violence. The researchers had to respect their power and resiliency in this context, before they were willing to offer information about their lives.

Many field researchers found this research to be emotionally draining and described the depression and anxiety that they experienced in their field diaries and interview cover-sheets. Researchers themselves encountered various risks or threats to their safety. On a daily basis, researchers had to make strategic decisions about where they would undertake this research, when they would do so (e.g. avoid evenings) and who they could rely upon or interview. Many decided to work in pairs to overcome these threats.

Various unforeseen problems were also encountered in the field. For example, it was very difficult and draining to conduct research in high temperatures over the summer months. Living in unfamiliar local communities also proved to be hazardous on occasion. These feelings were shared in weekly meetings with their lead researchers and country coordinators and in their communication with the regional team. In addition to regular field visits, the regional team was able to monitor and support researchers in the field by means of monthly reporting, a newsletter, peer-to-peer online mailing list and regular workshops. Throughout the research process, emphasis was placed on communication within national research teams and with the regional team. It was only by communicating their needs and concerns that support could be provided and solutions found.

In general, this research was only possible because researchers invested in relationships with children and reflexively considered their assumptions about children’s perceptions and lived experiences. This research has provided unique insights into the complex range of factors at individual, interpersonal and macro-levels that enhance the likelihood that some children will be more at risk of trafficking or more resilient in the face of adversities such as poverty, violence, exploitation and trafficking. By giving primacy to children’s perspectives this research fills an important gap in existing literature and provides a useful tool for programming in the area of child protection and child trafficking.

⁷⁰ Albania researcher

⁷¹ Bulgaria researcher

Chapter 4

Children's Perceptions of Trafficking Risk and Resiliency

According to the children in this study, there are two main processes by which children are trafficked. The first is being deceived, the second is being coerced. In order to understand why these respondents perceived some children to be more at risk of being trafficked it is necessary to understand the processes and mechanisms by which trafficking occurs, the power exercised by various actors over these processes and the decisions that children make in these settings.

This chapter will analyse the first process by unpacking what the children mean by being tricked, cheated and deceived, with particular attention to the exact mechanisms by which they believe this as being experienced by child victims of trafficking. It will then explain each of these mechanisms by referring to the respondents' "lived realities" with particular attention to their macro-contexts, interpersonal relationships, individual characteristics and decision-making. It will argue that although one cannot make causal claims about whether a particular factor will lead to trafficking, children's accounts provide in-depth information about the cumulative range of factors that might lead a child to be trafficked as well as detailed information about the mechanisms and processes by which this may occur.

Emphasis will be placed on children's perspectives, bearing in mind that their opinions and responses are themselves influenced by their own emotions, needs and wants and the messages they receive from a diverse range of sources, including the media, their parents, relatives, peers, teachers and social workers, as well as their relationships with the researchers. This in itself provides essential information about the factors that affect their decision-making, and their risk and resilience in the context of trafficking.

Trafficking messages

Most children in this research project had no direct experience of trafficking. Their perceptions are often based on hearsay and what they believe to be the realities. This is particularly evident in horror stories that children describe of mutilations, murders and selling of organs. Many of these perceptions relate to the meaning that children attribute to the messages that they receive about trafficking from a range of actors. This meaning is related to their own experiences, beliefs and values, and their relationship with the "messenger". The views of these messengers are evident in the accounts of key informants, which have not been included in this report but constitute a major component of the national reports. This report will focus on children's perceptions of trafficking messages and the source of these messages.

Parents were concerned about their children being trafficked and focused on physical coercion and deception. For instance, a mother in Montenegro kept warning her child: *"I should be cautious, there are all kinds of people who lie and can deceive you and promise you things and none of it is true"*

*and if you believe them you get ruined completely*⁷².

In this case, emphasis was placed on being deceived by the promise of marriage and then being trafficked into sexual exploitation. Some parents focused on concerns that children can be deceived by the promise of employment abroad but according to one child's mother, *"there is no way to earn money fast anywhere and these people are lying"*⁷³.

In Romania, a mother warned her child about the possibility of being caught, sold and forced to steal and beg. In Bulgaria, children were warned about walking close to the road because they may be trafficked for the purpose of organ removal. They say: *"Don't go close to the road because someone might thrust you in a car and take you abroad! They will take out your heart, lungs and they will sell them"*⁷⁴.

Some parents have communicated warnings about trafficking to children. They have even attempted to provide them with practical advice given that they are not physically able to watch their children constantly: *"I've talked about it with my father. He says he is aware of that and of those dangers. He advised me to take care of myself and avoid whatever is risky both in places and with people. He can't do any more than that, he says he can't change other people or influence the way they act, it's most up to me not to let them provoke me and to avoid danger as much as possible"*⁷⁵.

Hence, some children are informed that they are largely responsible for protecting themselves from a trafficker but should take their parents' advice into account when making decisions and developing protection strategies. This advice ranges from where to go, who to spend time with and what to do in the case of emergency.

A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that after telling his father about a boy who was forced into a car with tinted windows, his father instructed him not to enter the car of someone he does not know. Another child's father gave her a mobile phone and told her to inform him immediately if she is threatened. In Albania, a father of a girl in a migrant community warned her about accepting drinks in glasses as they may contain drugs. Other children have been warned about walking around in the evening. Parents cautioned children not to accept money or gifts from strangers.

For instance, a girl in Albania stated that after accepting a chocolate from a stranger in a car she was chastised by her mother: *"Well, she reminded me how often she had told me not to speak with the unknown people, not to walk alone on the way home and how often she had also reminded me that there are many people in the street who want to kidnap little children. When this happened I was in the second grade, so I promised my mom not to repeat it again. On her part, my mom was also afraid that that a man would show up again in that road and will pick me up. For a week, my mom or my brother accompanied me to the school"*⁷⁶.

Generally, parents focused on the "stranger danger" and the notion that talking to strangers can increase the likelihood that a child will be trafficked.

⁷²Montenegro -,focus group interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

⁷³Montenegro - focus group interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

⁷⁴Bulgaria - focus group interview, 14-17 years old boys & girls, school children

⁷⁵ Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁷⁶Albania - focus group interview, 10 years old girl, internal migrant

However, some children believed that their parents' advice was misguided. Some children explained that their parents are concerned about trafficking but do not explain why they are worried about this issue. Instead, they simply impose rules and restrictions on their movement. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"You know parents think only about the bad side, they say something could happen or you can not go out because you can get raped in the night by someone but they don't talk about the problem itself, about the consequences and the parents should talk about all that, not just tell the children don't go out and that is it"*⁷⁷.

A girl in Montenegro complained that her mother forbids her from leaving home unaccompanied as this may increase the risk of trafficking but as this girl states, *"you can't just stay home all the time"*⁷⁸. So this advice is redundant or useless at a practical level and is a source of frustration and unhappiness for many children. Some parents translate this concern into restrictions not only on children's movement, but on their friendships. A girl in Albania complained that her parents are overly concerned about trafficking and try to instill a sense of fear in her constantly. They insist on accompanying her to school and to social events because they feel she is not old enough to care for herself. However, this girl complained that there may not be a reason to be afraid, and in a sense their concerns and associated restrictions on her movement are not justified: *"My parents are afraid to leave me alone here, they say that they are not yet familiar with the people and that I have to be very careful ... Well, not to talk to the unknown people even if they speak to you. Not to walk alone because I may be kidnapped and it is not possible for my parents to learn about it. If someone bothers me I should let them know because they are older and can solve such problems better than me because I am young. My dad accompanies me to school and I come back with a friend of mine who lives here. Maybe there is no reason to be afraid but sometimes even a word is enough to scare you"*⁷⁹.

Relatives also provide such advice but it is also interpreted by many children as yet another example of how they are not trusted but constantly criticized for the decisions that they make. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated: *"Mother, grandmother and my uncle irritate me most. It's always difficult for me to spend time with them or talk. I know they love me. They constantly criticize me, saying that I don't see the dangers that threaten me, that everyone is bad and dishonest. I am always tense around them... When we sit together we always talk as if something terrible is about to happen, we never laugh and they keep telling us to be quiet and forbid us things. I don't understand why it has to be so all the time"*⁸⁰.

In other words, children complain that caregivers focus too much attention on the risk of trafficking, and in their attempts to instill fear in them they apply unwanted and unjustified rules and restrictions on their decision-making, movement and activities.

While some children believed that parents and caregivers are best positioned to provide this advice to children, others felt that children themselves and the peer group, in particular, should be used when passing on messages. For instance, a child in Kosovo stated: *"It depends how serious are the children. For example if children have information they should discuss it amongst them selves but the information should come from the parents initially so that the children can then discuss it amongst them selves, because who knows how seriously the children take information given by other children"*⁸¹.

⁷⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁷⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

⁷⁹Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, internal migrant

⁸⁰Montenegro -, focus group interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

⁸¹Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

Information about trafficking has also come from other sources, such as the media, teachers and police officers. A child in Kosovo stated: *“First of all I heard about it from my father and mother but also I have seen many TV shows about it. Also, a very long time ago, when I was going to the kindergarten, some police officers came there and told us the dangers from strangers, they also taught us how to cross the street safely and things like that”*⁸².

Some children at school are shown documentary videos about trafficking or have guest speakers who lecture them about the risks. In Kosovo, children stated that information about trafficking was incorporated into lessons on drug-abuse, alcoholism and so forth. As sex is raised in these discussions, some parents are unhappy with these lessons. A child stated: *“In our school, for example, we have this subject and we truly like it a lot. Personally I like it a lot and especially the part that talks about trafficking. I felt very bad when I learned what happens to people who get trafficked, they are lied to and then used. But in our school there were cases when the parent told my teacher “Who the hell are you to teach my child about sex”*”⁸³.

Even though they had received information at school, many children stated that they did not pay attention because *“I’ve never thought that it might happen to me”*⁸⁴. They complained that children were not informed about why certain areas or certain children are more at risk of being trafficked: *“We have heard something about that in school but only superficially. I understood those were children who had nowhere to go, risky in all areas and that it was risky for us high school girls. I didn’t entirely understand why, but, like, they may offer you something and then take it all away and mistreat you. I think that’s terrible. But I didn’t pay proper attention, I don’t know, I can’t believe that can happen to someone I know”*⁸⁵. In general, these risks are perceived to be too far removed from their own experiences and those of their friends.

Some children complained that this information did not provide practical advice on how to deal with these threats. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“Well, there are activities being done in schools, and there is talk on TV. So we know all about it but we don’t know how to protect ourselves. That’s one thing, and I don’t think that either our instructors or our teachers know much about that. And they should”*⁸⁶.

On the other hand, some children said it increased their awareness of some of the mechanisms by which children are trafficked. A child in Montenegro stated: *“At school, they’ve told us about it. That’s terrible, that’s why I feel a little afraid of going abroad just like that, without asking anyone, no matter if I could have a good time there”*⁸⁷.

Some children said that it taught them never to trust strangers even if they provide many complements. After a discussion at school, *“we commented how nobody should be trusted, especially if they indulge you”*⁸⁸. Many of the children had watched the film *“Lilja 4-Ever”*⁸⁹ in schools and took

⁸²Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, school child

⁸³Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁸⁴Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁸⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁸Montenegro- individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁹ Movie by the Swedish director Lukas Moodysson (2002), featuring a story of a girl trafficked to Sweden from former Soviet Union. The movie has been extensively used as an awareness raising tool in the framework of anti-trafficking information campaigns implemented in Southeast Europe.

away the message that it was important for girls in particular to be careful of falling in love with boys who may then hurt and traffic them. A few children highlighted the manner in which the risks of child trafficking are broadcast on television but also that there have been a few news broadcasts that suggest that children manage to escape and survive the experience of being trafficked.

This section stands merely as an introduction to a number of issues that will be discussed in greater depth over the course of this report. A few key issues are noteworthy.

First, children's perceptions of trafficking mechanisms and how processes are mediated or influenced by the messages that they receive from their parents, relatives, peers and teachers, who in turn are influenced by various macro socio-economic, cultural and political processes. For instance, the manner in which children interpret the message that they can be deceived through promises of presents, employment, migration and marriage will all be discussed in the next section.

Second, children's own perceptions of risk and rebound factors that are influenced by these messages. For instance, the overarching fear of strangers comes out clearly in their accounts.

Third, the strategies that they develop in relation to these fears are also influenced by the advice provided by these actors. Children often navigate social spaces with these messages in mind.

Fourth, are the concerns that the children raised about their parents' advice reflects their general complaint that they are not able to express their real concerns and needs because they are not listened to by adults in a range of different contexts. Advice, rules and restrictions are imposed in a top-down manner and children are not informed as to why they are necessary. Children are not asked whether they are realistic, feasible and reasonable. Children do not simply follow the advice or wishes of a parent but actively interpret them in their own way. Often their own sense of justice and injustice affect whether they will follow this advice.

Fifth is the role of the peer group which cannot be ignored when attempting to understand what trafficking means to children.

Sixth, children often receive mixed messages from a range of actors and this affects their ability to understand trafficking and/or to protect themselves.

Seventh, while alerting children to the risks of trafficking, these messages and associated restrictions often have the unintended consequence of placing them in situations that might enhance those risks. The overarching focus on risks and instilling fear in children has undermined attempts to understand their resiliency and the manner in which they are "opportunistic" and make on-the-spot decisions and/or plan, act with forethought and develop strategies to escape and survive situations that they perceive to be adverse.

Lastly, children can be decision-makers but they act on the basis of their feelings and desires, despite the existence of alternative options or evidence that suggests that they should do otherwise.

Being tricked and cheated

“They cheat them with words and things”⁹⁰

According to the children in this study, one of the means by which they are trafficked is through deception. This is described as “being cheated”, “being tricked” and “being told stories”. This information was gathered from a number of sources as was argued above. At an individual level, it is believed that certain children are more vulnerable because they are “curious” or “gullible”. This is in turn related to factors such as their gender, age, experience, educational level.

At an interpersonal level, reference is made to trusting strangers or having no-one to provide support to them or inform them about the risks. At the macro-level the children refer to the manner in which childhood and gender is constructed, poverty and a “culture of violence”. Each of these issues will be unpacked in turn but at the essence of children’s argument is that although they may be deceived or cheated with “words and things”, many children make a decision when faced with the options offered by a trafficker.

As a child in Kosovo states, *“Perhaps in the beginning the child can accept the promises made to him, but in the end it will turn out that the promises are not what they were supposed to be... Well, he does make a decision but it is a decision which he doesn’t know what he is getting into”⁹¹*. In order to understand why some children accept these promises or “fall for somebody’s stories”, one child states that *“we need to know what children want, because the one’s buying them must be using that line”⁹²*.

In order to reach this understanding, it is necessary to highlight ten broad mechanisms by which it is believed that children are “cheated”. It is said that traffickers:

- Ask children to provide information (e.g. directions)
- Offer them the opportunity to do or see more interesting things
- Give them material goods
- Promise them employment
- Offer them the chance to leave their current situation and travel abroad
- Offer assistance in finding a boyfriend or husband
- Offer them an opportunity to attend or to leave school
- Compliment or pretend to care for them
- Claim to know a relative or friend

In other words the respondents believe that traffickers offer particular children, who they believe to be more gullible and naive, what they want. In their accounts, these “wants” or needs include the desire for money, employment, escape, travel, adventure, attention, compliments, support and particular relationships or attachments. Each of these desires is highly individual and contextual, in that it is related to the child’s particular characteristics, interpersonal relationships and social contexts within which they make decisions.

The likelihood that a particular child will decide to go with a person who may turn out to be a trafficker depends upon factors at each of these individual, interpersonal and macro-levels and

⁹⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁹¹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁹²Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutional child

the complex manner in which they interact. As a child living in an institution in Romania stated, *“Anyone can fool them around and tell them things will be all right. There is nobody to warn them not to believe. And if they are poor they immediately believe it. We are poor too but we don’t do that. In here we have never heard of something like this”*⁹³. So in this case, it is important to ask why children, who may share the same dire economic conditions, are more likely to be deceived by a trafficker? A number of mediating factors are at play which ensures that some children are more resilient in this context. This chapter will highlight these complexities by using the mechanisms that children identify as a departure point for deeper analysis into the children’s “lived realities” and the strategies they develop in relation to adversity.

Being asked for information

A number of children state that traffickers ask children for information (e.g. directions) and/or ask children to show them the way and in the process, children are trafficked. As a girl in Kosovo stated, *“They take females as if they want to ask them something and it turns out that they put them in cars and then I don’t know how they do the crossing of border thing but I have heard that they take them to Albania or to other countries from Albania to Italy and places like that to sell children or to sell their body organs or something like that”*⁹⁴.

Another child stated that his girlfriend was approached for information: *“It happened to my girlfriend. They came and waved to them and at the next stop one of them got on the bus but there were quite a few of them in the car. One of them got in and asked her: “What bus is this?” She got scared. Some grandmother was sitting next to her and she said something like... “Get out!” They started to shout at him, so he got off and got in the car again, while my girlfriend... She got off and started to run but there was a building near there, and she, seeing them turn into her street, hid into that building.”*⁹⁵. In this case, the fear of being trafficked led to an on-the-spot decision to run away and hide.

A Serbian child stated that he was asked to show the way to someone: *“Like, he said to me, “Show me”. I told him and explained it to him, and he said, like, “Come with me. Come with me”. I went to my mum and told her and she came out to say you know, things like, “He can’t go out. He is still too young, you know”. He didn’t let go of me, when he... He got scared. He would’ve taken me away 100% and he would never bring me back. And I explained to him, I mean it’s simple, but he kept telling me to come with him...”*⁹⁶. His strategy was to ask for assistance from his mother as a means of overcoming the potential threat of being trafficked.

In order to understand why some children are more likely to believe the trafficker’s intentions to be sincere, it is insightful to consider the opinion of a child in Kosovo. She explained that this act of asking for children’s opinion makes children feel happier and inadvertently places them at risk: *“You know how kids are, they are happy that someone is approaching them and is giving them a chance to be seen in a society, but they don’t know that the wrong man could approach them too”*⁹⁷. This desire to be heard or listened to is echoed frequently in the children’s accounts of their lives. Hence, it is argued that because children’s opinion tends to be ignored by parents, elder siblings

⁹³Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl,

⁹⁴Kosovo - focus group interview, 14-16 years old girls, school children.

⁹⁵Serbia - focus group interview, 18 years old boy, street child

⁹⁶Serbia - focus group interviews, street and shelter children of age 9- 17

⁹⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

etc., they appreciate the fact that someone is asking for their advice and as a result are easily deceived by individuals who may pretend to be listening to them or interested in what they say.

According to the respondents, traffickers target children for a particular purpose and children whom they perceive to be particularly vulnerable. They relate this vulnerability to physical strength and to gullibility. In terms of the former, it is suggested that younger children are smaller and weaker and therefore cannot defend themselves from traffickers who coerce them. In terms of the latter, it is said that traffickers purposefully target gullible children because it is easy to trick them into consenting to go with them. As a boy in Kosovo stated, *“They traffic them by seeing that they are just kids walking up and down the streets and then they follow them and cheat on them somehow”*.⁹⁸ He stated that traffickers target children generally but other children identify particular characteristics that make some children more “gullible” than others.

It is believed by many children that age is an important reason why some children are “tricked” or “cheated”: *“Well, it could be that it is dangerous even in the houses for some kids if they are alone at home. I think that it is a bit more dangerous for girls and smaller children because the smaller children are easier to be cheated on and get scared easier and more”*⁹⁹.

This was echoed by boys living and working on the streets as is evident in these comments: *“The younger the child is it is easier to snatch him or her, because they are cheated easier”*¹⁰⁰. *“Children who are 9 or 10 are easily cheated then those who are 16 or 17”*¹⁰¹. Some children believed that this was related to biological or developmental differences, and the belief that children who are younger do not have the cognitive abilities to make accurate judgments and correct decisions.

On the other hand, this naivety was also related to their depth of experience and their limited access to information. As an adolescent boy in a Montenegrin institution stated when describing his younger peers, *“Well yeah, they are more gullible and unable to defend themselves very well, and they also aren’t as able as me. They are inexperienced so to speak, that’s what the instructors keep telling us: “You’re not experienced enough yet””*¹⁰². So lack of experience affects young children’s ability to express themselves, voice their concerns and defend themselves.

It is also believed that older children know more because they have had more experience than youngsters. The complex manner in which biology, experience and access to information interacts is evident in this statement by a girl from Kosovo: *“The 20 year old girls are more mature for example and know how to think differently about themselves, while this girlfriend of mine, who isn’t even 14, yet can be easily manipulated by others because she is not mature yet... She is not any different from us, it’s just that ...I don’t know, she’s just naive and trusts people easy”*.

When asked to explain, she suggested that this relates to parenting practices and levels of intergenerational communication: *“For example if a child is 6, then the parent doesn’t talk to him much about how to act in the streets and what the child is supposed to do where to go and where not to go, then this has a lot to do with that”*¹⁰³. In other words, older children “know more” and because

⁹⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁹⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 14 years old boy; school child

¹⁰⁰Kosovo- individual interview, 15 years old boy; street child

¹⁰¹Kosovo - focus group interview, 7 years old boy, working child

¹⁰²Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

¹⁰³Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

they are young, certain children do not have information about trafficking risks, and this may enhance their gullibility.

It is evident that the issue of age, naivety and decision-making is very complex when children describe life experiences that do not relate specifically to trafficking. It will be argued that a composite range of factors, that do not necessarily pertain to age-based notions of naivety, are likely to increase the risk of trafficking for children.

Age, naivety and decision-making

In a range of responses and settings that were not related to trafficking specifically, it was evident that children perceive younger children to be more naive. Many of these accounts of naivety were described in relative terms, in that older children constantly compared their own knowledge in relation to younger children's gullibility.

An adolescent girl living on the streets of Serbia stated that because she is older than 16, she knows what is good for her and what exactly she wants. Sixteen seemingly defines the age at which one develops the ability to make decisions and has been highlighted by children in all 7 research countries/entities because *"They are cleverer after 16"*¹⁰⁴ and *"the younger a person is, the less he thinks"*¹⁰⁵.

A child in Kosovo suggested that teenagers are able to make better decisions *"because they are a bit older and can use their sense more"*¹⁰⁶. Another girl stated: *"I am grown up now and I can think for myself, and I know what is right and what is wrong. I am not one of those girls that can be cheated on"*¹⁰⁷. So it is held that older children are more capable of making decisions in their everyday lives and this will prevent them from being "tricked".

Children's ability to make decisions is related to how much say they have in their daily lives. Children complained that they are not listened to and do not have much control over household decisions, as will be highlighted with reference to migration. Age seemed to be significant, as older children (teenagers specifically) stated that they have more say and younger children complained that their word does not count for much.

This is related to social expectations and parental perceptions of their decision-making abilities. For instance, a child in Kosovo stated: *"My parents tell me that I can't give them any advice because I am not ready to make decisions on my own yet"*¹⁰⁸. In contrast it is said that teenagers *"Are the ones who are asked what can be done, because they are more mature and know better"*¹⁰⁹.

It is also said that the ability to make decisions, affects the power that children can exercise over other children, because *"older ones know much more than the young ones, the young ones must obey the older children. But not all of them, older children can make mistakes, too..."*¹¹⁰. So this perception

¹⁰⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutional child

¹⁰⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, school child

¹⁰⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, school child

¹⁰⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

¹⁰⁸Kosovo - focus group interview, 15-17 years old boys and girls, school children

¹⁰⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

¹¹⁰Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

of age-based knowledge supports various power hierarchies. As will be revealed in a later chapter, peers often hurt or exploit each other, and may even become accomplices in trafficking scenarios. Their involvement cannot be seen apart from these power hierarchies legitimized by the perception that certain children, by virtue of their age, cognitive and decision-making abilities should obey other, older, children.

On the other hand, this decision-making ability is said to be affected by a number of factors. It is also evident that experience is perceived as very significant in terms of being able to make decisions. For some children, this experience and the skills and knowledge that one acquires from it, is more important than age. As a child in Romania stated, *“When you live through dangerous experiences, dangerous for you and other people at your age, you grow up, you mature”*¹¹¹. In this sense, maturity (and the ability to make decisions) is not tied to age but to the experiences that one has been through and/or survived. Many children living in institutions and/or on the streets believe that they are better able and have greater capabilities in relation to decision-making than a child living at home by virtue of the experiences that they have had to endure and overcome.

“Living at home” emerged as significant in numerous descriptions of decision-making. For one thing, many children living at home complained that they have little freedom in terms of decision-making, whereas children living on the streets emphasized that they are able to make important decisions in their lives.

A child living in a shelter in Kosovo stated: *“I left home when I was 15... Before I was 15 my dad decided about anything and everything but ever since I left home I make my own decisions because I know what is best for me and what is not”*¹¹². Another child living on the streets of Serbia emphasized that he, like other children living on the streets, are now free to make their own decisions without fearing the input of his parents: *“They are not afraid of their mother or father because they are on their own; they can do whatever they like”*¹¹³. In other words, decision-making and freedom to make decisions - is contingent upon social experience and how this is influenced by interpersonal relationships.

Hence, the belief that children of a certain age are more at-risk of trafficking needs to be qualified. Although this belief is shared by many children in relation to the “gullibility” and “naivety” of young children who are easily “tricked”, their accounts reveal that this is not related to age per se, but to a complex range of factors including access to information and experience.

Experience is itself specific for the individual child, their interpersonal relationships with parents, caregivers, peers etc., and the social context within which they grow up. It is also highly situational in that children are faced with different challenges, which they deal with in different ways. Focusing simply on age and the so-called “vulnerabilities” associated with being young, undermines any understanding of how children have matured, survived and exhibited high levels of resilience in many communities.

¹¹¹Romania - individual interview, 16 years old girl

¹¹²Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

¹¹³Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

Age and freedom

Children complained that their freedom to make decisions is often curbed by various rules and restrictions set by their parents. These restrictions are often justified on the basis of protection. As mentioned in a previous section, these restrictions are often enforced to protect children from violence, exploitation and trafficking. Although they may be an expression of love, care and support, this form of support is often misguided. As a girl in Albania stated, *"I think that it is hard to be a child in Albania. Parents love their children very much, but it seems to me that they put a lot of restrictions and prevent them from doing what the children want to do. They have very strong relations with the children so they do not let them free even to make mistakes. They think that by providing affection, sometimes even via violence, they offer the best for us; they fail to understand that we want to make mistakes in order to learn through them. I think that it is so hard for the Albanian parents to accept such a thing"*¹¹⁴.

So strong interpersonal relationships between parents and children may be a resiliency factor for some children in some situations but these parents may attempt to overprotect children by sheltering them from risks. In this way a resilience factor may turn out to be risky for children who feel that they are not equipped to handle threats given that they have little experience in making decisions on their own and protecting themselves.

It is held that parents do not explain why they have enforced these restrictions. As they do not understand what the purpose is, many children suggested that they become more determined to break them. For instance a girl in Albania complained: *"There is no advanced mentality to protect the child, to show them what is good and what is bad. Our parents should be aware that the more the restrictions the more we want to do what we are not allowed to. The parents often tell the children "do not smoke" that is all they say but they never tell children what is bad if they smoke. They do not explain that smoking is dangerous to their health and this is why they should not smoke. They simply say, do not smoke because I tell you not to smoke and after that the children see the father in particular smoking and says to himself "you smoke, why shouldn't I?"*"¹¹⁵

This quote points to children's sense of injustice when parents apply double standards in relation to rules and restrictions. As children do not know why certain behaviour is restricted to them, they may feel that it is unfair that adults have more freedom, choice and power. In fact this example of smoking was highlighted by a girl in Bulgaria, who stated that she deliberately smoked to show her parents that she can make decisions: *"Well, frankly speaking I did it to spite my parents. "You mustn't smoke, you mustn't drink, you mustn't stay out late at night, we want to know the boys you go out with, etc.!" and I did it to spite them. There had to be something which I could decide by myself whether to do it or not. Just like that to spite them"*¹¹⁶.

This issue of deliberate rebellion against rules and restrictions was not simply related to age and the so-called stress and tension that is said to characterize adolescence in particular, as was described in the literature review. It is related to the manner in which parents treat and interact with their children which is in turn influenced by the way that childhood is socially constructed. For instance, a child working on the streets of Bulgaria suggested that children only "rebel" when parents

¹¹⁴Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

¹¹⁵Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

¹¹⁶Bulgaria - focus group interview, 14-17 years old boys and girls, school children

impose their opinions and restrictions on them without providing support: *“When they tell them for example they want to go out their parents shout at them and tell them what they can do and what not. In this way children become somehow envious and bad. They become bad and when you tell them, for example to do something they just don’t want to do it. They become stubborn and whimsical. The parents are guilty for this. The more they shout at their children, the more stubborn they become. Something like that”*¹¹⁷.

So in terms of the rules and restrictions that parents set to protect their children, many children may rebel and purposefully break these rules because they perceive themselves to be unjustified. In breaking these rules, they may face a range of unintended consequences that place them at risk of violence, exploitation and trafficking, as will be revealed in a later section on gender and risk.

Freedom is also mediated by gender, in that boys tend to have more freedom than girls regardless of their age. This issue will be discussed in greater depth in a later section but it is interesting to note that girls are often treated like younger children and are denied freedom and decision-making power. For instance a girl in Albania stated: *“Here people have a completely different concept about males compared to females. A male can have a lot of options. I see this in my house. Nothing is prohibited for my brothers. On the contrary, even when he does something improper, my mom says, no problem he is a boy but I cannot forgive you, you are a girl, so you should bow your head when walking in the street. The boy is free to go to school, to choose his job and his wife, while the girls, at least where I live, do not have such chances for the reasons I mentioned”*¹¹⁸.

According to the respondents, the central problem rests with the fact that parents do not understand children and the daily problems and pressures that they face. For instance, one girl’s mother attempted to protect her from so called *“bad people”* by restricting her freedom of movement and interaction with friends.

A girl in Bulgaria stated: *“Well, actually she [mom] doesn’t understand me and she doesn’t want to. She doesn’t make any efforts and this makes me angry. She thinks she is the only one who has problems but I have problems too”*¹¹⁹.

This is echoed by another girl in Kosovo, which stated that while her parents give her advice, it is often not relevant to the problems she faces: *“I would like to talk more to my mother, my parents but still I don’t talk to them because they don’t understand me at all, so I go about talking to people I have been talking to until now... Because they have been living in different times and can not understand the new times and the needs now”*¹²⁰.

This was even more salient if a parent is older. For example, a girl in Kosovo stated that she has a positive relationship with her mother and could freely share her concerns and worries but her father, who was much older, tells her that she knows nothing and she therefore does not confide in him.

For children who break the rules, some are less concerned about the risks associated with their behaviour or with the punishment that accompanies it. Corporal punishment was used by parents

¹¹⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

¹¹⁸Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

¹¹⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

¹²⁰Kosovo -, individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

and caregivers in all of the countries. In order to avoid this punishment some children would try to stay away from home as much as possible or they would develop highly secretive strategies to avoid it.

For instance, a child in Montenegro stated: *"I'm only afraid father would beat me, so I take care I don't do anything he doesn't allow us to do. And when I do such things, I take care no one knows about it"*¹²¹. A child who ran away with her friend in Romania, considered the possibility of returning home and weighed up her perceived options but decided against the latter because she would be severely punished: *"I wanted to come back home it was like something was pushing me from the back but then again something was telling me don't, don't go back. Don't go back you will get a smack"*¹²².

Despite the fact that many children weigh up their options, in many cases these strategies may enable children to cope or avoid immediate violence but may in the long run put them at risk. For example, a street working child living in a shelter in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that her friend was beaten by her father and in order to escape this violence she left home and now she works in a bar near the border with Serbia and she doesn't go to school any more¹²³.

Many of the children described a process of self-evaluation in which they thought about the actions that they have taken in the past. Some did not regret their decisions because the actions were wrong or risky but because of the punishment that accompanied it. A child in Montenegro stated that she believed that she had a right to make her own decisions, so broke her family's rules by staying out late. She was less concerned about this action than the punishment: *"Well, I did regret it because they found out and it was the family problem for days and I was beaten and grounded. I know it's not nice to do something your mother forbids you to do but I told myself at the time I had the right to something I liked to do. And there, I paid for it. I only regret it because of the punishment"*¹²⁴.

Another girl in the IDP camp lied about where she was going and who she was spending time with. Instead of being concerned about the dangers associated with this or the corporal punishment she received, she regretted the fact that it made her parents lose trust in her. Many children across the region complained that their parents have little faith or trust in them and this tends to be unwarranted and unrelated to the actions that they take. Children who may be facing risks such as violence and exploitation may not seek support from parents, who do not trust them, instead of receiving support they may be subject to punishment.

Children in institutions complained that they have little freedom in institutions and have to follow the rules and restrictions set by social workers. Some children were looking forward to turning 18 when they can leave the institution. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"not much time is left, one more year as long as I become 18 and then I will take off from here and then I never want to hear about this place ever again"*¹²⁵.

On the one hand, some children complained that when they turned 18 they are "set free" and are released from the institutions because it is believed that they are now capable of making decisions on their own lives. However, many children were concerned about this sudden transition and the

¹²¹Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

¹²²Romania - individual interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹²³ .Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, street child

¹²⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

¹²⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, shelter child

fact that they have not been adequately prepared for this so-called freedom and have not been assisted in their decision-making processes with regards to their next steps outside the institution. It is important to note that experiences in institutions differ for children across the region, as will be discussed in a later section. Some children in a shelter in Kosovo stated that they were prepared for independent living because they live in semi-independent apartments in which they are required to make their own decisions on the basis of information provided to them by shelter staff¹²⁶. Generally, however, children in institutions stated that they have little freedom and decision-making power, and not only have they considered running away to go to the streets (where they may face various safety and security threats), but they feel that they have not been adequately prepared to deal with potential trafficking-related threats.

Age and trust

When creating a life history book revolving around a hypothetical story of a child who had been trafficked a child in Montenegro described the following scenario:

“I’ve drawn a girl who came to this family, and they all thought she had run away from home. And they beat her up, that’s why these bruises are here. That on top everything else that happened to her... I don’t know, no one understood her or trusted her. That happens all the time that we children are not trusted. They think we make things up, and I think no one has such imagination to make that up and tell about those bad things that happened to them. When they talk about nice things, then OK, maybe. And even if she was lying, why wouldn’t someone listen to her and trust her?”¹²⁷

This quote epitomizes one of the main concerns expressed by children regardless of age namely, that they are not trusted, and this adversely affects their social supports in periods of adversity.

Many respondents stated that children who are most at risk of being trafficked are those who have few people to turn to – they have few social supports and have no-one to “lean on”. However, children stated that they often find it difficult to obtain support from their parents or other adults because they are not trusted by virtue of their age, and the way that childhood is constructed in many communities. For instance, a child in Montenegro complained: *“She’d first accuse me that it was all my fault, and only then, after she scolds me and accuses me, she’d see how to help me... If she just did what I asked her to do, without talking about it and without accusing me and criticizing me”¹²⁸*. A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina also stated that she is subject to corporal punishment if she tells her mother her problems and asks for her assistance: *“I’m afraid she will punish me, she’d beat me to death so I solve the problems alone”¹²⁹*.

In institutions, children also complained that they were not trusted and that they are actually falsely accused of committing various acts: *“Well no-one, believes the children. Like no-one believes us in the Home. Until a grown person says something and confirms our story, they don’t believe us”¹³⁰*.

Without their parents to stand up for them, they cannot defend themselves. Children argue that those most at risk of being trafficked are those with little support in terms of protection and

¹²⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

¹²⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

¹²⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

¹²⁹Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 11 years old girl, street child

¹³⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

advice and that children who have little protection and advice are those who are not trusted and believed.

Children living and working on the streets state that older children are less likely to be believed or trusted by the police. As a result, it is said that older children are more likely to be abused by the police. If a younger child complains about maltreatment, they will be more likely to be believed and their physical wounds will show more. The police will therefore get into trouble.

In general, a number of conclusions can be made about risk and resiliency in relation to childhood.

First, many children believed that young children in particular are more at risk of being trafficked because they are not only physically weak but more gullible and naive by virtue of their age and cognitive abilities. This belief is shared by parents and caregivers who impose certain rules and restrictions on their behaviour in order to “*protect them*”. This is supported by various socio-cultural norms related to childhood, which often overlap with those pertaining to gender.

Second, children's accounts suggest that naivety is related less to age and the particular developmental stage that a child is passing through and more to their access to information and their experience. In terms of the former, information enables them to make informed decisions and will help them develop clear protection strategies when confronted by a trafficker. In terms of the latter, experience is contingent upon a range of factors. In terms of interpersonal relationships, it is evident that children who are given more say, decision-making power and freedom are perceived to be more resilient because they have a chance to mature, have various experiences and make decisions that equip them to deal with adverse situations. It will also help them see through false offers which traffickers use to trick children.

Third, it was suggested that children who are trusted more by adults will be more likely to seek out support in terms of advice and protection. Children who are not listened to and are not trusted to make their own decisions will be less likely to call for assistance when being tricked or threatened by a trafficker. These arguments around trust, freedom and decision-making will resonate throughout this report.

Offering more interesting options

Many of the children stated that traffickers deceive children by offering them more interesting activities to do, more interesting places to go and more interesting people to meet. As one child stated, “*These people deceive children, they tell them: “Come on, I want to show you something”, and then they put them in their cars and take them to other places or perhaps even keep them here in Kosovo*”¹³¹.

Another child stated that traffickers think about who children would like to see and then offer them this opportunity: “*He will tell you come and I will take you to a singer you like, for example a singer you liked very much and then he says ok and you think he will take you there and that you can trust him and you go with him not knowing his true intentions*”¹³². In other words, they attribute trafficker's high power, knowledge and awareness of their specific wants which they then manipulate.

¹³¹Kosovo - focus group interview, 14-16 years old boys and girls, school children,

¹³²Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

In order to understand the appeal of undertaking interesting activities or meeting interesting people for children, it is necessary to review their descriptions of their daily lives. In a range of settings, these descriptions are littered by boredom and a sense of frustration at the lack of recreational facilities or activities for them to partake in. This is conveyed in a statement from an Albanian girl from a migrant community: *“Everything is very boring. Everyday I do the same things, I get bored. I do not know. I feel powerless to change and why should I change something that has been like this for years”*¹³³.

Children in institutions also complained that they have few activities. As one child in Montenegro stated, *“I don’t do anything here, I just idle time away. They should organize us. If they told me to do something I like, for example paint the Home, different color for each wall”*¹³⁴. Another child in this institution complained that all she does is *“clean, tidy up and such. It’s terribly boring”*¹³⁵.

Children from all research communities complained that the only things for them to do are to walk from one coffee bar to another or visit internet cafes. Existing recreational areas are described by children as inadequate. Some children in Northern Mitrovica complained that the only park for smaller children is too close to the police station, and this makes her feel uncomfortable¹³⁶. Children from a Roma community in Albania complained that their parks are littered by dirt and garbage¹³⁷. A few children from the IDP camp in Montenegro complained about the fact that they have few places to play, and that no-one – their parents, NGO staff, and officials in the camp are willing to help them to remedy this situation, despite their best efforts to enlist their support: *“I was sad and angry when a man from the camp built this bar on the playground where we play football... I asked me father how can he build a bar there, and he says let it go, it’s not your business. How is that not my business, when we need to play football there? ...I was sad that we didn’t matter and they weren’t ready to do anything for us and they would for him, and no one says a word about his bar, and they drive us off not to break the windows, as if we had no right to some place to play...”*¹³⁸

Yet again, this quote highlights the extent to which children are rarely consulted or listened to. They have little power to express their needs and as a result their concerns are disregarded.

Many of the children expressed a sense of deprivation around what they described as failing to have a “real childhood” associated with play. As one boy in Kosovo stated in response to a question about where he plays, *“It is quite hard to be a kid here because there are no proper conditions that a child needs... because we don’t have any football field or anything like that, where to go out or where to do things that children do”*¹³⁹.

So many children receive messages about what their childhood should be but this often fails to match the reality. The idea that childhood is associated with play does not hold true in many communities which do not have the economic and social resources to fulfill children’s need and desire for recreation and entertainment. The reality therefore does not offer them a stable, protected, sheltered period of play.

¹³³Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

¹³⁴Montenegro- individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹³⁵Montenegro- individual interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹³⁶Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, school child

¹³⁷Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl

¹³⁸Montenegro- focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

¹³⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, street child

The child respondents said that children with few recreational activities are in greater danger. This “danger” was associated with a range of threats. On the one hand, this danger is related to playing on the streets and the threat of being run over because “when the ball goes on the street a car can hit you”¹⁴⁰. The danger is also related to the pervasive threat of strangers and criminals. As one child in Bulgaria stated, “In the schoolyard that’s near us there are junkies and drunkards and that’s why we don’t go there”¹⁴¹.

It is said that these “junkies” and “drunkards” force them to consume substances, harass or physically hurt them. It was also said that it is dangerous for some children to have no recreational activities because boredom might encourage bullying. It is also held that children in institutions who are bored may decide to run away and on the streets may be placed in greater risk of violence, exploitation and trafficking. With reference to trafficking, it is said that the absence of recreational facilities and the pervasive sense of boredom, will make children more likely to be tempted by the offers of a trafficker: “Children may feel better if they are given some attention and some interesting things to do, instead of just hanging around on the streets, where they can be lured into all kinds of things”¹⁴². Hence, children suggest that the dearth of “interesting options” makes them more likely to accept offers of entertainment and recreation, which might turn out to be false.

The offer of material goods or employment

It is held by the children in this study that traffickers know what children want and for some children this includes gifts or material goods. As one Montenegrin child states, “At first, these people promise them all kinds of things, you’ll get this, you’ll get that. And so they lure them into it”¹⁴³.

It is held that these promises are normally false and by accepting them a range of unintended negative consequences may happen: “they may offer you something and then take it all away and mistreat you”¹⁴⁴. This negative consequence may arise because some people traffic children by withholding information from them: “Pimps or traffickers they don’t say anything about perils, they only talk about nice parts such as money, clothes or jewels”¹⁴⁵.

So children may decide to go with a trafficker because they do not have access to all the information needed to make an accurate judgment. Nevertheless, they make this decision because they want material goods. The respondents stated that traffickers manage to “trick” children by offering them employment. They specifically target poor children who want and need jobs to support themselves and/or their families. As one child in Kosovo stated, “First they see what does the child need or want and then they tell them for examples come with us and we will give you a job that pays well”¹⁴⁶.

It is said that children make a decision to believe or go with a trafficker on the basis of this promise of employment: “Well, in the beginning maybe the child could go on their own will but they go

¹⁴⁰Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old boy

¹⁴¹Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

¹⁴²Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹⁴³Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹⁴⁴Montenegro - individual child, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹⁴⁵Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl

¹⁴⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

*because they are deceived by the traffickers, for example they tell them they will give them jobs or something like that*¹⁴⁷.

One child in Bulgaria stated that traffickers make proposals to children which appeals to their desire for recreation and their need to work. For example: *“It is summer now; don’t you want to make some money to go to the seaside, on vacation? I do this and that and I can offer you work you can make good money and it is at the seaside you will be working and you will be at the seaside at the same time you will make some money”*¹⁴⁸.

The decision to believe these promises is made on the basis of a need or a want which traffickers exploit. It is said that *“There are children who don’t want to work, like those sent to beg because they don’t like it but they have to go to get money”*¹⁴⁹.

From their accounts, children believe the promises of traffickers to support themselves and/or their families depending on the adversities and particular pressures they are facing. In other words, the *“troubles”* and the needs are specific to the child and the social context, but the fact that traffickers manage to trick children suggests that traffickers are aware of children’s different wants and needs or that children share similar wants and needs, which traffickers manipulate.

So on the one hand children may accept a false offer of employment because they have individual reasons for earning money: *“Everyone wants to earn big money so someone can use that as a hook as well”*¹⁵⁰. This is enhanced when people are poor: *“If someone is poor and someone offers them a chance to earn big money, who would say no?”*¹⁵¹

In other cases, children accept a job because they would like to contribute to the household income: *“If a girl is from a poor family then she is deceived easier because they tell them I will find you a job abroad and then he or she doesn’t think much because of the poor living conditions and accepts”*¹⁵². Hence, individual decision-making depends upon interpersonal relationships, which are affected by the macro-economic context within which they are played out. Traffickers are aware of this and exploit their wants and needs to obtain their consent. In order to understand these individualized and interpersonal needs and wants, it is necessary to look at the respondents’ descriptions of work in their everyday lives. Some children work on the streets but live at home, while other children work and live on the streets.

Working children living at home

According to the respondents, there are different categories of children who work. As one child stated, *“Now, there are children who understand that and they want to work and help out and even if they don’t like that they keep quiet and work. There are children who don’t want to and don’t like to and are very unhappy about having to work and there are children who get beaten when they come back from the town without bringing anything home”*¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁷Kosovo - focus group interviews, 12-18 years old boys, school and street children

¹⁴⁸Bulgaria - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, school child

¹⁴⁹Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

¹⁵⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

¹⁵¹Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

¹⁵²Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

¹⁵³Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

So these categories of children relate to a complex combination of three factors: their willingness to work, their need to work and whether they like working. These needs, wants and likes must be seen in a social context associated with poverty and social dislocation.

The children have a clear sense of justice and injustice when it came to the work that they undertake when living at home. This sense of justice affected their willingness to work, the likelihood that they would accept an offer of employment or a chance to migrate abroad. It was felt that it was fair and just if:

- They made a decision to work
- They contributed to the survival of the household
- They help a parent who because of illness cannot work
- They help a parent who is unemployed or does not earn enough
- They are able to keep a portion of their earnings
- They work to further their independence

It was felt that work was unfair and unjust if:

- They had no say or choice over whether they wanted to work, and what types of work they could undertake
- They were physically coerced to work or beaten if they did not earn enough
- They had to work in terrible conditions but their parents did not
- Their parents did not or could not work
- Their parents used the money to purchase alcohol and other material items that were not used to help the family
- Their parents did not allow children to keep a portion of their earnings

Many children would like to work as they are able to earn some money for themselves and gain some degree of economic independence. Some children stated that they need to work to purchase personal items because *“children need some stuff that their parents cant’ buy”*¹⁵⁴. Another child in Albania stated that she would like to work to purchase personal items even though her parents will not let her because they think that she is too young to work: *“I have asked my parents but they have not allowed me because they think that I am still little, I will start working at the age of 13”*¹⁵⁵.

This was echoed by another child in the Albanian migrant community: *“Parents too do not support us properly to find a job. They always say, “You are little, you will work all your life. You better stay home”. I personally think that economic independence would be very good”*¹⁵⁶.

These children complained that their parents do not understand their needs and wants, and as a result forbid them from working. On the other hand, many children in this study work with their parents’ encouragement; the extent to which they choose to do differs.

It was said that many children do not have a choice over whether they would like to work in particularly difficult conditions. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“If they could, they wouldn’t work if they did not have to. Their father or some relative, if they don’t have a father, probably presses them to*

¹⁵⁴Kosovo - focus group interview, 17 years old boy, school child

¹⁵⁵Albania - focus group interview, 9 years old girl

¹⁵⁶Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

¹⁵⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

earn money and that's why they go and work...". When asked what this work is like, this child stated: *"Hard, I think. They have to be about the town all day or dig in the containers or beg about the town till the evening, they get tired till they come back home and bring the money they've earned. I see they have to do that even when it's cold and there's rain... If those children don't like to work and it's hard for them, and someone makes them go out and earn money each day, then these people can only make them unhappy"*¹⁵⁷.

In other words, conditions of work are often seen as hazardous and undesirable and a child may not like to work. However, it will be shown that their willingness to work is related to the direct and indirect pressure that many face. In terms of the former, physical force is often used to make them work; they are therefore willing to work and need to work to avoid violence, although they dislike it. In terms of the latter, indirect pressure might be the result of interpersonal responsibilities and the desire to please a parent, caregiver, sibling or peer; children are therefore willing to work and need to work to fulfill their duties and derive a sense of happiness. The nature of the work determines whether they like or dislike it, but fulfilling an interpersonal responsibility may override these likes or dislikes if they perceive the situation to be just and fair.

Some parents need children to work because they cannot earn enough money to support their families, but this becomes unfair when parents who do not work and/or use the money for their own needs: *"Many children have to work because their fathers make them. They either can't make enough money themselves and they need help, or they don't try very hard but stay at home and wait for the children to bring some money home. Which I think is terrible... I tell you, there are some fathers in this camp who are really bad people and don't do any work all day long and wait for someone to bring them money, and there are those who walk about the town or do manual work all day long to earn ten Euros. And that's a lot, if they could make that much every day... The ones who don't do anything or drink and wait for children or even their wife to earn them money and get it from begging from people, they must make their children unhappy, they must be unhappy. Sometimes they even get beaten when they come back from the town with no money or just a little bit"*¹⁵⁸.

Children were very critical of so-called *"lazy parents"*. A child who was begging on the streets of Serbia stated that his friends feel bad, *"Because their parents sit at home... while their children have to mooch so that they would have money to buy beer"*¹⁵⁹. It was said that in some cases, parents *"sit, eat, drink and wait for the children to bring the money whether it's hot or cold"*¹⁶⁰. *"Daddy drives Mercedes, a child begs"*¹⁶¹ and while the children work, *"their parents live well, they have big houses"*¹⁶². It was held that some parents pretend to be ill so that their children will work on their behalf: *"Sometimes she stays home and pretends her leg hurts or something like that. She pretends her leg hurts and her son is at the parking lot, it rains, he begs. He asks for half a mark, he takes care of the cars"*¹⁶³

It is said that some parents use physical violence against children who do not earn enough money: *"Sometimes people won't give them money so some children get beaten by the father saying "where's the money", how come he spent the whole day in the town and didn't bring a cent home or they don't believe them that they didn't spend the money on something to eat or drink. Some fathers don't beat their sons*

¹⁵⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁵⁹Serbia - individual interviews, 18 & 15 years old boys, street children

¹⁶⁰Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interviews, girls age 7 & 11, street children

¹⁶¹Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interview, 18 years old boy, street child

¹⁶²Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interviews, 12 & 13 years old boys

¹⁶³Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group, 10 years old boy

when they come back without any money but some shout and beat them because they want to buy drinks with the money, and when they have nothing to drink they act like mad people..."¹⁶⁴.

A girl in Kosovo complained that her father uses the income that she makes from chopping wood to purchase alcohol: *"And the money that with we would make, my father would take them and go drink them and eat them all up with his friends..."*¹⁶⁵

She was beaten regularly for not earning enough money. Another child in Kosovo stated that he has no choice but to work: *"He shouts at me if I don't work. I don't know what would happen if I wouldn't do that, maybe my father would beat me up, I don't know"*¹⁶⁶.

In response to this violence, some children develop various strategies to pacify a parent and guard against further violence. For instance, a child stated that she would pretend to beg to appease his father because she felt that staying at home and enduring the pressure to work, was a preferable option to running away, living on the streets or taking a husband: *"Sometimes I just approach a person and if father's not nearby, I don't even ask that person for anything. Later I tell father that person did not give me any money and I didn't even ask for it, I'm sick of it but then again, I know I have to beg because father would hit me and shout and because we have to eat. I know all that but still I wish I weren't doing it. When I come back home I want to walk around the camp with my friends but they often forbid me to... There, look at me, I can't do something else, and I hate begging. What else can I do? ...nothing. "You must earn your living", my father says. "Everyone get out on the street", and we have to go. What is the only other thing I can do? I can run away from home, but then I can either get lucky or get ruined. No one knows. I could run off with a boy who'd take me for his wife. And what if I choose a bad one? Then what would I do I can't go back home, so it's the streets. It's all very complicated!"*¹⁶⁷

In other words, some children act with forethought and they weigh up their options that they perceive to be available. So in the case of this child, living at home, and pretending to beg is better than running away and having to survive alone on the streets. This strategy is only feasible if her father does not find out that he is being lied to and does not use physical violence to enforce obedience. If this had to occur, running away might be a preferable option. Protection strategies may therefore only be short-term and situational; they therefore need to be flexible and adaptable, and allow for on-the-spot decision-making.

For some of the children, the fact that they could not keep a portion of their earnings was problematic and children develop various strategies to ensure that they can keep some of their earnings. As an Albanian girl stated, *"More often it is the parents who get even the money earned. Sometimes the children do not tell the parents how much he has earned. I tell the children "do not give the money to your dad but buy something to eat" but they are afraid and respond that they cannot do it."*¹⁶⁸ According to the children, these strategies depend on courage, with some children more able to develop and carry out strategies of resistance and rebellion against unjust practices.

¹⁶⁴Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁶⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, shelter child

¹⁶⁶Kosovo - focus group interview, 12 years old boy, school child

¹⁶⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

¹⁶⁸Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

Just and fair work

It is said that some children need to work to help their families. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“Many children have to work to help their families to survive”*¹⁶⁹. Another child explained that it would be unfair if he did not work and did not help his family: *“Nah, how can I spend them the way I want I have to help my father and my brother. It wouldn’t be fair if I only did what I wanted and just went for walks with me friends and played football. Me father doesn’t make me work, but I want to help.”*¹⁷⁰ So many children have a high sense of responsibility to support their families and assist their parents and siblings with income generation.

Household tasks are often divided so that each member contributes to the household income, although there is often direct and indirect pressure to assist. As a child in Montenegro said, *“My father and my older brother work, they walk about the town and search the containers and bins for copper and anything else they can find, then we sell that and make a living that way. I also search the containers; we don’t go together, I go one way and they go the other, but I also try to contribute as much as I can”*.¹⁷¹ This was described as a reciprocal and collaborative household strategy by some children who empathise with the financial difficulties faced by their parents. As a child who works in an IDP camp in Montenegro stated: *“Well, I think those children have to work, you have to live on something. It’s not enough that their father works, they could not live on so little money. Children know that and they go and work to help their family, and I think it’s a good and normal thing to work and help as much as any member of the family can... They should not be unhappy either, because they are helping their family to survive”*¹⁷².

For some families, children’s contributions are necessary for them to subsist and afford the most basic items: *“My father and I work every day. Father searches the containers and collects whatever he can find to sell later and people throw everything away. Sometimes he even finds bread and when we don’t have any money for food, we eat the bread from the container. I beg with my friends around the town and bring some money home and when I do, we buy bread and things at the shop, and we all eat... I’m fine and I like doing it. I’m used to doing it, always have been doing it.”*¹⁷³

Hence, it is evident from these two quotes that children’s likes, needs and wants are closely linked to their interpersonal relationships and the quality of their particular relationship with a parent.

This work was seen as legitimate if their parents also worked. As a girl stated, *“There are fathers who want to drink beer and they wait for their sons to bring them money. My father works, it’s not like I am the only one that works”*.¹⁷⁴

It was seen as justified if a parent could not earn enough money. So the extent and nature of children’s work is directly related to parental income. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“Well, when the parents don’t have any income then the child is forced to go and work, collect these cans, and if the parents would have money then the child wouldn’t need to go and work. That’s how it is if you don’t have any incomes”*¹⁷⁵.

¹⁶⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁷⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁷¹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁷²Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

¹⁷³Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁷⁴Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁷⁵Kosovo - focus group interview, 10-15 years old girls, street children

Their parents' employment practices are directly related to macro-economic conditions. In Kosovo, following the war of 1999, many industries were closed and salaries cut. A child recalls his engagement in work to these political and economic macro factors and the fact that his father was no longer working and state benefits have been dwindling stating: *"Hell no, I don't like it a bit but I haven't got anything else to do and not much choices, anyway. I have to help my family and have some money for my own expenses... No, there is nobody else besides me working. My father gets some 75 Euros if I am not mistaken from the company he worked before the war for 25 years but that much money is nothing [now]"*¹⁷⁶. So their decision to work is directly influenced by their parents' employment practices. *"I do and my mother, she is a cleaner in the hospital, and my dad gets jobs every now and then to build houses, otherwise he hasn't got a job... I wanted to go and work on my own, because before I used to sell chewing gum and now I sell peanuts. I work as I want to help my family"*¹⁷⁷.

Children's work and their own sense of happiness and self-esteem are also related to their parent's income. A child felt bad about deciding to play with his friends when he found out that his father had not succeeded in raising money that day. He felt that he had not fulfilled his household responsibilities: *"But again, I didn't go to the town because my friends were going to the Cijevna and I went with them. When I was sitting at home and father came from the town, I look at him and he's in a bad mood. I knew he hadn't found anything to get some money for that day. I was so angry at myself that day I didn't search the bins and couldn't tell father I'd earned anything. So I sat and stayed quiet. He doesn't say anything to me either and it was hard for me and I felt sorry. I wish now I had decided differently"*¹⁷⁸.

Fear of disappointing a parent is therefore an important factor in their decision-making. A child in Romania explained: *"With what else could we live otherwise? Because my mother is barely making a penny from time to time... my father the same..."*¹⁷⁹. A child stated that it was fair that he worked because her father had a good reason for not doing so. Given high levels of unemployment, he had few options other than to beg but *"he is ashamed to ask people for money"*¹⁸⁰, so he does it in his place. Other children consider their work to be fair because their parents are sick or disabled: *"I work to help my mother who is very ill and comes home late from work. But there are children who work because others make them to"*¹⁸¹.

A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina was proud of the fact that she begs and uses the income to assist her family. She compares this to the behaviour of her sister who chooses to do otherwise: *"If I don't bring it, they don't eat the whole day. Danijela, my sister, she spends all the money on candies. She brings 5 KM*¹⁸² *home and gives nothing to mum"*¹⁸³.

Some children are satisfied with giving their parents their income as they will then allocate them a certain portion to fulfill their needs. As a child in Serbia who stated that he cleans windscreens at traffic lights said, *"I give money only to my old man, so that he can give me some. Well, he leaves me, for instance, 200 or 300 Dinars, something like that. It is enough for me. I feel fine. He's the one who gives me things to wear, buys me sports shoes in Panèvo, and whenever I need anything, he buys it for me."*¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

¹⁷⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

¹⁷⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁷⁹Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl

¹⁸⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁸¹Romania - individual interview, 14 years old girl

¹⁸² Konvertibilna Marka – the currency used in Bosnia-Herzegovina (equivalent approximately to 0.5 Euros)

¹⁸³Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interview, 7 years old girl, street child

¹⁸⁴Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

The children appreciate the fact that their parents use their income to purchase food and other goods that meet their needs. Being flexible about whether they have to work when their subsistence needs have been met, was also highlighted as important. For instance, a child stated that when enough money is brought home he does not have to work everyday: *“And on the next day she [his mother] says, “We have everything, don’t go. You don’t have to suffer every day, you don’t have to work so much. You can go when you want to”*”¹⁸⁵.

They appreciate it when parents empathise and notice their hard and often hazardous, work. Other children prefer to retain a portion of their earnings up-front: *“To my dad I provide the money, man. I give one half to my old man, and I keep the other, and that’s it”*¹⁸⁶. In this way they exercise high levels of power and control over their income, and can use it to purchase personal items.

In addition, to gaining a portion of the money that they earned, many of the children were proud of the fact that they had helped their families and pleased their parents. A girl in Serbia stated that she gives her money to her father because *“he means to me more than anyone else”*¹⁸⁷.

Their willingness to work is therefore contingent on the quality of an interpersonal relationship. Another child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that she is happy to give her mother money because she observes her mother worries about financial issues. She is also appreciative of the fact that her mother did not abandon her when she was little: *“When I see mum worried, I feel bad as well. I used to be awake till 4 a.m., all night; I can hardly wait till morning... My mother doesn’t force me but she kindly tells me to earn so-so money. I go and get it because I know we need it, I know if I didn’t there would be no one to feed my mother. She fed and raised me. She could have left me, and I wouldn’t be alive”*¹⁸⁸. She explained that she has a responsibility to repay her mother for her care and in this sense their relationship is reciprocal: *“I would like to have 15 KM, to give my mum 10 and hide 5. When I get 50 KM I go home and give it to my mum. Then I don’t have to work for a couple of days and then I go again”*¹⁸⁹ In return her mother cares for her and cleans her clothing.

This idea of pleasing a parent and thereby fulfilling certain interpersonal responsibilities was echoed by a number of the children working on the streets. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“When father brings me a hamburger to the place where I sell popcorn and tells me his boss has given him a couple of Euros and when I also earn some money that day, then I’m super-happy”*¹⁹⁰.

Another child stated: *“But my father doesn’t shout at me if I bring too little and I like it when I earn more and make mother pleased”*¹⁹¹. When she brings home money from begging, one girl stated: *“Mother is pleased then and I like it when I come home and I can show her how much money I’ve brought with me”*¹⁹². Some of the girls who were working on the streets stated that they preferred undertaking these activities than working at home doing various household chores, as it gives them a chance to move around freely and meet their friends: *“I like it less when I have to stay home and help mother.”*¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

¹⁸⁶Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

¹⁸⁷Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

¹⁸⁸Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

¹⁸⁹ Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

¹⁹⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁹¹Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁹²Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

¹⁹³Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

Hence, it has been argued that children are under direct and indirect pressure to work in order to support their families, fulfill their interpersonal responsibilities, assist sick or unemployed parents or to purchase items for themselves or for their parents. It is suggested that these children who work on the streets, even when they are living at home, face a number of risks from being run-over by a car, getting sick or being kidnapped and trafficked. As one child who is working on the streets of Kosovo stated, *"A car could hit me, some one could steal me. Children shouldn't go out to the street and their parents should look after them. Because they can be taken to other countries and it is the parent's duty to look after the children so they don't have to go out and sell... Because there are thieves who would steal you and stab you... I wouldn't let them sell things, because it is better for the children not to go and sell, but stay home and go to school and do their homework, because children are small and they may be endangered so they should stay at home"*¹⁹⁴.

Another boy in this context stated: *"Well, if the father of the child tells the child you must work until you make 20 Euros, then he stays out until late and then the thieves see him and steal him"*¹⁹⁵. It was also said that these children are easily "tricked" by the promise of employment because they are under significant pressure to work to support their families. Simply being on the streets is said to place them in danger: *"if the parents look after their children and don't let them in the streets then they won't be able to steal his child... the parents shouldn't let their child out in the streets"*¹⁹⁶.

It is evident that the complexities surrounding the notion of risk and resiliency need to be considered. Having a positive interpersonal relationship with one's parent, characterised by high levels of communication, empathy and understanding may provide an important form of support for children who are facing adversity. They will be more likely to turn to this parent or caregiver for advice and protection. Children who are forbidden from working even though they would like to do so, might feel that their parents does not understand them or have much trust or faith in them, may be less likely to turn to their parents for support. They may even work secretly without informing their parents of this decision; this in itself might limit the support that they can receive if this work becomes exploitative. On the other hand, strong interpersonal bonds may make children more likely to accept a job offer if they would like to please or help a parent that they regard in a positive light. As mentioned, this job offer may turn out to be false and children's decision to go with a person who turns out to be a trafficker, will lead to a range of unintended, negative consequences.

Constructions of masculinity

While many children contribute to the household income, it is said that boys, in particular, face pressure to support their households. Being the only male in his household placed this Albanian boy under pressure to work: *"My father passed away and my elder brother has been in Greece for three years and we know nothing about him. We do not know whether he is dead or alive. I am the only male in the family and I have to work in order to maintain the family"*¹⁹⁷. This is mediated by age in that the eldest male often has to take responsibility for income-generation. A child in Kosovo said that he works because his father is unemployed: *"Because my dad is unemployed, I am the eldest son so I need to go out and do the working..."*¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 8 years old girl, street child

¹⁹⁵Kosovo - focus group interview, boy 7 years old, working child

¹⁹⁶Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, street child

¹⁹⁷Albania - focus group interview, 12 years old boy

¹⁹⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

Boys' concern about labour exploitation and the possibility of being "tricked" with a job offer reflects the daily pressures that they have to face and the particular manner in which masculinity is considered in many communities. Many boys stated that they felt greater levels of pressure to work and provide for their families if they live at home or to provide for their female peers if they live on the streets.

A boy in Albania stated that he has a responsibility to support his mother and siblings because he is the only male in the family. Some boys complained about this: *"To us, men it is always harder. We have to work harder things, search for job, no one wants you in the factory, we have to do hard things. Girls just stay at home and prepare the food"*¹⁹⁹.

This was echoed by another boy working on the streets of Serbia: *"I think that it's easier for girls... Well, boys. Boys have to work at the traffic lights and girls don't. They should sit at home"*²⁰⁰.

A boy in a Montenegrin institution complained that girls are only willing to date them if they have money and are able to buy them drinks and presents and as a result they have to work. This was echoed by another boy in Serbia who complained about girl's passivity and demands in dating practices. Hence, boys complained that they face greater levels of pressure to work and even in the course of working, it is more difficult for them to avoid difficult working conditions or exploitation.

It is also said by boys that they are asked to undertake more tiresome and straining work: *"Boys can for example lift heavy things and girls cannot because they are not strong enough"*²⁰¹. So for instance, it is said that boys collect metal from rubbish dumps in Kosovo because girls can easily be hurt. It is also held that boys sell various items in the evening, whereas girls can leave earlier because they are weaker and can be subject to various forms of violence.

A boy in Serbia stated that boys are more likely to be exploited: *"It's more difficult for men, in everything. When we work we can get beaten up, we don't get as much money"*²⁰². Therefore, boy's major concern about trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation reflects their own worries about having to work, being "tricked" by an employment offer and being exploited in the workplace.

It is said that girls are more likely to be trafficked into sexual exploitation but it is said that boys are used for begging and criminal activities. A child in Kosovo stated that they teach boys *"how to steal and stuff and then make them steal for them"*²⁰³. It is also believed that boys are forced to work: *"In most cases girls are prostitutes and boys work at construction sites"*²⁰⁴. Given that many boys are used for manual labour, it is said that boys who appear to be older or physically stronger are selected by traffickers.

Health evaluation

The respondents stated that some children are more at risk of being trafficked because they are more likely to accept an offer of employment. It is said that certain children are under pressure to

¹⁹⁹Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 13 years old boy

²⁰⁰Serbia - focus group interview, 15-18 years old boys, street children

²⁰¹Kosovo - individual interview, 14 years old boy, school child

²⁰²Serbia - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

²⁰³Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

²⁰⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, school child

accept these offers because they are healthy and/or are supporting a sick parent or relative. Children also stated that traffickers target particular children because of their health status.

Many children attached importance to being healthy and stated that being healthy enables them to work and thereby fulfill their interpersonal responsibilities. The children linked their health status to the social context. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated: *"You can't be healthy if you don't have good conditions for living and I think I'd be healthier then and feel better and would be able to help my brother, sisters, friends and everyone would be healthier. Isn't that so?"*²⁰⁵ In other words, macro factors related to the socio-economic conditions in the IDP camp have affected her health and in turn her ability to work and assist her family to overcome their economic struggles.

Children were very concerned about the health of their relatives and many worked to contribute to the family income, particularly if a relative was not able to do so. For instance, a child in Kosovo stated that she works together with her brother because her sister feels pain when she walks. Another girl in this case works because her father is disabled and can hardly walk. Another child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated he works because his parents are too old and sickly to work.

Once again this is related to macro- factors such as poverty and the failure of the state to provide assistance. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"Yes I go out every day and I work from 16:00 to 23:00. My dad is ill so I have to help him because we are quite poor, only the social assistance helps us, so the child must work and help the family"*²⁰⁶. Another child in Kosovo suggested that she is working to help his sick brother. *"I do not go out with my mother because she is at the hospital and because my brother is ill and I am working so that I can pay for his medicine"*²⁰⁷. So it is very important to be healthy to work and provide for a relative who is ill.

Children who are healthy but their siblings and parents are not, feel under great pressure to work. They see being healthy as a source of resilience because they can assist their families (and themselves) to generate income and thereby survive. However, it was also said that working can adversely affect one's health. For instance, a child in Romania stated that lifting heavy items will produce a hernia. Many children working on the streets of Serbia stated that those children who beg or clean windscreens at traffic lights are run over by motorists. Another child in Kosovo complained that he will get ill working at the carwash particularly as the weather deteriorates and gets colder. Children were also very concerned that being healthy may enable them to work but it might also make them more vulnerable to being trafficked for two central purposes such as forced labour and organ donation. So in this sense, this source of resilience may also be a trafficking risk.

Many of the children highlighted the role that health status plays in trafficking, with traffickers targeting specific children for different purposes. For instance, it was said repeatedly by children in all research communities that healthy children are trafficked in order to sell their organs. As a child in Montenegro stated, *"Someone may take children, kill them and take an organ and give it to someone else. I'm really frightened of that, especially if we're healthy"*²⁰⁸.

On the other hand, it was also said that being disabled is a risk factor because traffickers will use these children to beg for them given that their disability tends to elicit more public sympathy. In

²⁰⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁰⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 9 years old girl, street child

²⁰⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

²⁰⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child

fact, some children in Serbia even suggested that traffickers may choose a healthy child and then deliberately hurt and disable this child so that he/she may be used for begging purposes: *“Who knows what happens, they cut off your arm or something and they make you an invalid for life so you have to mooch all your life”*²⁰⁹. A child working on the streets of Serbia said that he had been approached for the same reason but responded by running away: *“It happened last night or the night before. He said, “Come with me to cut your arm or your leg, to send you to America to work for me.” I ran away”*²¹⁰.

This belief in the connection between disabilities, begging and trafficking derives from the horror stories that children have heard which are present in many trafficking messages. They are also related to the children’s own experiences on the streets where they have seen disabled people beg and earn large sums of money. A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina claimed to have seen a mentally handicapped child begging.

So the respondents argue that many children may decide to go with someone whom they believe will find them employment. They do not necessarily want to work, but need to do so to support themselves or their families. When making this decision they are not warned about the negative consequences of this choice, and in the process they are *“tricked”* or *“cheated”*. The fact that there are a range of negative, unintended consequences that include exploitation and bodily harm, does not remove the fact that they made a decision which was manipulated by a trafficker.

Negative consequences: exploitation

“Employers” were rarely described in a positive light by children. A child in Kosovo suggested that children can become friends with their bosses, who will then look after them. A child in Serbia stated that “employers” can protect children and that they can also cover up for them if they steal. This does however have the potential for greater risks, because “employers” receive a portion of whatever children steal, and they may introduce children to further criminal activities. Children did not clearly distinguish between these “employers” and exploiters and traffickers.

Most children described their “employers” in a negative light. Many emphasised that they were not fairly paid. For instance, a child in an institution in Montenegro complained that children do not earn enough if one compares it with the income generated by an “employer”: *“The thing with doughnuts, a guy once asked us if we wanted to sell them on the beach and he’d give us 2 Euros per day. Who knows how much money he makes when a single doughnut costs 50 cents”*²¹¹. A child in Romania stated that he is paid less because he is a child, regardless of how hard he works: *“Actually, I don’t really want to go to work on a daily basis, because they notice I am a child and they give me little money because they say that I do not work properly, even if I do and it is not convenient for me. I work as hard as the others and they pay me less. I cannot do it like this”*²¹².

In Kosovo a child complained that he has to work all day with small breaks but he never gets paid for the amount of work he puts in. Another child in Kosovo stated that “employers” do not care about how old children are and because they are not provided with contracts they are frequently

²⁰⁹Serbia - focus group interview, boys, street children

²¹⁰Serbia - focus group interview, 13 years old boy, street child

²¹¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²¹²Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy,

not paid: *"All the jobs run by the private people, they do not care how old you are and they do not give you a job contract and sometimes they give you the money and sometimes they do not"*²¹³.

A child in Bulgaria complained that he was not paid by an "employer" because he did not have any identity documents: *"There aren't good people here you can become acquainted with. Not long ago I went to work with another man, a stranger; he didn't want to give me the money, because I had to have documents, to have a firm or to work with a contract, because you need education for such a thing"*²¹⁴.

Some children try to negotiate the terms of their working arrangement but in some cases they enlist the support of a parent. A child who sells popcorn said that he is not unhappy about having to work but about his working conditions: *"I have to work for us to survive. What could I do differently? I don't know. I would like to have different days, if it was possible, but it isn't. I've talked to father about it and he told me it was difficult and promised he'd talk to this man he works for. All that is not easy"*²¹⁵. Some children would enlist their parents' support when trying to improve their working conditions. Yet again having a positive relationship with a parent may turn out to be a resiliency factor but children may be working and may be more likely to be tempted to accept a promising job offer if they would like to please or help the parent.

It is suggested that these negative conditions are far worse when one is being trafficked especially since trafficked victims find it difficult to leave or escape the situation and because they have few people who can support them or negotiate on their behalf. The children therefore clearly distinguish their own work practices from exploitation that a victim of trafficking may face. The decision to go with a person who offers employment may lead to a range of negative unintended consequences which the children did not expect or were not warned of or provided with information about. It was frequently said that these children will be subject to physical abuse.

They will be forced to undertake work that they did not expect or want. For instance, *"they think they are going to work there but they are forced into prostitution instead"*²¹⁶ or *"they were told they would work as dancers or something else and instead they were sent to clients"*²¹⁷. They will be exploited and will not receive the money that they expect or deserve: *"I mean they take you and make you earn money for them... you think they will give you a nice job, or you split your earnings fifty-fifty with them. And once you get there, they beat you hard and they give 100 Euro so you can dress and eat."*²¹⁸ Hence, children highlighted the exploitative manner in which trafficked victims are treated by their "employers". It is useful at this juncture to describe their own relationships with their "employers" to understand what conditions they regard to be exploitative.

The offer of travel abroad

According to the respondents, traffickers offer children an opportunity to travel abroad and on this basis, they may decide to go with them. It is said that the offer of going abroad makes them

²¹³Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

²¹⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

²¹⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

²¹⁶Romania -.individual interview, 17 years old boy

²¹⁷Romania -.individual interview, 15 years old boy

²¹⁸Romania -.individual interview, 16 years old girl,

happy: *“Sometimes they are glad they go abroad because they like it there and have fun”*²¹⁹. It is a desired outcome, which if seen in light of the dearth of recreation and entertainment for children in many communities, is seen as highly appealing. It is said that although they desire to go abroad, they are not aware that the decision to do so, many lead to a range of unintended and unwanted consequences: *“It is not because they are compelled but children think that this will make them happy, they will go abroad and they are blessed; besides they do not think that the uncle is there to cheat them. They go and cannot come back home”*²²⁰.

Apart from the opportunity to see and do more interesting things, the respondents stated that traffickers exploit the fact that there are few jobs within their communities and offer them the opportunity to find work abroad and build a “better life”. So they manipulate children’s desire to improve their situation. As a child in Romania stated, *“I cannot say that it is not their own wish, if it wasn’t for their own will, they would not go abroad. Because if you meet such a person in the street and he tells you come with me because I have work for you in a restaurant abroad, you have to think well, because after all he is a man. And if you meet a woman it’s the same. You have to think this situation thoroughly before you leave the country... Because they trust persons who promise them money, clothes and they believe they will live a better life.”*²²¹

The child respondents said that children often make this decision to go with a person, who ultimately becomes a trafficker because they would like to support their families and fulfill their interpersonal responsibilities back at home: *“She still has a family and that’s why she went so that she can help her mother and the children. They knew that she was going abroad but like her they knew that she would work as a waitress. But later she became a prostitute because the plan had been such from the very beginning, but they had lied her that she would be a waitress”*²²².

It is said that in addition to procuring children’s consent, traffickers convince parents to allow their children to go abroad to work: *“That one, because her mother is desperate to have money, she consented for her daughter to leave abroad with X, to Spain”*²²³ So children are not the only people who can be “tricked” by a trafficker; “naivety” and “gullibility” is not related to age, per se, as adults may be equally vulnerable. This risk is related more to poverty and need.

One of the reasons why it is believed that children (and their parents) may consent to going abroad with a stranger is that they promise to obtain travel documents such as passports and visas for them. One child in Bulgaria stated that if he was a trafficker he would say to a child: *“If you prepare the pictures and if you want to do it, and if he approves you, you wouldn’t have to worry about the money neither for the passport nor for the tickets. I will help you.”*²²⁴ By promising these items, many children stated that traffickers can “trick” and “cheat” both parents and children: *“In the case of I it is true that they knew what was about. But if you think you can go to your parents and tell them look mother and father, some guy has proposed me to go abroad because he has found work for me, in that case if the parent is really interested in the welfare of his child, he would not permit this thing and he should think what might happen to the child, especially if it is a girl...”*²²⁵. These promises are often

²¹⁹Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²²⁰Albania -, focus group interview, girl- 13 years old

²²¹Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

²²²Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

²²³Romania - individual interview, 16 years old girl

²²⁴Bulgaria - focus group interview, boy -16 years old, school child

²²⁵Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

not true, so instead of finding work, children find themselves in a situation of exploitation and violence where they are deprived of freedom of movement and subject to slavery-like conditions, which are difficult to escape from:

“So I am certain that here in Romania they are promised something that sounds very nice, they are promised a very good situation but maybe when you get there things aren't exactly so. It has never happened to me but this is what I think it happens. They make them beg, steal, and girls are indeed forced to produce money from prostitution... They might regret they came abroad because home was better anyway. Even if we were not having so many opportunities back home. It is tough; once you went abroad it is not like you left from here to a village and if you miss home you can always go back. There, if you left you left for good.”²²⁶

In order to understand why children and their parents may want to go abroad so much that traffickers are able to manipulate them, it is necessary to understand the importance attached to migration by many children, families and communities and why many children decide to migrate alone, with relatives or with strangers. The reasons that children provided across the region can be broadly categorised as desiring to:

- Travel, explore and see new places for recreational purposes
- Escape poverty
- Escape persecution and war
- Escape negative conditions in their homes of origin
- Find a better life
- Return to a former community or country

Travel, exploration and adventure

For some children the desire to travel was associated with seeing a new town or country. This was seen as “fun” and a means of finding “new friends. It is an adventure”²²⁷. Many of the children have never left their home towns. The fact that many children have not ventured out of their local communities cannot be seen apart from the restrictions placed by many parents on children's freedom of movement, which as was argued, is often restricted on the basis of protection.

Their movement is also restricted by the fact that many parents do not have the financial resources needed to organize a safe trip for their children. A young child in Albania described Greece as follows: “Because it is better there, there are toys, the air is clean, there are a lot of good things there”²²⁸. Greece, for this girl, may offer a place where she can play and thereby fulfill her expectations of what childhood should be.

Seeing foreign countries on television that are “much nicer”²²⁹ was a reason frequently provided by the children as to why they would like to travel abroad. For some children, this desire emerged from previous experiences in foreign countries. A boy in an institution stated: “I would love to go on trips or in a youth camp, to Felix, in other places, other cities. I went to Germany two years ago and I stayed there for a month. It was very beautiful there. I went there with people from the centre, a social worker and

²²⁶Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

²²⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

²²⁸Albania - focus group interview, 10 years old girl

²²⁹Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl

people from other placement centers. It was so great that I didn't want to come back to Romania. I would love to go there again"²³⁰.

In other cases, this desire emerged from contact with foreigners. A child in Romania stated that he would like to go to Morocco because he met many Moroccan tourists visiting Romania. Many of the children living in an institution in Montenegro stated that they would like to go to the United States of America because they had met a few American volunteers who taught them English: *"Though, there was a lady from America who did some workshops, she comes every year and we do all kinds of things, but I'd like more and I know there are some friends of mine who can't speak English and would like to learn... Well, we often have foreigners coming here and when we talk to them we see that everything's somehow nicer in their countries and better organized, although we have never seen any of it. Some volunteers from abroad also come here often, they teach us to sing songs in their language, a bit of the language too, but that's short. They tell us about their country and we just dream, without any real chance to see it"*²³¹.

A number of their relatives lived abroad (see below) and communicated the idea that it is nice to travel and explore, learning about people from different countries. As a child in Bulgaria stated, *"We are three people. Me, my mother and my father but my father is in Italy right now. Well, I would like to visit Italy because my father is there. He said that he has a friend who used to say: "See Naples and die." I don't know why but I would like to feel that. I would like to visit London, France, if I have the opportunity. I would like to travel to some countries and look around. I have wanted to live somewhere else. I have dreamed about being an American or someone else, but not to be here in Bulgaria. I have always wondered how they live there - if it is the same or different"*²³². Hence, their desires are mediated or influenced by their contact and level of communication with individuals around them, as well as their own personal experiences in foreign countries.

Escaping poverty

*"It would be better for them if they escaped because they get more money, they take better salaries"*²³³

The reasons why children would like to leave a country vary. In the children's accounts it was frequently associated with escaping something bad in favour of something better. As a child in Romania stated, *"Because they do not like the country they live in... Well, it depends what they want to go for, maybe here it is cold and they like it warm and they go to warm countries. Maybe they have problems here in the country and leave to another country... I would like to do brick-laying. But I think it is better in another country than here, it is earned better"*²³⁴. As his account suggests, this desire to escape is frequently associated with socio-economic factors such as unemployment and low income levels.

It is said that leaving is a choice but it is a decision that many children are forced to make. As a child in an institution in Romania states, *"They are forced to because of the life they have. If they have nothing here, what else should they do? They go where others tell them life is better... There is more*

²³⁰Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

²³¹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²³²Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

²³³Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

²³⁴Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy, street child

money, because people get paid more. They don't go there for nothing. If things were the same in here, people would not leave anymore"²³⁵.

For some children, unemployment is a factor behind why they decide to move to another town: "Maybe I will go to another town because in Macin you cannot find a job"²³⁶. Another child in Bulgaria stated that she would migrate to another town or to another city if she finds a well-paying job: "The town is nice but there are just not enough opportunities... Well the reason is that they can't find realization here. They don't like the jobs that are available here. That's why they are looking for other opportunities... Well, if I have a chance for a better professional realization and to have a better job... Well if I have a better payment I would definitely go. This is something important and it can attract me"²³⁷.

This migration was often described in terms of rural-urban movements within the same country. For other children it means traveling to another country to find work. For instance, children in Bosnia-Herzegovina mentioned migrating to Montenegro because incomes are higher. Albanian children mentioned moving to Greece or Italy.

A child stated that the decision to migrate cannot be seen apart from wider political developments and in particular the inclusion of Bulgaria into the European Union. She argues that migration is their only option: "You can see there is no way out here. The salaries are too low and there will be no work when we get into the European Union"²³⁸.

This was echoed by another child who expressed high knowledge of macro economic processes: "I don't have much time. It is supposed that we become part of the EU in 2007 and if I earn some money, after 2007 it won't have any value if we transfer our money into Euro. That's why I will try to leave as soon as possible to earn some money and then this money will have some value here"²³⁹.

A number of the children expressed the desire to migrate to Germany, Switzerland and other European countries because they "know that there is more money abroad and that is why they escape abroad"²⁴⁰. This view is supported by the media and the television programmes that children watch: "Maybe because they think that abroad is much better and they also see on TV that there is more money out there. Because nowadays you can say that young people are interested only in money. Everything that matters is money because it can give you a better life..."²⁴¹.

Fleeing war and persecution

Many of the children who were interviewed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro associated migration to another country with the desire to escape armed conflict or with the desire to return to their countries of origin. The national reports provide detailed information about the background to the conflicts that occurred in this region. This section provides insight into the manner in which it affected the desire of some children and their families to migrate.

²³⁵Romania - individual interview, 14 years old girl

²³⁶Romania - individual interview, 15 years old boy

²³⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

²³⁸Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

²³⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, school child,

²⁴⁰Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

²⁴¹Romania - individual interview, 13 years old girl

Some of the children were Serbian migrants to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and moved to Kosovo after the economic crisis that followed the war. Other children in Bosnia-Herzegovina had migrated with their families as refugees from Kosovo, often leaving relatives behind. In Kosovo, many of the children moved during or after the war to other cities to escape conflict and persecution. An Albanian-speaking child in Kosovo moved from northern to southern Mitrovica: *“We lived in Mitrovica before the war, and after the war over by the brick factory and now we live here by the bridge”*²⁴².

Another Albanian-speaking child stated that he moved with his family: *“I’ve lived in Prishtina for 7 years now, before that I used to live in Podujeve... Because my house was burned there and now I just go there to visit my uncle sometimes”*²⁴³.

A Serb-speaking child in Kosovo highlighted the experiences of refugees that his family often assisted: *“Refugees also suffer... they lost their houses and cannot go back to places they came from. Now they do not have job and they are poor. In our shop we give them food on loan but sometimes we don’t ask for money”*²⁴⁴.

Another Serb-speaking child complained about the on-going tensions in Kosovo, which he would like to leave: *“I would like to go somewhere where there is peace...”*²⁴⁵. In this context, Albanian children have expressed high expectations about an improvement of their lives, Serb children appear to be worried about political negotiations and Roma and Ashkali children have noticed an improvement in their social position but are still concerned about their economic status. In Serbia, some of the children living on the streets were IDPs from the Kosovo conflict.

In Montenegro, research was conducted in a camp for internally displaced persons from Kosovo. Most of the children had vivid stories of the violence that they witnessed and experienced and the journey to Montenegro: *“We fled on horses from Pec to here. My father was hit in the head with a gun and they broke his skull and we took him to hospital and the doctor put stitches on his head, he had five stitches and they’d beaten him all over, he was covered in blood. He was horrible at Pec... and, you know, these Albanians are angry at us now, because someone put fire to his house, perhaps, someone looted, stole, and now we can’t get work so easily there and earn the way we used to before the war. They won’t let us. You can easily get into a fight with them. Someone says whoever wants to work may work there in Kosovo as well but I don’t think that’s how it is”*²⁴⁶.

Bombing at the hands of the NATO forces emerged frequently in their descriptions:

“At that time the Albanians were taking those older than 16 to go fight in the war so I came here together with my mother and my older brother. We stayed 10 days and then went back home to Kosovo. We wanted to remain there in our home in Kosovo. We didn’t want to flee from home, we were like brothers with the Albanians, we still are, and they had also told us not to go anywhere but stay in Kosovo, and everything would calm down in a short while. Then NATO bombing began. That’s when I felt most afraid in my life. I wasn’t the only one afraid, the others were afraid too. We were in Kosovo during the bombing, for a month and a half, and the fear was enormous. Then we decided to leave Kosovo in some trucks and we came to Podgorica. Then they gave us some food, oil, milk... I didn’t feel any fear, I was not afraid any more like when we were in Kosovo. If the Albanians came now to kill us I wouldn’t be afraid and in Kosovo

²⁴²Kosovo - individual interview, 9 years old girl, street child

²⁴³Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

²⁴⁴Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

²⁴⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 9 years old boy, school child

²⁴⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

*I was so afraid. Podgorica was not like my place, my home; everything was different when you had your own house and land. Here you don't even have a house, when we arrived we lived in a house with no windows or doors"*²⁴⁷.

This was echoed by another child, who participated in a game that involved throwing a ball to people they trust or would turn to for help: *"I'd never throw the ball to the people who threw bombs in Kosovo. All that is happening to me, actually all of us who came from Kosovo: living here and not in my own house, that's all because of the people who bombed us. I consider them my biggest enemies, they disturbed my life and now everything is different because of them. I often think why they bombed us, what did we do to them, we could have lived well as we always used to. And they could have stayed home and looked after their own business. Before they came we did not need to move and we would surely never have come to Podgorica, if only they hadn't come. My mother says it had to be that way, and I say it didn't, it could have been different"*²⁴⁸.

Their parents were the key decision-makers in the evacuation process, as is evident in a child's description of a drawing: *"I've drawn here these people in front of our house in Kosovo. There was this crowd, our neighbour, my uncle, father, they kept coming in and out and there were a lot of people around. They were all worried and serious and frightened, my father and our neighbours. Father came into the house and said we had to move to a different place. I did not get all of it very well, but it remained in my memory as an occasion when important decisions are made. Then mother took things from the house and we all took things to carry and left home. In the other village we boarded a truck and rode on. I often remember that day, most of all the serious face that my father had and we all listened and didn't talk much. After that, everything is as you see it now; we live here in this awful camp"*²⁴⁹.

Some children complained that they were not consulted when this decision to migrate was made: *"Well, now I understand better how terrible and difficult those days were, and that day when we left home. At the time, I realized something was going on around me that had not happened before and people were looking at one another differently and talking differently. I memorized that, I wondered at that time, and now, when I think about all that, I feel sadder and angrier that we left home than I felt at the time when we left. I keep thinking how, maybe, we did not have to leave Kosovo... I've talked to my brother and father, but they say: "Shut up, that's not for you to talk about, you don't understand. We had to leave or we would have been killed". Father said later that we wouldn't be going back to Kosovo any more, but staying here. I told him he used to say we'd come back to our old house, and he told me he'd said that to calm me down. When I wanted to talk to mother she tells me I should be a good girl and do what I'm told and it's not for me to talk about things that are up to father to decide"*²⁵⁰.

Generally, given the poor conditions that they face in the IDP camp, most of the children expressed the desire to return to Kosovo, which they associate with better times before the war. The children constantly compared the socio-economic conditions of the camp with their memories of Kosovo: *"As you know, we came from Kosovo. We had to come to Podgorica and leave all we had there: our house, cattle, garden, and a way of life that we could not resume here. I am a refugee now, or rather, what they say is the correct term - a displaced person. We live here in this trash and this unbearable stench. It's a wonder that all of the children are not sick with various infections and poisoning."*²⁵¹

²⁴⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, boy- 15 years old, IDP camp

²⁴⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

²⁴⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

²⁵⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, girl- 15 years old, IDP camp

²⁵¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

This move had a significant effect not only on their socio-economic status, but on their educational attainment, friendship, social networks, and general sense of happiness and well-being: *“I divide my life into before and now. Before, while we were still in Kosovo, and now, since we have come here to Podgorica. We lived a completely different life there. We had a nicer life there and we were all felt OK and were sort of happier than here. My father went to work, I went to school, I had my friends and we had a nice time together. When the bombardment started, everyone felt afraid and we came here. Life is hard here, there is no work, we have no conditions for nice life, there is no water except the tap over there, and we haven’t had hot water since we have come, we have to heat it on the stove... When we first came, it was important that we find a place to stay and a way to survive, and no one, not even me, thought of school”*²⁵².

Some children discuss their concerns and desire for migration with their parents: *“Well, coming from Kosovo was a change. In Kosovo we lived better, here we live totally bad, sometimes there’s nothing to eat, sometimes there is. If we returned I think we would be doing ok again in Kosovo. Father says it would be hard for us over there as well”*²⁵³.

Other children are excluded from these conversations and simply listen to their elders complain about these issues: *“I listen to both women and men talking in the camp, while sitting in front of the sheds, saying how hard it is for them to have come here. So changing places is not easy for anyone. You may even get to a worse place than the one you left. Who knows?”*²⁵⁴ In many instances, the children felt that the decision is in the hands of politicians and non-governmental workers: *“They asked us too whether we would return to Kosovo. Father said we would, if they provided him a job, and they said that did not depend on them, but they could build us a house, and then father asked if we could eat the house. So my father has not decided yet where we are going to live, but everything depends on those people”*²⁵⁵.

In most cases, the children were critical of the assistance they received from politicians and NGOs and felt that their offers to return to Kosovo were empty. *“I think it all depends on these foreigners. Why wouldn’t those people come here and say: “In two months’ time you will have a house and a job in Kosovo, like you used to have, it’s not your fault that you lost everything and your house was torn down and there was a war”. Some people came to ask us who wanted to return, and we said we did, and then what...? They have waited for years, and so have we”*²⁵⁶. One child stated that they have little choice over where they will eventually live: *“It all depends on these people from the world and their different organizations and these politicians in Montenegro. It’s going to be the way they decide it to be. So, there will be no big changes and we will all live as we always have”*²⁵⁷. In comparison, another child exhibited high levels of self-efficacy and stated that politicians cannot stop him from returning to Kosovo: *“What can I do regarding them stopping me from going to Kosovo, for example; not all the politicians in the world can do that, and they only care for themselves, not us. Do you ever listen to the news? Everyone knows it. Do you know a poor politician or someone from these organizations who do all kinds of programmes? They are all rich, and all they know is to tell stories like the ones from the Red Cross. They, like, take care of us and help us and you see what kind of progress we have made in all these years”*²⁵⁸.

²⁵²Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

²⁵³Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

²⁵⁴ .Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

²⁵⁵Montenegro -. focus group interview, boy- 14 years old, IDP camp

²⁵⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

²⁵⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, boy- 14 years old, IDP camp

²⁵⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

Hence, armed conflict and the failure of the state to provide adequate assistance to families has had a significant effect upon children's desire to migrate in this region, either to escape violence and persecution or to return to a country from whence they were evacuated.

Running away from home

The children provided a number of reasons for why they would or have run away from home, as was highlighted in a previous section. As a child living in the streets in Serbia stated, *"Well, some children run away from home because of their parents. There are some children who run away from home because they don't have anything to eat and drink. There are some children who run away from home because of friends, you see. There are some who, for instance, do it (ran away from home) for drugs. There are different... I ran away because of my parents and because of friends. I was almost worse than others, I also ran away because of friends. Now I am back at home... but I am bored, because they don't go out"*²⁵⁹. The reasons that she mentioned include poverty, violence, drug addiction, boredom, frustration at rules and restrictions on movement, and the influence of friends. Substance-abuse and violence in the household is frequently cited as a reason.

In Kosovo, a child stated that children runaway to *"get as far away as they can from the people who beat them"*²⁶⁰. A girl in Albania said that she would runaway if she is forced to marry. Another boy in Bulgaria stated that he would like to find his own way, and runaway to increase his independence. It will be argued that this desire to runaway is a sign of the courage and bravery that many children exhibit, although it may lead to a range of unwanted, unintended consequences. This bravery is a source of resiliency, but living on the streets may place children at the forefront of greater risks of being trafficked.

The decision to leave is only made after extensive thought and the weighing up of various options that the children perceive to be available. This decision also includes extensive preparation, which involves seeking social supports that might provide assistance. Some children decide to run away to a different town but others decide to migrate abroad. A child in Romania stated that she considered migrating abroad to solve difficulties she experienced at home because *"If there are family problems, they can be solved only abroad, in France, Spain, Germany, all these countries"*²⁶¹.

Seeking a "better life"

On the whole it was believed by the children that life abroad is *"better"* because there are more employment opportunities, higher incomes, better education systems and different forms of recreation and entertainment. Positive stories from friends and relatives reinforce the desire to immigrate, particularly if they would like to support themselves or their families. As a child stated, *"If they earn money for them and their families, why shouldn't they be happy?"*²⁶² So migrating abroad to earn money and gain independence might be seen as desirable, even if it involves working on conditions that might turn out to be exploitative and dangerous.

On the other hand, some children stated that those who have been abroad lie about their experiences to make it sound more positive: *"They have no more childhood. Here, you can see for*

²⁵⁹Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

²⁶⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

²⁶¹Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁶²Romania - individual interview, 17 years old boy

yourself and what kind of a life we have. It is tough but we are happy. There, for an extra penny you may sell even your mother and father. That is how they tell us, those who come back from there. Each one lives for himself over there. They suffer but they don't admit it. They brag about it but it is not like that. I don't think it is better over there" ²⁶³.

When asked to explain, she stated, *"I don't know but it is not like in here. At least you get a warm meal in here... even if it's a poor one. If you enter a programme conducted by Save the Children, it is even better, but if you leave the country without any purpose... it's not easy. Where do you sleep, what do you eat? ... Maybe they think they are tough, cool. But they are sad. That is what I think. How can you live without your family? If they left altogether, it would be something else. But alone, it's not good at all"* ²⁶⁴.

So for some children, after weighing up the options the idea of going abroad where there is no guaranteed source of income or food, and leaving one's family, is undesirable.

Many of the children had heard negative stories about other people's experiences abroad. It is said that abroad, they may find it difficult to find employment and may be forced into exploitative arrangements. A child in Romania stated: *"I don't think they find something better abroad, they only go begging or stealing, I don't know what else they could do... Well, they get there on the street and they are forced to beg, to bring money, and if not, they are beaten... I think they are really upset and they want to come back home"* ²⁶⁵. Some children described cases where people who have gone abroad have not been paid properly for their work.

Some of these children's parents were unhappy with the way they were treated by their employers abroad. This had a significant impact upon how their children viewed life abroad: *"I will go there and if I find a good job, not to work 20 hours but normally 8-9 hours and to treat me well and not trying to make me do things that I shouldn't... Yes, I have a recent case with my father. He explained to me that they work 20 hours a day and it is written in their contract that they should work 12. And even more when they finish work, the Italians mock with them. My father gets very angry because he depends on them and has to put up to this humiliation. Sometimes they mock with them. I don't think it is normal... If you work a normal job with normal time and payment, if they treat you well you may live better than here"* ²⁶⁶. So this desire to go abroad is mediated by their interpersonal relationships, and the manner in which a parent or caregiver may communicate information about their own experiences abroad.

The respondents also complained that employers will not assist foreign migrants – even if they are children - or provide them with insurance when they fall ill or have accidents at work. As a result, *"they leave the country young and healthy and they bring them back dead"* ²⁶⁷. It is said that in foreign countries one not only feels lonely because one has left relatives and friends behind, but one does not feel safe, while *"here at home at least you feel calm and somehow protected"* ²⁶⁸. It is also said that abroad, one has few people to turn to for support in times of trouble. As a street child in Kosovo stated, *"Well, I am in a foreign country now, I don't know anybody here, I don't know*

²⁶³Romania - individual interview, 18 years old girl

²⁶⁴Romania - individual interview, 18 years old girl

²⁶⁵Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁶⁶Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, school child

²⁶⁷Romania - individual interview, 17 years old boy

²⁶⁸Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

²⁶⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, girl- 17 years old, street child

where to go, who to turn to.”²⁶⁹ This is exacerbated when one travels to a country where they speak a different language. A child in Bulgaria stated that she would not like to live in a foreign country where she cannot speak the local language because she prefers to feel “secure”: *“Here I can at least speak with people and ask for help if I need it”*²⁷⁰.

In this regard the child respondents said that success abroad “depends on the country and the intelligence of a person. If they know the language and how much time it will take to learn it.”²⁷¹ Others put this success down to luck: *“I had a friend who went to Italy to pick olives and he went there with a bus driver who told him that they need people there and so he went. He was very happy and everything was all right. Everything started from that man who was a bus driver. He said that everything was fine and they paid him well and the work was not very hard. But he also said that he met people there who weren't happy at all with their work and they didn't have a place to live. They even didn't have money for food. That's why I think it is all a matter of luck. Some have luck and others don't”*²⁷².

So some children are aware of the risks of going abroad. After weighing up this information, many children decide that it is important to migrate, despite their knowledge of these risks. The alternative option is seen as far more undesirable than a potential risk that they may be trafficked.

Trusting strangers

In general, many children expressed the idea that it is desirable to go abroad only if you do not rely on strangers but travel with relatives and/or join relatives in the foreign country. Children believed that this will ensure that promises of employment are legitimate, that one will find support in times of trouble and one will not feel lonely without one's family and friends. They said that it is very important to know someone when migrating abroad, who can assist you to leave the country and find employment and accommodation in the foreign country: *“I could leave but there is nothing for me to do there. Am I to stay there alone and do nothing? Because only if you have someone over there who can take you and tell you what to do... You have to have someone who can take you there, give you a job, a place to live in... By yourself you cannot make it. I can barely make it over here, how can I make it abroad?!”*²⁷³

The children were particularly concerned about the possibility of being deceived, “tricked” or “cheated” about what life is really like abroad, and what work they will be expected to undertake. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated: *“Well, they may have a friend or a neighbor or a relative tell them to come to some town to live, and he told them they would be fine there. And they come and see that the man was not telling them the truth. What can the poor people do, either stay there or go back to where they came from”*²⁷⁴.

Some of the children had been warned by their parents about trusting strangers when making a decision to migrate abroad: *“I know my mother often tells my aunt how anything can happen to anyone there in Italy and these foreign countries, and how one can't trust anyone about anything. Some people say that you can earn money fast there, and my mother says there is no way to earn money fast anywhere and these people are lying. Now, someone may believe them and go there and get hurt, I don't*

²⁷⁰Bulgaria -, individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁷¹Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

²⁷²Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

²⁷³Romania - individual interview, 17 years old boy

²⁷⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

know. What I know about myself is that I don't like anything I am not familiar with and I don't trust anyone too much and would never go anywhere"²⁷⁵.

They also referred to incidents where children, often relatives and friends, have migrated abroad with strangers and disappeared, as a child in Albania stated: "A person told him that if he could pay 3000 Euros he could take my brother directly to Greece and would immediately find a job for him, to work for his boss. We did not know that man but my brother trusted him and he left for Greece together with two other boys of our neighborhood. Their relatives too have not heard anything from them. We believe that they are alive but cannot notify us"²⁷⁶. Another child in Albania stated that a girl went abroad with her boyfriend, but her family did not try to stop her: "They let her go instead of asking her "where are you going, who are you going with". She prepared the documents. No one knows what she did there..."²⁷⁷.

In schools and institutions, some children were also told about the negative potential consequences of trusting strangers. A number of children in this institution described their international volunteers in a very positive light and believed that they were sincere in their promises to help them travel abroad: "I am thinking of going abroad but that's sort of difficult. Though this American who visited us here said she could take a couple of us to America and give us some job so we can make a better living there than if we had those jobs here in Montenegro. That would be the most important thing in my life, if something like that happened to me"²⁷⁸.

They believed that they could trust these volunteers because the institution has undertaken various background checks: "I think anyone coming to our Home gets checked. So if they offered us to go abroad and if they guaranteed for us, none of that would be likely to happen"²⁷⁹.

In general when approached with the offer to go abroad, the children suggested that one must be wary of trusting strangers and must carefully observe his/her character, consider the options, and negative potential outcomes before deciding to travel with them. It was emphasised that children make a choice to trust him/her but this might often not enable them to fulfill their wishes, hopes and dreams: "I cannot say that it is not their own wish, if it wasn't for their own will, they would not go abroad. Because if you meet such a person in the street and he tells you come with me because I have work for you in a restaurant abroad, you have to think well because after all he is a man and if you meet a woman it's the same. You have to think this situation thoroughly before you leave the country"²⁸⁰.

Children make this judgment on the basis of different needs and criteria. For instance, a girl in Bulgaria stated that her friend went to Italy to pick grapes with the assistance of a stranger: "I think he was attracted by the fact that the family of the driver is in good economic condition and maybe that helped him decide to trust him and go abroad"²⁸¹.

Other children felt that it was better to rely on travel agencies or individuals who have already worked abroad for assistance in deciding whether to go and what employers can expect of foreign

²⁷⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

²⁷⁶Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, internal migrant

²⁷⁷Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old boy

²⁷⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁷⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁸⁰Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

²⁸¹Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

migrants as well as what migrants can expect from their employers. It is also said that one can pay an agency and they will take children abroad by legal and illegal means (see below): *“Well, you pay some man or some agency that does that, who send people abroad through a black market, and then he goes through mountains and the sea and gets to Germany for example”*²⁸².

So despite the fear of trusting strangers, it is often perceived as necessary for families and children to rely on them to facilitate the migration process: *“When we are with a group we pay someone who knows the way... they may be people whom we do not know. You ought to be with the family, if you are by yourself you never know what happens... My aunt says that we will have to look for someone who can take us to Greece safely, to go there together because we will have a good time there and will find a job”*²⁸³.

Parental involvement

In general however, the perception was that it is better to rely on parents and relatives when migrating abroad as is echoed by two children in Bulgaria and Romania: *“I think it is best to leave with the help of relatives”*²⁸⁴; *“if I have the opportunity to go together with my family, otherwise I wouldn't go”*²⁸⁵. This was said to be particularly important if one is young and has little experience: *“I am sure that if they migrate then they do it with their parents, because they can not do it on their own... Because they are too little to do that, and they wouldn't know how to do that without having someone older besides them who is more mature and who knows better”*²⁸⁶.

Nevertheless, some children complained that they were not consulted when their parents make decisions about the migration of the family: *“I don't think these children have any say in it. With us, children don't have a say in such things, they go wherever the whole family is going, nothing they can do about it... The only thing I think these children can do is to make their own decision not to move and remain where they are. But what a child can make such a decision are few, I can tell you. What child has enough strength to confront his father and manage to get by alone? They would stay in the street on their own, all of their people would leave, I think that would be impossible. Such a child would be in great danger”*²⁸⁷.

Some of the children felt that it was important to consult their parents before migrating abroad alone, although ultimately the decision rests with them. In other cases, their parents have forbidden children from leaving: *“I wanted to go to Italy when I was 12 but my father said I was too little then but father used to say that when I turned 18 I can go there”*²⁸⁸.

As parents may forbid them, some children migrate without informing their parents about their intentions or whereabouts: *“According to me, most go without their parents' permission. I know a girl who went abroad with her boyfriend, she was below 18 and now she has a child. Her friend is a foreigner... he was 22. She went with him and after some time she called her parents and told them that she was with him. The police had been looking for her but finally she called. She stayed abroad for a few years and*

²⁸²Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, school child

²⁸³Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl

²⁸⁴Romania - individual interview, 15 years old boy

²⁸⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

²⁸⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

²⁸⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

²⁸⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, shelter child

then came back but after some time she left again”²⁸⁹. So children can make this decision without their parents’ involvement. As one child stated, “there is nothing that can stop us to go and search for a job in another city”²⁹⁰. They therefore exhibit high levels of self-efficacy in terms of their belief that they can control and exercise power over the decision to migrate.

Some children felt that it was unlikely that a parent would agree to their children traveling abroad with strangers. On the other hand it was said that their parents may have little information and they “are not informed enough about the risks”²⁹¹.

A child in Romania said that parents are very cautious when it comes to allowing their children to travel with strangers, “But if you think you can go to your parents and tell them look mother and father, some guy has proposed me to go abroad because he has found work for me, in that case if the parent is really interested in the welfare of his child, he would not permit this thing and he should think what might happen to the child, especially if it is a girl”²⁹².

For some girls, parents will only allow them to travel abroad with a man if they are married: “I am a girl and no one would allow me to go abroad alone. When I joke about it with my mom, because I cannot with my dad, she tells me that you can go and do whatever you want after you get married. For the time being you are here and forget about it”²⁹³.

On the other hand, it is said that some parents agree to let children leave, provided that they send their earnings back home to help their families: “When she comes back the money will stop coming and they won’t be very happy about that”²⁹⁴. It is said, that given the costs of migrating abroad as a family, children often go over first to raise the money needed for the rest of the family to join them: “I guess they migrate more on their own because if the whole family migrates then that is much more expensive than only for the child alone, then slowly other members of the family migrate too after their child has worked and made some money”²⁹⁵.

Involvement of relatives

A number of children stated that many of their relatives live abroad in countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece and Switzerland. Not only do these relatives send back money to assist them in times of financial trouble, they also play a key role in the decision to migrate, in the process of migration and in settlement in a foreign country. In terms of choosing to migrate, a Montenegrin child said that she is considering going abroad but needs to consult her uncle beforehand: “Well, first I’d need to ask my uncle, when he comes here, whether he’d take me and whether he can find me some work, or I could come just like that. And if he says I can come, I’m gone”²⁹⁶. These relatives often send out letters of invitation which are needed in visa applications. They often provide financial and emotional support upon arrival in a foreign country and in times of trouble.

²⁸⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

²⁹⁰Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

²⁹¹Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

²⁹²Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

²⁹³Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

²⁹⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

²⁹⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

²⁹⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

On the other hand, a few cases of maltreatment emerged in the children's accounts of living with relatives abroad: *"They took me to Greece. One day my aunt's husband hit me in my lips as I had not made enough money... Then all asked me why I wanted to come back to Albania and my aunt's husband asked me "have you made up your mind, think it over again before you go home". I told him that that was my decision and I would never go to Greece again"*²⁹⁷. In other words, she made a decision to leave her relatives and return home to escape abuse and exploitation.

In some cases, the children stated that parents pay large sums of money to a middle-man, a stranger who will take their children to live with a relative. It is at this point that some children said that trafficking may occur. A girl in a shelter in Kosovo states, *"This one time as I was leaving school, a man came close to me and asked me if I was the child that he was looking for. He said that my uncle has sent him to get me, and he grabbed me but I managed to run away from his hands before he could get me into his car and even today when I think about it I get the shivers all over my body. He said that besides my name, my uncle also told him that I was a good singer, which is the truth because I can sing very good even when I was in school. When he saw that I did not want to go he grabbed me and said come on your uncle sent me to get you. I do not know my self how did I manage to get away from him, and I remember that I got very afraid"*²⁹⁸.

It is said that by pretending to know a relative traffickers try to build up children's trust, thereby enabling them to overcome their fear of strangers. Some children also mentioned the possibility that parents send their children to someone, who they claim to be a relative, because they do not want people to know that they have abandoned or "sold" their child. Although he is skeptical that this actually occurs, a boy in Montenegro states: *"I've heard of these things I've just told you about children going to live with a relative, and there is talk of some parents taking money from someone and sending their children to live there with a relative and some people say they are not their relatives at all. I don't get that. It's just people saying such things. How could it happen that someone sells his own child - that's impossible... To tell you the truth, I don't believe it's true, people say all kinds of things. It's someone jealous, saying his neighbor got the money from selling his child. How could that happen, that's crazy. Those parents must have sent their children to a relative or a brother, and the kids are having a great time there. Never mind that, people make up all sorts of things"*²⁹⁹.

The process

Most children were aware that some official documentation is needed before traveling abroad, although they seemed unclear about exactly what the requirements were and how they could fulfill them. Parental permission was highlighted as important in some cases, although some children felt that it was contingent upon the child's age: *"They may but only with the signature of their parents. But only these older ones, they can leave outside. The smaller ones can leave only if their parents sign for them"*³⁰⁰.

Another child stated that this is one reason why parents should travel with their children: *"One can also leave with his entire family. I don't think a parent can leave his minor child alone because at the border you need the signature of the parents. But indeed, if you don't care and you believe life is*

²⁹⁷Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl

²⁹⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, shelter child

²⁹⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

³⁰⁰Romania - individual interview, 14 years old girl

*better there for your child, as it has happened in the case of my friend, they signed the papers for her*³⁰¹.

Money seemed to be one of the main concerns of children hoping to travel abroad. It was felt that only wealthy people can afford to purchase passports. Alternatively it was suggested that children can obtain “false documents” with a different name and surname.

Not only is this very expensive but it also requires reliance on a stranger, “They try to find someone to help them across the border, to get them false documents and things like that so they can go abroad”³⁰². A child in Kosovo said that this can be easily carried out: “Simply find someone who gets you illegally to Italy... you go to Albania and those rebels there will sort you out, and once you are in Italy there are no more borders to cross... That’s why my nephew got where he is before the war, and if he could do it then I can do it just as well”³⁰³. A few children stated that it is easier to migrate illegally and purchase documents: “if I would want to migrate then I’d just do it by black market, it is easier”³⁰⁴.

If they decide to immigrate illegally they have to choose their travel routes carefully to avoid being caught by the police. As an Albanian girl stated, “Some of them can get visa at the embassies but the majority go illegally, either via the mountain or by boats. I do not know for sure but one day my classmate told me that his brother had gone to Italy via Kosovo and he thought of doing the same thing”³⁰⁵.

Two of the younger children in the Albanian sample emphasised that they were scared of wild animals attacking them en route to Greece. As a boy stated, “I was with my mom and dad, we climbed the mountain. We walked one day, five hours. We missed the buss and remained there... When we left it was daylight but then it grew dark. We came across a bear on our way to Greece. Nevertheless I was not afraid of the bear. The bear was angry because the Greeks had taken his cubs... It was very long. It took as some thirteen hours to get there”³⁰⁶. Although it is difficult to verify his story, this quote reveals the stress and fear experienced by - or feared by - many children when they migrate or consider the possibility of migrating across dangerous and difficult terrain – even when they are with their parents.

A few of the children stated that they knew of someone who had been caught by the police crossing the border illegally, or have found themselves in this predicament. For instance, this Albanian child said that they were caught on their way to Greece: “We climbed the mountain. The police caught us when we arrived in Thessalonica. My sister in law also brought the baby with her; we wanted to make a phone call when the police caught us”³⁰⁷. Another child stated that he was caught working illegally in Greece.

Some of the children stated that they would only like to migrate abroad temporarily and/or would return if things do not go well abroad. It is said that their desire to migrate is related to the fulfillment of a particular need, and if that need is not met or “they don’t like what they are doing” they can simply return. For many children, they would ultimately like to settle in their home

³⁰¹Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

³⁰²Serbia - focus group interview, boys and girls 13-22 years old, street children

³⁰³Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

³⁰⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

³⁰⁵Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

³⁰⁶Albania - focus group interview, 11 years old boy

³⁰⁷Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl

countries, largely because of their intimate relationships and social networks, which can be called upon during times of trouble. As a Bulgarian girl stated, *“I would go but I would also return, because this is my birth place. I was born here and all my friends are here. I don't know anyone outside; I know neither where I am nor who is around me and what is around me. I can't ask anyone there for help”*³⁰⁸.

On the other hand, it is said that sometimes they will not be accepted back by their families particularly if they left without their parents' consent and/or traveled there illegally. A Bulgarian boy compared this situation to one in which a trafficked victim returned home: *“So, if it they were forced they [parents] will accept them. But if my work there was illegal and I was doing it willingly, I don't think they would be very happy”*³⁰⁹. Another boy said that it would be difficult to return home initially but through communication and negotiation, the problems could be resolved: *“For example if someone ran out of home and went somewhere the parents are worried a lot. When the child comes back they are very happy at first but then they talk about the reasons and if they were guilty they ask for forgiveness and the child also explains the reasons. It definitely matters if the child went there with or without his or her parents knowing about this”*³¹⁰.

Despite these perceived difficulties associated with the process of migration and/or return, many of the children still wanted to migrate to another city or abroad because they believed it to be an opportunity for adventure and a chance to escape hardships such as poverty, war and interpersonal violence. In other words they weigh up the perceived options, and decide to migrate even if they know it to be a potentially risky strategy. One of the risks that they mentioned was related to trafficking.

Migration and trafficking

According to the respondents, the actual process of migration leaves children more vulnerable to being trafficked, in that they are often alone and in desperate need of documentation. A Romanian girl stated: *“Actually they are kidnapped on their way, some of them are taken to a room, they catch more girls, they make them fake passports and they put them out on the market to produce”*³¹¹.

Another child stated that illegal migration in particular places one at risk of being trafficked: *“If you cross the border illegally, it can be very, very bad. Traffickers, pimps, other bad things too... They can say it if they don't want to go there. Nobody takes them by force. It is worse if they mixed up with traffickers. They cannot escape the traffickers and they have to work only for them. At this point they can no longer decide for their life”*³¹².

One of the reasons provided for this is that one cannot rely on assistance from the police if one is crossing the border illegally with the intention of work. It is said that traffickers promise to assist them financially and with documents and in this way, make children work for them to pay back their debts: *“Most of the people are lured with that. They pay for the transport and the passports, the girls pay nothing and after that the girls are made to work for them and pay them back for the transport and the money which was given to them. I think that it was easy for me, it wasn't difficult”*³¹³.

³⁰⁸Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls – 14-18 years old, school children

³⁰⁹Bulgaria - Focus group interview,., boy- 12 years old, institutionalized child

³¹⁰Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

³¹¹Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl

³¹²Romania - individual interview, 17 years old boy

³¹³Bulgaria - focus group interview, boy- 14 years old, school child

As mentioned above, the children suggested that traffickers manipulate their desire and need to obtain travel documents and go abroad. In this way, they deceive them into agreeing to go with them: *“They have ganged together some man, and some woman. And they promise you all: money, a job abroad so you can earn money and come back here and build yourself a decent house, not huts like ours”*³¹⁴. They make these empty promises to children that do not reflect the reality of violence and exploitation: *“Well, I think they lie to them. They tell them that they are going to do something else and when they go there it is something different”*³¹⁵. Yet the fact that children make a decision to believe them, was emphasized by many respondents.

Nevertheless, the respondents said that children cannot be blamed for believing these lies. As a child in Serbia states: *“If you decide that you want to go abroad to work as a waitress, and end up somewhere else, you are not to blame for that”*³¹⁶.

To guard against this happening, a Bulgarian boy suggested the following: *“They should know where they go and what they are going to do. They must know the language even if they don’t work anything related to talking. They should have real contracts. There was information in the news about people who were deceived. Now it is not so common, I guess people became more cautious”*³¹⁷.

The offer of boyfriend/husband

According to the children, traffickers often “trick” girls by pretending to be a boyfriend, or offering to marry them before trafficking them. Alternatively, it is held that they offer to broker a marriage for them. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“She may meet a guy who’ll tell her all nice things and make promises and she believes him and he deceives her”*³¹⁸.

According to a child in Bulgaria, *“They might propose to marry her. She falls in love, she dreams of a peaceful, carefree life and she is trapped. I have heard that the traffickers’ goal very often is to make the girls fall in love with them. They put a spell on them, they fascinate them...”*³¹⁹. A child in a shelter in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that children are “sold” by traffickers to people who would like to marry them: *“If a female child gets kidnapped she can be sold better in Italy, for bigger money. They sell them because they marry their girls, they sell them so some people can marry them, that happens there”*³²⁰.

In another case, a child stated: *“There are many cases, I know the relative of someone I know. She was married at a young age and her husband took her to Greece for prostitution; she is having a very bad luck”*³²¹.

It is also said that parents are convinced by men that they will be good husbands for their daughters. These men then traffic the girls: *“There are even relatives and people who allegedly ask the girl’s*

³¹⁴Romania - individual interview, 14 years old girl

³¹⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, school child

³¹⁶Serbia - focus group interview, boy-18 years old, street child

³¹⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

³¹⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years boy, IDP camp

³¹⁹Bulgaria - focus group interview, 14-18 years old boys and girls, school children

³²⁰Bosnia-Herzegovina -,focus group interview, 16 years old girl, street child

³²¹Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

hand to marry, the marriage takes place and they take the girl. They give the girl's mom a lot of money. They promise the girl's parents that they will take care of their daughter, that they have a big villa, that the boy has only his mom at home and so they convince the parents who are rather old and are not going to last that long. The parents see the house and they say OK. They rent a house and show it to the girl's parents, who on their part think that their daughter will be happy but it so happens that the daughter calls and tells of her sufferings and notifies that her so called husband plans to sell her to Italy and the family feels said afterwards"³²².

In this case, it appears as though these parents were not aware that their daughter would be trafficked. However, the relationship between early and arranged marriage and trafficking is contentious as is evident in a number of children's accounts. In numerous accounts, children describe parents as "selling" their daughters. As a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated, "*Sometimes it depends on parents. Some parents sell their children and if a man who wants to buy a girl shows up then her parents sell her and she marries the man. When they are sold, the girls must earn all the money people gave for them*"³²³. Parents are attributed blame and responsibility for the trafficking of their children.

In other cases, this practice of "selling a child" is clearly distinguished from arranged marriages: "*We haven't heard about selling, only the custom we have to take money from the husband for the girl and then it looks like the father sold his daughter*".³²⁴ This is echoed by another Montenegrin child, who uses the word "sale" to describe both practices but clearly differentiates the activities in terms of culpability and his sense of injustice: "*How can you sell your own child? I'd cut that person's throat. I don't know how someone can sell his own child, I've never heard of that. I've heard of people selling their daughter to a husband, never about other things*"³²⁵.

In order to understand why girls and their parents may believe that a trafficker is a legitimate husband, and on this basis decide to go with him, it is necessary to understand what marriage means in the children's lives and how this is distinguished from trafficking in most of children's accounts.

Some of the children described early and arranged marriage as a custom or tradition in certain communities. In the literature this is often described as a phenomenon shared by all RAE groups without looking at the differences that exist between these groups. The Roma and Egyptian children clearly distinguished these practices from each other. As a child in the IDP camp in Montenegro stated, "*I know that Roma take money when they want to find a husband for their daughter, and the husband must pay to her father, I know that and that's not it, that's a normal thing. But it's not the same with us Egyptians, we never take money. But to sell your child to someone for money, I don't know what to say, that's terrible and I can't imagine it*"³²⁶.

Another child reiterated this sentiment, but clearly distinguished this practice from trafficking children for other purposes: "*We Egyptians are a different story, we don't take money for a wife, as Roma do. They sell their daughter to a husband, and the husband must give money for a wife we don't have that. I heard from my mother, my aunt, the neighbors talked about some people who had sold their child to someone for money*".³²⁷

³²²Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

³²³Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, street child

³²⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

³²⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

³²⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

³²⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

The children's accounts in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo specifically, reveal the complexity of this custom or tradition and the particular manner in which it is constructed, and is changing in relation to socio-economic developments. In many poverty-stricken communities it is an economic strategy adopted by households to ensure their survival. As a girl in Kosovo stated, *"Now that the conditions are harder and the unemployment is so great, this all influences that girls are married by being taken-away"*³²⁸. It is said that by marrying a daughter off, the expenses of running a household and raising a child are reduced, as her husband's family has to take responsibility for her.

A girl in Kosovo said: *"Parents say "a mouth less to feed", or "girls belong to other people's houses"*³²⁹. In Albania, a child stated, *"They think that if a girl gets married, there will be no problems; they are very poor and force the children to marry at a very young age"*³³⁰. Alternatively, if a girl marries a wealthier man, it is believed that she will assist her parents: *"The parents themselves want the girl to get married because they think that she can probably help them..."*³³¹.

Some of this money exchanged in the process of marriage, is used to finance important social gatherings, in which relatives and other community members participate. Given the social importance attached to weddings, engagement and marital ceremonies are very elaborate and expensive. These costs have had a significant effect upon the custom itself. In Kosovo, a boy stated that this practice is declining because weddings are too expensive to arrange: *"The marriages that are done on free will, they are done with much less money, as these with facilitators... well, and they require lots of money... Well I would say there are more marriages with free will... where the boy takes away the girl."*³³².

It is also said that given the economic climate, it is too expensive to rely on mediators to find a husband and negotiate the marriage. As a result, some children state that the custom of arranged marriages is in decline and that children now have more say over their partners: *"Nowadays, it happens more that the boy and the girl fall in love and get married... times of mediators are past, so when they would come to the girls family, then the mother and father's word is the last say, as the couple have already been in love and are getting anyhow married... Well, living and having economic crises, having jobless people marriages done in such way are easier"*³³³. So macro-factors have an effect upon this interpersonal practice and how it is played out at the level of the individual.

For some families, marriage is one way in which a child is able to obtain papers to migrate abroad: *"Well there are cases when for example the girl or the boy get engaged with a boy or a girls from abroad, they get married and wait for the papers to come out and go abroad to live"*³³⁴. This is not an exclusively female practice in that boys may also get married for this purpose.

Some girls and their parents perceive marriage to be a source of escape from poverty stricken communities, when a daughter marries someone living in another city: *"Later a boy asked her to marry him and she got married at the age of thirteen. Her family told her to marry him if she did not want*

³²⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

³²⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, street child

³³⁰Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

³³¹Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old boy

³³²Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, school child

³³³Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

³³⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

to live in that neighborhood”³³⁵. It is believed that in other countries children will have an opportunity to find employment and earn higher incomes, which they can send home in the form of household remittances. As a result, marriages with foreigners are encouraged by parents: “Well, probably they will come and ask for her hand from some far away place, perhaps as far as Switzerland, or somewhere else, where ever, just as long as it is from far away...”³³⁶. Children themselves favour the idea of marrying someone from abroad for the reasons described above – adventure, escape, employment and income - and use a variety of means including mediators who are often relatives, and the internet to find husbands: “I pray I will get married in Germany... I don't know, perhaps my uncle will find someone for me. He is in Germany, or perhaps through internet... It doesn't matter if Germany or somewhere else - anywhere away from Kosovo”³³⁷.

Hence, marriage is seen for some girls as a means of traveling abroad and fulfilling their hopes and dreams. A girl in Kosovo explained: “I wish to be a good hairdresser and I want to go abroad and get married there. I can not go there on my own, so of course I have to marry someone to get there”³³⁸. This is repeated by another girl in Albania, who stated that as a girl her movement is restricted and she would only be allowed to travel abroad if she was married: “Me to go abroad? No, never. I am a girl and no one would allow me to go abroad alone. When I joke about it with my mom, because I cannot be with my dad, she tells me that you can go and do whatever you want after you get married. For the time being you are here and forget about it”³³⁹.

For some girls, it is not simply about being able to go abroad but to overcome restrictions that are placed on their movement after they have passed through puberty (see below): “It's not always as bad with a husband... I'd like them to find me a husband, I don't know what to do around this camp any more, all day long. I can't go to the town, even when I'm sick I can't go to the doctor's alone, but my mother or brother have to accompany me”³⁴⁰.

So for some girls, marriage is sought after as it is a means by which they gain freedom of movement.

For some parents, marriage is a means of protecting their daughters from male attention, sexual violence and the possibility of “disgrace”. It is believed that if girls have sexual relations out of wedlock and/or fall pregnant, they will not only bring disgrace upon themselves, but upon their whole family even if it is the product of sexual violence. As a result, when girls pass through puberty their movement is restricted, they are confined to the domestic sphere to undertake domestic tasks, they are removed from school and they are forbidden from begging on the streets with their siblings. Their relationships with male peers are restricted and intimate/sexual relationships forbidden. If it appears as though girls are having contact with men, are the object of their attention and advances, marriage is hastily arranged.

These constraints emerged from a complex relationship between what parents regard as physical protection of their daughters and the avoidance of individual and familial shame and disgrace. In Albania, one child stated: “Well, there are many young boys who keep nagging the girls while they walk in the street and after that they chase them home. They get to know where the girl's house is, and they

³³⁵Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

³³⁶Kosovo - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, street child

³³⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

³³⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, street child

³³⁹Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

³⁴⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

chase her for some time. Sometimes this is scary because very often they say that they will snatch you because they are in love with you and other things like this. It happened to a friend of mine that a boy bothered her so much and he persisted in asking her to marry him. The girl did not want to marry the guy who insisted and said to her “you will either be mine or you cannot marry anybody else”³⁴¹. Under such circumstances, being afraid that the boy could snatch their daughter, her parents compelled her to quit school. The boy still persisted and then some of his relatives intervened and asked the boy to give up: “My friend failed to get any education at all and right after that she got engaged to another boy because her family and the girl herself were afraid that she would not be able to get married because of the incident”³⁴².

Girls who appear to be sexually interested in boys are hastily married off, as are those who dress in a so-called “provocative” manner – it is believed that these girls in particular are at a higher risk of being trafficked because they will attract the advances of male strangers:

“Well, these girls that don’t go to school and don’t do anything good all day long, they misbehave, are rude and brazen and have bad and brazen company and then become like them, talk to boys a lot and ramble around. But not all of them are like that, just some. If the parents see that, then they’ll find her a husband and marry her off immediately. And the husband can be very mean to them and beat them, and then she suffers and is sad. Mother said that parents are right to marry her off because they have to take care of her, and it was her fault that she provoked the boys, and that’s why her parents had to find her a husband right away because who knows what would have happened to her. This way she stays with her husband, who then takes care of her and doesn’t allow her to do anything wrong because he’d beat her or send her back to her parents, and that’s a disgrace for them, so she has to pay attention that does not happen because no one wants to make one’s parents angry”³⁴³.

These rules and restrictions are often enforced by means of parental corporal punishment. In addition, male siblings are often tasked with the responsibility of watching over their sisters’ movement.

As a result, many girls conform to the behaviour expected by their parents in that they follow their rules and submit to the restrictions on their behaviour - relationships, movement and appearance. As a girl in Montenegro stated, *“Well, if they saw me walking with a boy or my friends somewhere I’m not allowed, they’d forbid me to leave home for days. We’re not allowed to go for walks with boys, I know that’s not nice and I’m not allowed, but there’s this boy I like, and I wanted to see him but didn’t dare, and then a friend of mine went to tell him I didn’t dare because of my father and that I liked him. I’ll see what happens, I’m afraid they’ll marry me off to someone else and I wouldn’t want that”³⁴⁴.*

On the other hand, many girls decide to break these rules because they perceive the rules themselves to be unfair and unwarranted and they complained about the differential freedom enjoyed by their male peers and siblings, with the process by which they are married at any early age to a person that they do not know and have not been consulted about and they do not want to experience the constraints that they associate with marriage. Many of the girls have witnessed or heard about negative experiences that young girls have experienced after being married. For

³⁴¹Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

³⁴²Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

³⁴³Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁴⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

some, it is an experience shared by a close friend or sibling. Some girls associate marriage with a loss of freedom and violation of their rights, although this may depend upon the family that they are married into.

For many girls, marriage in the West was described as better because it is undertaken at a later age, this fed into their desire to migrate abroad. Their perceptions were often mediated by the experiences communicated by someone they know: *“Well, my mother for example married when she was young and she always tells me how bad that is, so we know that it is not good to marry early. She tells us to enjoy as long as we are in our fathers house because we will have a lot on our heads in the house we marry in, the husbands house... It's best never to get married... just kidding. First you must enjoy life until you are 24, and then get married... My aunt is 28, and she still doesn't want to get married, she lives in Denmark. This aunt knows about the other aunt who married young, and now she has many problems with her husband”*³⁴⁵.

Some girls emphasised that when one becomes married one is subject to the power and rules exercised by the husband and his family. One boy in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that he would be very strict on his future wife on the basis of the example set by his siblings: *“For example a boy likes her. He sends his father to ask for her hand at our place, and so on... Well, around 16, she shouldn't be older. That's why you get a woman in your house to clean when you get married, to wash your clothes, to give birth and take care of the children. If I got married now my wife wouldn't work at the open market. First of all I wouldn't allow it to myself. Two of my brothers' wives are home, they don't work. There you go”*³⁴⁶. This boy's point of reference was his siblings' experiences and the manner in which they treat their wives.

A girl in Bosnia-Herzegovina complained that marriage is associated with restrictions: *“When you get married then your husband will give you orders, you will have to ask permission to go to the store. He is in charge there. There are husbands and wives like that”*³⁴⁷.

Girls are also subject to the rules and instructions set by their husband's relatives. If one fails to follow their instructions, one risks being sent home in disgrace. As one girl in Kosovo stated, *“Well, very bad things happen. It can happen that the husband's family doesn't like the girl so she will be forced to leave the husbands house”*³⁴⁸.

This is repeated by another girl in Kosovo: *“So soon after this the problems began as the young girl or bride doesn't know how to behave with her parents in law, the husband, she doesn't know the rules of the house, and all these things cause problems, then they fight to each other, and in most of the cases none of them have finished the school, nor works”*³⁴⁹.

The fact that their education is restricted upon marriage was a source of concern for many girls who stated that it not only stunts their intellectual development but that of their own children as well: *“She doesn't know to do the house work, and she doesn't think about school much, because she is not educated, she doesn't know how to educate her children, and that's how she will remain primitive”*³⁵⁰.

³⁴⁵Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, street child

³⁴⁶Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interview, 18 years old boy, street child

³⁴⁷Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old girls, shelter children

³⁴⁸Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

³⁴⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

³⁵⁰Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

Children also complained about the fact that they are not consulted in the selection of their husbands. Often this decision is taken in total disregard for their love of another individual: *“Well, I don’t know, that is a family education problem, and sometimes parents are guilty as well for such things, they know that their daughter is in love with someone and they do not talk to her about those things”*³⁵¹.

A child in Montenegro stated: *“Well, if she loves a boy and her parents don’t like him and don’t want him to be her husband, they immediately get her a different husband, one they think would be better for her, and she accepts her parents’ choice, although she loves the other one. It often turns out that her husband is not good for her, he may even beat her or have other women, and she has to stay home and keep quiet and do as she’s told. She can’t go back to her father’s either”*³⁵². In other words, having little choice over one’s partner could increase the risk of intimate partner violence and lead to a loss of social supports in the future.

This issue of arranged marriages was also a source of concern for boys. A boy in Serbia complained that his girlfriend’s father did not agree with the match and married her off to someone else: *“I loved her and she loved me, but her parents didn’t let us stay together”*³⁵³.

A child complained that she is worried that economic concerns will override concerns for her own well-being, in that her father might marry her off to a wealthy husband without taking his character or her preferences into account: *“My father is going to take a lot of money from my husband for me. Because of that, I am afraid that father would be more concerned with who would offer more money than if they would be good to me”*³⁵⁴.

If girls are caught flouting these rules and restrictions there are a range of negative consequences. Any notion of children’s choice would be completely disregarded and they could be physically restrained and/or married off quickly: *“If they saw I was meeting someone, they’d lock me up in the house or start looking for a husband for me, someone they choose, I wouldn’t have a say, that’s how it went with some other girls from the camp... Well, I know father would send me off to a husband if he saw me with this boy. That’s why I mustn’t see him”*³⁵⁵.

Their parents arrange their marriage quickly without undertaking the necessary checks on the husband’s family and background: *“As soon as a girl does not do as her father says, he starts looking for a husband for her, to make sure she does not bring disgrace to him”*³⁵⁶. So some girls are courageous in their attempts to break the constraints on their freedom but this often leads to further restrictions and a forced marriage: *“Parents ban them too, but there are girls who don’t do what their parents tell them and go for walks in the town, or they say they are going to a friend’s and then go to the town. When their father sees them and if they see them with a boy, then things get hard and dangerous for her: her father would beat her up and lock her up in the house. And then they could find her a husband in three days and she has to go to him, so nothing happens to her that would bring shame to her father, the father prevents the shame and sends her to a husband and she has to accept that”*³⁵⁷.

³⁵¹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

³⁵²Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁵³Serbia - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, street child

³⁵⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁵⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁵⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁵⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

Alternatively, parents may use corporal punishment to enlist their daughter's compliance or abandon their daughters as a means of removing the shame she has brought to the family.

A child in Albania stated that regardless of whether the sexual contact was consensual or not, girls are still blamed for having sexual relations with boys and asked to leave: *"It has happened that a boy has bothered many girls in the neighborhood and they have become the talk of the town afterwards. This is stupid. Or a boy kidnapped a girl for three days and later let her free to go home. Her parents did not welcome the girl home so she moved to her relatives in Burrel. She stayed there until she married another man and after marriage her parents accepted her. Do you understand now the mentality predominant in Tirana? We are in Tirana geographically, but as far as the mentality is concerned we belong to the North of Albania"*³⁵⁸. In this child's opinion these practices are outdated and do not make sense in a modernizing, urbanized city like Tirana.

The children stated that when this occurs to a girl it is very difficult for her to find support or assistance from relatives because of the stigma associated with *"being ruined"*: *"and then her father has to throw her out to the street because he can't find her a husband any more. He says she ruined his honour. Nobody wants her and she's completely ruined. When she's out in the street, we can't help her, there's nobody, her uncle or aunt or anyone from the family can't take her in. That's why I watch my sister, so she doesn't stand with a guy"*.³⁵⁹ Some of the children stated that this notion of *"disgrace"* can be used by individuals seeking to harm children and even traffic them. They are aware that these children have few people to turn to if they are thought to be sexually active, so it is easier to manipulate, *"trick"* or *"cheat"* them: *"Those are the biggest threats, that someone would do something bad to these girls or trick them, so they don't know where to go because it may happen that no one from her family wants to take her or help her, if she brought disgrace to them"*³⁶⁰.

As a result of these concerns and possible risks, many girls developed highly secretive strategies to flout the rules and restrictions set by their parents and relatives in a number of ways including selecting men that are not known by the parents or community, especially in the face of high levels of community gossip, dating boys in unknown or unfamiliar areas and relying on friends to lie about their whereabouts.

Some girls run away and marry without their parents' consent. As mentioned above, these *"courageous acts"* can however lead to problems such as conflict and violence in the family and a loss of familial support: *"I have to say that's not always easy and such decisions can cause huge problems. It all depends on what the family is like and what the boy is like. Sometimes it all ends well and sometimes there's a lot of fighting in one family or the other. It often turns out to be a bad solution for the girl. That's why only a small number of girls decide to run off with a boy. Most of them obey their parents and don't want to create problems, even if it hurts their own interests"*³⁶¹. However, in the process of struggling against the gendered constraints on their movement, it is said that some girls are placed more at risk of physical violence and even trafficking. They may date or marry boys who are not known in the community. These strangers may be potentially dangerous. As they visit unknown areas so as to avoid being recognized, they may face additional threats to their safety and security and not know who to turn to for assistance.

³⁵⁸Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

³⁵⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

³⁶⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

³⁶¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

Hence, according to the respondents there are a number of ways that a trafficker can exploit the importance attached to marriage and female “virginity”. They can pretend to be wealthy husbands from abroad or offer to mediate a marriage with someone abroad or in another town. If a father is seeking to protect his daughter and family from physical harm and disgrace or is trying to increase household income he may readily agree to her marrying a stranger. Girls may disagree with the constraints placed on their movement and may flout these rules by running away and/or choosing to date a stranger in unknown areas without their parents’ knowledge.

These men may ultimately traffic them. Alternatively, if they are sexually active and/or raped, the stigma associated with it may remove their social supports, minimize the chances of them getting married and/or make them vulnerable to individuals who offer them marriage or pretend to care for them. It is important at this juncture to highlight how girl’s perceptions of trafficking are influenced by the gender norms in their communities, and in particular, the manner in which sexuality and femininity is constructed.

Trafficking and constructions of femininity

When discussing the threat posed by trafficking, many of the children described it in gendered terms, in that it was believed that certain children are more at risk of being trafficked and that certain children will be trafficked to undertake different forms of exploitative work. In respect to the former, it is said that girls are more at risk of being trafficked. In terms of the latter, children tended to associate girls with sexual exploitation, and boys with labour exploitation and begging.

When explaining why girls are more at risk of being trafficked, children pointed to their lack of physical strength in relation to men and the idea that girls are more naive than boys and can be easily deceived. It is said that these girls are targeted by traffickers because they can be easily tricked. It is also held that certain girls tend to be targeted more because they dress provocatively, socialize with boys or venture into “forbidden” or socially proscribed areas, and thereby gain traffickers attention, particularly if they are seeking girls to exploit in the sex trade.

In terms of strength, it is argued that girls cannot defend themselves against attacks or physical coercion at the hands of traffickers, who are generally believed to be men. As an Albanian child stated, *“Well, girls are more often kidnapped because boys can fight against the kidnappers but the girls cannot so it is easier to kidnap the girls... Well, the boys may struggle, he is strong and hits the one who wants to harm him but there is nothing a girl can do, she feels powerless, because a girl can deal with a girl, but what can she do to a boy?”*³⁶².

It is said that girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence: *“Boys won’t be raped if they don’t want it. The risks are higher for the girls. It is not only about raping but also boys are stronger and they can protect themselves better”*³⁶³. As a result, it is held girls are unable to thwart the advance of a trafficker.

So in this sense, girls share the same perceived vulnerabilities as young children because of their size and relative physical “weakness”. This fear has a significant effect upon children’s decision-making and freedom of movement. As a girl in Kosovo stated, *“Younger children in Kosovo are afraid*

³⁶²Albania - focus group interview, 11 years old girl

³⁶³Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

to stay longer in the streets because it is dangerous for them, but also, staying so late in the streets is not good for youth as well. For example in the news they keep telling of cases where children are taken in the streets and later sold in other countries. Or... you know, there are some people who deal with drugs or other bad things, and with these things they can do bad things especially to girls, this why I and my friends do not stay out longer than 7 p.m., to avoid something bad happens to us. Also, for example they can take females away and sell them, you know women trafficking"³⁶⁴.

In a number of accounts by boys and girls, female children are described as being "weaker and more susceptible"³⁶⁵ to being trafficked. A boy in Bulgaria described girls as because "easier to steal... because of stupidity"³⁶⁶. A child in Albania stated: "they may be kidnapped but it is easier to cheat the girls... The boys protect themselves while girls are more naive as far as their intelligence is concerned. Girls may be overwhelmed"³⁶⁷. Another girl in Kosovo stated that some girls are "naive and trust people easy" so "anyone can fool around with her"³⁶⁸.

On the other hand, it is said by many children that naivety is mediated by age, in that younger girls are more at risk because "little girls are deceived easier"³⁶⁹. As one Kosovo male stated, "The 20 year old girls are more mature for example, and know how to think differently about them selves, while this girlfriend of mine who isn't even 14 yet can be easily manipulated by others because she is not mature yet"³⁷⁰. A girl in Kosovo said that other girls aged 14 or 15 are "easily deceived, to get raped, to be sold in other countries for prostitution"³⁷¹. A child in Albania linked age and gender-specific targeting of children to puberty and menarche specifically: "Because the girls are cheated... They take girls for prostitution, they rape them because it is time now... Because at such an age the body of a girl develops, the others bother her, they are aware of the fact that she can easily be cheated and keep bothering her. It is the girls' fault. They invite the girls for coffee, get them on the car and then they may inject drugs to them"³⁷².

It is said that traffickers "trick" girls with the promise of an intimate relationship or marriage, and the promise of employment, often by appealing to their vanity and complimenting them through the offer of work as a model: "Well, they promise girls for example jobs, or that they will get them to be on the newspapers or magazines... make them photo models or stuff like that, or that they will get them married will someone abroad, in Germany or Switzerland... stuff like that"³⁷³.

As described in previous sections, poverty, interpersonal responsibilities that dictate work, social pressure to get married (particularly to someone living abroad) and the desire for compliments may be factors why some girls might believe these promises.

The child respondents also said that boys and girls are both at risk but will be exploited in different ways: "I think that it is the same for the boys and the girls, they are both in the same danger, but it can happen that girls are in more danger because they can be used for sexual use and they can be deceived"³⁷⁴.

³⁶⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

³⁶⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

³⁶⁶Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

³⁶⁷Albania - focus group interview, 13 years old girl

³⁶⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

³⁶⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, boys and girls- 14-15 years old, school children

³⁷⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl school child

³⁷¹Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

³⁷²Albania - focus group interview, boy- 14 years old

³⁷³Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

³⁷⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

The manner in which traffickers purposefully target certain children for different purposes is described in the following quote: *“It depends from the work the thieves want them to do. For drugs for example smaller children are used, whiles for prostitution older girls are used, those over 18, but also girls aged 16 or 17 can work as prostitutes too... It depends on the work. For prostitution for example they look for better looking girls”*³⁷⁵. The association of the trafficking of females for prostitution was repeated by children across the 7 countries/entities in which this research was conducted.

As they are selected for the purpose of prostitution, it is said that traffickers are very particular and very discerning when deciding which girls to target. Not only do they choose girls who appear to be particularly naive but they choose girls who are regarded as “beautiful” and who dress and act in a particular way. This behaviour is considered to be sexually provocative in that particular community and is therefore likely to draw attention to themselves.

For instance, when discussing which children are more likely to be trafficked, a child in Kosovo stated: *“I don’t think it depends from where the child comes from, but rather from females and their behaviors. If they go out, and behave differently, like laughing without a reason or dress in a way that draws the attention of others and so on”*³⁷⁶. In terms of clothing, in Albania it was said that girls who wear makeup, “extravagant clothes”, short skirts or expose their stomachs are at risk. It is also said that girls who date boys are also likely to be targeted or subject to various forms of violence. This reflects various stereotypes about trafficking, and social norms about what is considered to be “appropriate” behaviour for girls, and the idea that girls who contravene these norms will face a range of dangers.

Not only do these arguments about gender-specific forms of trafficking reflect the messages that children have received from a range of sources (e.g. media, parents, peers, relatives, teachers etc.), but some of these statements about “risk” reflect girls and boys’ contrasting concerns in their daily lives. Statements made about girl’s “naivety” are related to the fact that access to education is often restricted for many girls in the region, as will be discussed in a later section. Girls across the region were worried about violence and sexual violence, in particular, at the hands of boys and men in their daily lives. A girl in Serbia adopted the strategy of dressing and acting like man as a means of protecting herself: *“A, for instance, well, she says that she is a girl, but behaves like a man... It’s harder when you are a girl, because someone might rape you on the street, or someone might kill you on the street”*³⁷⁷.

In their accounts of their lives, sexuality and the issue of virginity was raised frequently. As highlighted in the section on “marriage” girls’ virginity is highly prized in certain ethnic and cultural communities. This is evident in the following quote: *“Serbian children make their own decisions. A Serbian girl can go to bed with a Serb and with a Gipsy, whereas a Gipsy girl mustn’t go to bed with any man. Because she has to be a virgin when she goes home”*³⁷⁸.

It is said that certain rituals revolve around virginity, particularly during the marital process. As a girl in Bulgaria explained with regards to her wedding night: *“We have such traditions, right, when your mother and father marry you the boy must sleep with you in the evening and they must see. If you*

³⁷⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

³⁷⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

³⁷⁷Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

³⁷⁸Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

are a virgin, it is good. If you are not, some problems might occur. They start telling my mother, my father, the people who have brought me, they tell them: "What girl have you brought to us? Don't you know that she must first sleep with our son, etc.". They gave a short, white skirt. And where you bleed, you take this thing and you give it to your mother. She gives it to your mother-in-law. She takes it, shows it to everyone and they start breaking glasses, plates, what not, and shout and howl till the morning because to them it is something very big - the fact that their daughter-in-law was a virgin. But eventually I realized that these traditions and these things are not good"³⁷⁹.

It is said that girls who are found not to be virgins are returned to their families, who may in turn be "throw them out" onto the streets. So the fact that girls could be raped in the course of trafficking was an issue that girls were very worried about, not only because of the effects upon their own physical and emotional well-being, but because it might bring shame to themselves and their families, and thereby reduce their options. Some of the strategies that girls develop reflect their concern about sexual violence. For instance, a girl in Romania stated that she chooses her clothing carefully and only selects baggy T-shirts because she does not want to draw attention to her growing sexuality.

The fact that some girls who dress or act in a way that counters social norms are seen as more at risk, is not only an example of the way in which certain children are labeled in a community for behaving in a particular manner, but also the manner in which the respondents have had to deal with this labeling and gossip, or have had to try and avoid it in their daily lives. This is evident in the following comments: "My dad and brothers think that if a girl goes out and talks to boys then she is a whore, a prostitute"³⁸⁰.

A girl in Kosovo complained that boys are not judged or labeled in a similar manner: "If a girl goes out at night time then they immediately say that she is not a good girl because she goes out at nights but they don't say that for boys. As for boys he can go out as many times as he wants in the night and no one will say anything about them, or say that he is a bad boy, on the contrary they say good things about them then. They even praise them saying that their boys are old enough to go out now, he goes out with girls, and they don't care that these girls are someone else's daughters"³⁸¹.

Some children in this study had personal experiences of this type of labeling and gossiping when they acted in a manner that was not seen as fit for a girl. They develop various strategies to deal with it. For instance, they only date boys in areas where they are not recognized, as a girl in the IDP camp in Montenegro states: "I go see my boyfriend and then go for a walk with him, but never in the camp. I don't like anyone to see me walking with my boyfriend, everyone would talk about it and they would say I'm a bad girl. And I think that's not right, that I should be called bad just because I walk with my boyfriend. Then that talk would reach my father, and God forbid he should see me, I'd be done for"³⁸².

For instance, a girl from Kosovo ran away from home to escape these negative comments and gossip: "When I was just a little girl I used to hear people talking, gossiping. See, I was always the kind of girls who was socializing with boys, played football with them, pushed my self with them in the street where I lived in. I was always more developed and bigger and strong, and I never dealt with gossiping... At that time I had a boyfriend, and we were really getting along and they wanted to separate me from him

³⁷⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, trafficked child

³⁸⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

³⁸¹Kosovo - focus group interview, boys and girls 14-15 years old, school children

³⁸²Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

*no matter what. They would tell us “You are embarrassing us, look at your sisters, they do not even dare to go out, let alone have boyfriends.” I would come to Prishtina, hoping to find some solution, because I could not take it any more*³⁸³.

Even in the institutions, children complained about this type of treatment: *“Each man that I spent some more time with and thought we could be friends would make a pass on me. So I treat them the same way, I only talk to a boy if I fancy him and would like us to be something more. Please don’t think I’m an easy girl, like they say here in the Home, it’s not true, I’m just honest. Here, if you have a boyfriend, they already think you a whore. And I don’t care if I have a boyfriend I don’t have a problem saying so”*³⁸⁴.

Hence, it is evident that constructions of gender in relation to risk and resiliency need to be considered when attempting to understand why some children are more likely to be trafficked, and to understand what trafficking threats mean to certain groups of children. It is held that because marriage is of such personal and social importance in many communities, children and their parents may be more likely to accept an offer of marriage that might turn out to be false. It was argued that parents’ attempts to protect girls from violence and trafficking are often misguided, as these attempts often lead to unwanted constraints on girls’ behaviour that might enhance trafficking risks. It is also argued that girls’ attempts to thwart or overcome constraints on their decision-making, freedom and sexuality, might place them in risky situations. So their resistance, while a sign of resilience and strength, is also a source of risk. Girls’ perceptions about trafficking risks and resilience are influenced by these gendered norms, such that they may describe other girls’ whom they believe to be behaving inappropriately, as more at risk of being trafficked. These labels might have the unintended consequence of removing valuable supports that many girls need in times of adversity.

The offer of attention

The respondents stated that traffickers give children attention, complimented them or pretended to care for them. They said that two groups of children in particular are more likely to believe these kind words and on this basis decide to go with a trafficker: children in institutions and children living on the streets who feel that they have few sources of support: *“I think that those children that no one looks after are more likely to be sold. They feel no one cares about them. They have a hard time in their everyday lives and any kind of talk that shows them any concern comes in handy”*³⁸⁵. This section will describe the manner in which children in institutions and children living on the streets may be “tricked” by a trafficker because they need and want attention, encouragement and support.

Children in institutions

Children in institutions were highlighted by the child respondents as a group that might be at risk of being trafficked. A child in an institution in Montenegro explained that this relates to their need for encouragement and compliments, which are easily manipulated by traffickers: *“I’d like someone to be proud of me at least a little, someone to tell me I’m good at something; you see, those people who are*

³⁸³Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

³⁸⁴Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁸⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

*involved in selling children could use that and manipulate children that way*³⁸⁶.

It is also said that traffickers exploit the fact that children from institutions have few people to turn to: *“Well, that may happen to any girl, but in a way they think we belong to no one and they can have their way with us. Not that anything bad happened to me, but it doesn't mean it may not”*³⁸⁷. This is echoed by another child, who stated: *“Last summer a man climbed onto the roof, seems he wanted to kidnap a girl, but our friends kept constant watch after that. Some use the fact that we're from the Home, they think we have no parents and they can do anything with us”*³⁸⁸. By offering them attention, it is said that traffickers take advantage of the fact that they often feel lonely and feel as though they have no-one to turn to.

To understand this sense of feeling alone, it is necessary to understand the relationships that these groups of children have with those around them, with particular reference to their parents, social workers and members of the public. Many of the children in the institutions believed that their parents did not care for them or want them. A child in Montenegro said: *“My folks don't care about us, they just think about themselves. I don't know why they created us at all”*³⁸⁹. Another stated: *“I have been here for a very long time, almost since I was born, I have no parents and my relatives get on my nerves, they never took much care of me”*³⁹⁰. Many were placed in the institution after being neglected, suffering physical abuse, witnessing intimate partner violence and living with substance-abusing parents. They were either placed in the institution by social workers, parents, relatives and neighbours, or run away from home and were removed from the streets and placed in shelters/institutions. Some blamed their parents for being placed in the institution.

As a result, some of the child respondents felt that children who suffer from maltreatment should be removed from their parents' care and placed in an institution. As a Romanian girl stated, *“I would talk to their parents. I would go to their place and see how they are treating their children. If they treat them badly I would take children away from them and place them in centers or apartments”*³⁹¹.

Another girl reiterated this sentiment saying: *“I would force the parents to take care of the children and when I see that they doesn't take, I would take the children from there to a place where they would have living conditions”*³⁹².

On the other hand, some children suggested that blame cannot be directed at their parents but at wider structural issues such as poverty and socio-economic inequalities and the fact that few people and institutions provide support to poor families. Some children felt that poverty was the reason why they were removed from their homes and/or prevented from returning to their parents: *“I will not be able to go home with them because they are poor and they do not have conditions at home. They are poor”*³⁹³. So on this basis, it was felt that instead of removing children from their homes and placing them in an institution, parents should be provided with assistance.

Despite the negative treatment that many of these children had experienced at the hands of their

³⁸⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁸⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁸⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, boy 15 years old, institutionalized child

³⁸⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 18 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹¹Romania - individual interview, 10 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹²Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

parents, they still expressed a desire to have more contact with their parents and/or return to live at home. A Romanian girl stated: *“If I were to be a fairy with a magic stick I would phone my mother to come quickly to take me and I would let all the children to go home... I’m sad because my mother is not with me. My father not really, because he used to get drunk all the time, and beat my mother... but I’m sad about my mother because I heard that she is upset that she cannot take me, they don’t leave me from here. This is why I am sad”*³⁹⁴.

Many complained that the staff in the institutions stop them from calling their parents or going to visit them. They are often “lied to them” or not explained why this contact is restricted: *“They let us to unburden ourselves, to cry. Afterwards they would calm us down: “Don’t cry, I will phone tomorrow,” but still in vain... When my mother came to me and when she wanted to talk to me, to put Mrs. A on the phone, they said that it wasn’t possible”*³⁹⁵.

Sometimes it is explained that it is not safe for them to visit their parents unaccompanied but some of the children felt that this is unreasonable as they want to and are capable of going to see their parents alone: *“I would like to go home sometimes, because I’ve left home a long time ago, 3 years ago, and I didn’t go to visit. I would like to go, but I have nobody to go with, I would go alone but they don’t let me. They say that what if something happens to me?”*³⁹⁶

On the other hand, some children complained that social workers too readily return them home on the basis of promises made by their parents that conditions will improve. A child in a shelter in Kosovo complained that social workers initially failed to recognise the abuse that she suffered at the hands of her father because they did not consult her, and even after she was removed, they kept encouraging her to return home: *“The social workers when they come to our home, they come for assistance and then they only talk to father. He tells them all he wants, I was apparently the Star of the House, that is how adorable I was to him., they did not give the opportunity to the mother or the children to have their say, they only listened to what dad had to say, and of course he told things the way he wanted to... I went back home hoping that my father had changed. But no sir, nothing changed there... They were just the same, he had not changed at all, and again the tortures and the maltreatment started and I could not stay there anymore with them and after a while I left again”*³⁹⁷.

In general, this failure to consult children, listen to them or give them attention appeared frequently in the comments of the respondents living in institutions. For many of them, this was the reason why it was preferable to live at home with their families where they would be given attention as individuals: *“In a family everyone is focused on me, while here neither the instructor and especially not the director, can know where each child is and what they are doing...”*³⁹⁸.

Generally, across the four countries in which children in institutions were interviewed (Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia) it is apparent that many children do not perceive their care to be adequate. They argue that instead of care and individualized attention, too much focus is placed on rules and restrictions. They state that they are not listened to or trusted, and yet it in social workers that they are expected to place their trust for their daily subsistence and care.

³⁹³Romania - individual interview, 10 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹⁴Romania - individual interview, 11 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹⁵Romania- individual interview, 11 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹⁶Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

³⁹⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

³⁹⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

An example of the manner in which their needs are not considered is that in an institution in Montenegro. During the summer, children are moved elsewhere as their premises are occupied by tourists. Children are offered the opportunity to work for these tourists on a part-time basis. They resent the fact that their personal space is invaded and all their posters and personal items are removed for the sake of these tourists. This stands as an example of how children believe that their best interests, needs and wishes are not taken into account by adults in institutions.

Many of these children find it difficult to adapt to the rules or engage with staff members who are “strict or pretend to be strict”³⁹⁹. It is said that if they break the rules they will be punished and this may take a corporal, violent form. Too much attention is paid to their behaviour rather than their needs.

As one girl stated, “Yeah, they keep telling us we should behave well although sometimes it has no connection with what is really needed... Well, they don't have to keep repeating that we should behave in this or that way, we're not retarded, although we are from the Home. When someone visits they keep telling us to say hello or something, we know stuff”⁴⁰⁰.

Many children believe that these rules are unfair, particularly when they have an impact upon their interpersonal relationships and freedom of movement: “Well, I make each day suit my wishes at least a little, I've told you how much I love company and going out, so I do that every day. I can be punished all they want, they can't forbid me that. They shout a little, they punish me, and that passes, but I got what I wanted”⁴⁰¹.

These rules and restrictions permeate every aspect of their lives such that many children complain that they very little power and control over basic decisions in their lives. As a child in Romania complained, “I sometimes don't like that I watch TV and the lady calls me to do this or that. I sometimes don't like she does not let us go in town when we want to and I got mad and cursed a woman”⁴⁰². In a shelter in Kosovo, one girl stated that she would prefer to go to a shelter with older girls as there are fewer rules: “It was OK, I can not complain, but I did not really feel like staying there because you are quite isolated there, you could not do anything there, they were quite strict there. For example there are shelters where there are only grown up girls, but here there were a lot of children and it was quite strict. I wanted to go to this shelter where there were grown up girls, but I was not allowed... Anyway, I am sick and tired of these institutions. They are not helping me at all”⁴⁰³.

Apart from the rules that are set in a top down manner, the children complained that they are not listened to and are not trusted when they need help. As a child in Montenegro stated, “Well, no one believes children. Like no one believes us here in the Home. Till a grown person says something and confirms our story, they don't believe us... I don't know, no one understood her or trusted her. That happens all the time that we children are not trusted. They think we make things up, and I think no one has such imagination to make that up and tell about those bad things that happened to them. When they talk about nice things, then OK, maybe. And even if she was lying, why wouldn't someone listen to her and trust her?”⁴⁰⁴ As a result, the children complained that they received little or ineffective,

³⁹⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰¹Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰²Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰³Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁴⁰⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

assistance from staff members: *“They didn’t do anything. My brother wrote complaints for different things, for example when they stole my phone but they didn’t do anything”*⁴⁰⁵.

In general, the children complained that the care they received was inadequate and social workers treat them simply as individuals who they are obliged to care for, but they do not necessarily want to do so: *“No, I somehow always have this fear that she would not take me seriously, and this is just a job for her”*⁴⁰⁶.

In Bulgaria a child stated that their social workers *“should be replaced. They should do everything possible to move us to someone who would take a better care of us”*⁴⁰⁷. In Montenegro, a child encouraged other children who have left never to return to the institution if they have a choice: *“They had enough of the instructors and all this for their whole life. So if they have found their way at all, they don’t even think of coming back here”*⁴⁰⁸.

The children stated that apart from their social workers, there are few individuals they can turn to for support. They suggested that they are teased or labeled by adults and children because they come from an institution and do not live with their parents: *“That’s right, then you really have no one. At least that’s what the others think. And that’s why they often call us all kinds of things, even bastards. Which is the worst... Because it’s very ugly, they also mean a heap of other things when they call you a bastard. That means you have no one and everyone rejected you so why shouldn’t they as well... Well the ones that call us names. There are some adults like that, it’s not just children”*⁴⁰⁹.

Alternatively it is said that they receive unwanted pity. A child emphasised, *“I don’t like pity”*⁴¹⁰ and yet this is the way that the public tends to treat them with little regard for their needs. As another girl in Montenegro stated, *“Well, half of them cry and we don’t need that. It’s great when someone comes here to see how we live and is really interested”*⁴¹¹.

This pity is often generated or fostered by the media’s portrayal of them, *“Because some reporters often come here and I don’t like to talk to them because they present us in a way that makes everyone pity us. That’s stupid, if we don’t have parents it does not mean we are the ones who need their pity. When they record us, then all of Montenegro pities us, as if they didn’t know about the existence of the Home...”*⁴¹².

In their attempt to raise money for the institution through publicity, children’s real concerns are ignored by journalists and the public: *“They would truly wish to hear what we want, and not like when the TV comes and we have to say how great it is in the Home and smile and be grateful because they give us some things that we need... It was nice, we sang. But you can see that everyone pities us, which really gets on my nerves”*⁴¹³. The children complained that these donations do not fulfill the care and attention that they need and want: *“And also the ones who call themselves humane and give us money for the Home, they may think they should not give money for the things we really need”*⁴¹⁴.

⁴⁰⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁰⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴⁰⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹²Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹³Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

The public's concern was often described by the children as false and intended simply to abate their own consciences: *"There, the rich ones only care for their fortunes, and don't care for us, and they pretend to care for us. What kind of a person is that, taking care of their fortune and not of children? And they all keep saying that children are their greatest fortune; right, we are a proof of that. They come here from time to time, give some money, shed a few tears, and go on taking care of their fortune"*⁴¹⁵. Even celebrities and singers who visit them fail to consider what they would like: *"This is exciting for the small kids, they dance and play, but they still don't understand that there is nothing there for them. They could have given us each at least a CD, considering all the singers were here"*⁴¹⁶.

A child stated that it is difficult sometimes for them to distinguish between people who are giving them charity or wanting them for another purpose. As one child in Montenegro stated, *"Though when we go for walks during the day, this man once asked us whether we were from the Home. We said yes, and he said he'd give us 5 Euros each. We ran away, X only stayed and took the money. It must have been someone who was here for the summer. But you never know, everyone thinks we the Home residents are so wretched, so sometimes it's charity, but maybe he wants you to do something for him. Well, I don't know, that we run an errand for him or do something his children wouldn't do, and he gives us a bit of money"*⁴¹⁷.

Children in the institution in Montenegro complained that while their subsistence needs are met, they do not receive individualized gifts and that the 5 Euros that they receive per month for pocket money was insufficient to meet their desire for luxuries. It was therefore suggested that these children might be more willing to accept the offer of material goods or employment. These children were particularly concerned about how to find employment and stated: *"Nobody cares whether we're going to need it, because now I need to find a job and I don't know what attitude to take or anything"*⁴¹⁸. A child stated that this is likely to increase the risk of exploitation for children from institutions: *"Where can you get a job immediately at 18, without being mistreated?"*⁴¹⁹. They felt that they had been inadequately prepared for living outside the institution. It is held that this might increase the risk of trafficking: *"someone should tell the ones from the Centre that it is not all the same for us when we remain with no one and nothing and that they need to provide at least something for us. Because when we leave, we may also accept all kinds of things"*⁴²⁰.

In general, the children in the institutions described a feeling social exclusion; they feel lonely and feel that they do not belong anywhere. As one child stated, *"Well, somehow, when I look at my life, it all makes me sad. Especially when I thought of leaving and realized I had no one, and I think that's how it is for everyone here at the Home, because they don't have any parents. I think life would be much nicer for me if my mother were alive. No matter what our life would be live, I think I'd feel more confident that someone cares for me. As it is, they don't care very much what we do and where we are going to be in a few years. And they keep telling us if we don't like it here we are free go any place that's better for us"*⁴²¹.

However, it is difficult for these children to find alternative places to go because they have few people to turn to for support. As a girl in Bulgaria stated, *"While the unhappiest are the ones who*

⁴¹⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴¹⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴¹⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴¹⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴²⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴²¹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

live in social care homes, who don't have parents and nobody helps them... Well, they feel rejected. Miserable. They surely don't have nice feelings for their parents who have abandoned them"⁴²².

This sentiment was reiterated by another girl who stated that this is the reason why she prefers to live at home despite the fact that she has frequent arguments with her parents: *"There is a difference when you are alone. I don't think that young people who live in institutions are happy because they are deprived from everything we have such as love and the comfort of your family"*⁴²³. Many of the children in this study prefer to live on the streets where they have a greater sense of freedom and control over their own lives.

Children working and living on the streets

A number of the children in this study were living and working on the street. Two main categories of children can be highlighted within this group:

- Children who were abandoned, "pushed" or "kicked" out of home
- Children who decided to run away from home

Children reveal how difficult it is to draw a firm line between these two groups of children. Their preference for living on the street is related to the absence of alternatives that they perceive to be viable. A parent "pushing" a child out removes an option that children perceive to be available.

The respondents state that frequently their parents have a reason for asking them to leave: *"If, for instance, his father or his mother kicks him out; if they tell him: "OK, now go out", there must be a reason why his mother and father want him out..."*⁴²⁴ It is said that the children may have been drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or breaking rules: *"Well, they sniff glue, and go home in such a state. Their mouth smells, and their mum notices it and their dad kicks them out..."*⁴²⁵. *"They told him to be drug addict, if you continue like that we will abandon you. So, he continued and they abandoned him. He kept on using drugs, sleeping at staircases and streets..."*⁴²⁶. So in this sense they feel that their parents' decision was justified because they have broken their rules, engaged in criminal activity or activity that flouts certain social conventions.

Children who choose to run away list a number of reasons including substance abuse, intimate partner violence and physical abuse. It is held that *"some children won't stand to be ill-treated at home"*⁴²⁷ and on this basis they make a decision to leave their families. Conflict seems to be one the overarching reason why children run away: *"if there is a conflict in this family and they don't want to be a part of this conflict, then they decide to go, to run away from their family"*⁴²⁸. They first weigh up what they perceive to be the available options and on this basis decide to leave.

They stated that they make their own decisions and exercise high levels of control and power over their living and working conditions on the street. It was said that on the streets they can decide if they want to work, how they would like to spend their money, and use it to buy items for themselves:

⁴²²Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁴²³Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁴²⁴Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴²⁵Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴²⁶Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 10 years old boy

⁴²⁷Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

⁴²⁸Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

“Well, some children are happy and some are not, you know. But generally they are happy when they go on the street, because, for example, when they are at home, their fathers and mothers harass them, and force them to mooch and to beg, whereas on the street they are free. They can steal and mooch, but then they can spend everything they make on themselves, while otherwise they have to give it all to their parents. And then their parents don't buy anything to the child from that money, but they spend it all on drink and on themselves, mostly”⁴²⁹.

Many of these children emphasise their independence, and their ability to set their own goals and achieve their dreams without their parent's assistance. Hence, it is believed that as parents have failed to provide support in the past, they are unlikely to do so in the future, so it may be better to leave home. Heightened levels of perceived freedom also seemed to be a persistent theme in their accounts: *“They are not afraid of their mother or father, because they are on their own; they can do whatever they like”⁴³⁰.*

It was held by the children that although it is difficult to adapt to living on the streets in the beginning, the children stated that they learn how to survive and manage, whereas children who live at home never develop these skills. Some children who are living on the streets believe that it is almost inevitable for parents to fail their children and *“leave them with nothing”*. They also highlight the manner in which having various skills is seen to be a source of resiliency, such that children living at home are more at risk because they do not know how to survive in situations of adversity.

One of these skills involves being able to determine who to turn to for support in times of trouble. On the streets the children stated that they cannot trust all people because they are frequently subject to harassment and violence. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“Well, those who beg, and those who work, I think that something could happen to them; someone could shout at them or beat them up. Well, if for example is night time, it may happen that someone will come out and pick on me, say something rude to me, or things like that. And if this time finds you out of home someone can pick on you, as our streets are very dark... I will not ask strangers. For example from someone I don't know, because you never know what kind of person he is”⁴³¹.*

It is however often difficult to tell the difference between these strangers: *“Some shout and yell, drive us off, others are good and talk to us sometimes, and give us a little. A man once gave me 10 Euros, and that was just that one time, no one gave me anything like that again. That was a long time ago, maybe last year, I can't tell. I was so happy then, and I was very happy also when I came home and we went to the shop and bought all kinds of stuff. There, you see how nice that was, and you see there are people who are not good to us; some 10 days ago a man almost broke my friend's arm. We were begging at the junction, and this guy hit this friend of mine that I often beg with, with a bottle. There are many such idiots, and this man was drunk too”⁴³².*

It is evident that small acts of kindness at the hands of strangers are greatly appreciated and remembered. Some children stated that few people provide them with help: *“I also think no one would do anything for you for free. You don't have to bother to go from one shop to the next, they'd just chase you away like a sick dog”⁴³³.*

⁴²⁹Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴³⁰Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴³¹Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old girl, school child

⁴³²Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴³³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

Another child stated that it is difficult to find work and as a result he must keep begging: “[I] go to all the shops in the town, approach the owner and ask whether he’d hire me to do some work there and teach me the trade. I gave it up each time, because it is clear to me that no one would do that or help you if they don’t know you or have some benefit from you”⁴³⁴. It is said that they are treated as though they are a public nuisance.

They complained that although street children empathise with others’ struggles, few people tend to empathise with them or try to help them. In fact, many children felt like they are treated as nothing: “no-body pays attention to the people on the streets, as if they don’t exist”⁴³⁵. In other words, many people do not recognise street children’s humanness – they are treated as non-entities without rights or needs that need to be respected and met. This sense of being excluded exacerbates their sense of helplessness in many situations, which often leads to desperate attempts to gain attention.

In a later section, it will be argued that children think that those who do not have anyone to care for them are easily “tricked” by traffickers’ attention and promises of care. In addition, it is said that children who work and live on the street are so desperate for work and income that they are easily deceived by traffickers’ promises of employment and material gifts. They find it difficult to anticipate the way that people in the general public will act towards them. This makes it difficult for them to make discerning judgments about whether an offer or gift is real or is simply a charade put on by traffickers.

Hence, despite the perceived advantages of living on the street, many child respondents felt that these children who work and live on the street face higher risk of being trafficked. A child in Kosovo stated: “Traffickers look for poor children, street children who sleep in the streets, children who run from their homes. They look for these kinds of children because it is easy to traffic them and to cheat them. They are found on the streets, in the hidden alleyways or for example in bus stations or train stations where children could sleep in”⁴³⁶. As they are living in public spaces, they can be easily found, accessed and trafficked. A child in Serbia stated that “Street children are more at risk because they have no parents to care about them”⁴³⁷. In other words, they have few people to turn for help and assistance.

It is held by the child respondents who mentioned trafficking as a risk, that traffickers can exploit this sense of loneliness that children in institutions and children living on the streets feel, by offering them attention, compliments and care.

The offer of schooling or release from schooling

Across the seven countries/entities in which this research was conducted, many children highlighted the possibility that a stranger could “trick” or “cheat” them by offering them or their parents the opportunity to study. It was also held that these strangers may offer children a chance to leave school and do something else such as having fun and adventure, finding employment, marriage or

⁴³⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴³⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁴³⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁴³⁷Serbia - individual interview, 18 years old boy, street child

an opportunity to go abroad. This section will explore this mechanism and provide reasons why children would take up either one of these offers by referring to their own experiences at school, and how these are influenced by their relationships with their parents, peers and teachers, which in turn are affected by macro socio-economic, political and cultural factors.

With regards to the promise of education, a child in Albania stated: *“A man says to the family: “Give me your son to work together, I will take him to school”, so the kidnappers lie to the parents who on their part decide to give the child”*⁴³⁸. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, a child said that given poverty and children's desire to attend school, traffickers *“tricked”* a child into going with them. They said *“they would take care of her like she was their own child and that it would be better, but they didn't they sold her to get the money. She asked them: “aren't you going to send me to school?” and they answered: “we are, after we get the money we gave to your mother from you!”*⁴³⁹.

This is echoed by a child in Montenegro who stated that poverty leads some children to believe that they will receive education, but in the end their decision to believe this promise, leads to various unintended, negative consequences: *“They come across some poor child and they promise to pay everything for them, schooling and everything. And the child thinks they would really do that. And they say this is your new home and all that. And the child realizes later that it's not the truth. And then it's late.”*⁴⁴⁰

Another child in Montenegro said that these promises might turn out to be real, so it might be risky turning them down. This is risky for a child since they might be better off living with other people, particularly if a parent is willing to give up or *“sell”* a child: *“Children don't matter here but the father and mother. It happens to the fathers who are wretched, poor, and they want to sell their baby for money... Well, I think it may turn out that child was saved, that things may be much better for the child. Who knows, those people may love him/her, look after him/her, feed him/her, send him/her to school, s/he may become a doctor. S/he's better off with those people than if s/he stayed with these who would sell him/her”*⁴⁴¹.

In other words, they make a decision knowing the potential risks but as these risks are potential, there may be a chance that going with a stranger might lead to an improvement in children's lives.

The route to and from school was seen as particularly dangerous for children because it is said that this is where traffickers can coerce them or make these false promises. It is said that as children follow the same route daily, traffickers are able to watch them and know what they may be interested in receiving. Alternatively, it is held that they visit schools to learn more about children's wants and needs, and on this basis manipulate them. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“They would go to schools and they would get more information about children on how to deceive people easier, and then they would steal the children by deceiving them”*⁴⁴².

Numerous children revealed that they had been stopped on the way to school and offered presents such as sweets or had been offered the chance to see or do something else. Other children had been or had heard about children who had been *“tricked”* through the offer of marriage. For

⁴³⁸Albania - focus group interview, 13 years old girl

⁴³⁹Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 16 years old girl

⁴⁴⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁴¹Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁴⁴²Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

instance, a child in Albania recounted the story of children who were tempted by their peers on the way to school, with the promise of marriage abroad: *“I have heard that two boys from Vlora with a nice car came across two girls who were coming home from school and asked them to go to Vlora and from there to go to Italy where they would marry them”*⁴⁴³. A child in Montenegro stated that traffickers approach children on their way to school with the offer of doing something more interesting. He explained that children might be tricked in this manner because *“you don’t do anything in school except study, which is what I am least interested in, I am a practical type of person”*⁴⁴⁴. It is said that some children do not have goals and do not know how education can be used to achieve these goals so *“they think maybe it is better if I drop out school and make money instead”*⁴⁴⁵.

On the other hand, a few children stated that those who do not attend school face a number of risks that might increase the likelihood of a child being trafficked. Negative peer influence was one such factor raised by children. In Albania a girl stated: *“She did not like to associate with the school mates and in fact she was somewhat self conceited and she was brought to Italy”*⁴⁴⁶. It is also said that school is a *“safe place”* because *“there no one can touch you”*. As a result, many children felt that those who do not attend school are more at risk of being trafficked. Some children raised the importance of school in terms of increasing children’s awareness of the risks of trafficking.

In order to understand why some children do not want to attend school temporarily or permanently and why some children and parents believe false promises of further education, it is necessary to understand the value attached to education in the research communities, and by children in particular. In other words, why would children want to leave school or why would they want to go school? Children’s perceptions of education depend upon their own experiences in this environment, which in turn are influenced by their relationships with parents/care-givers, siblings, teachers and peers.

Parents and school

Many parents encouraged school attendance and rewarded good school performance. For example, a child in Montenegro stated: *“My father is happy when I get a good mark and then I want to get another one and I want my father to be happy for me”*⁴⁴⁷.

As was suggested in relation to children and work, children often aim to please a parent that they have a positive relationship with. In this way, they fulfill their interpersonal responsibilities. On the other hand, the pressure to perform well in school also has negative consequences. A girl in Bulgaria stated that she tried to commit suicide because her poor marks disappointed her mother: *“The last time I cut my veins was because my mother was avoiding me all the time, she didn’t want to talk to me because I had a poor mark. She said that I wasn’t worthy of being her daughter because I had a poor mark and this was the first one in my life. She took it rather deeply and didn’t want to talk to me”*⁴⁴⁸.

Other children complained that they were subject to parental corporal punishment if they did not

⁴⁴³Albania - focus group interview, 8 years old girl, internal migrant

⁴⁴⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁴⁵Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁴⁴⁶Albania - focus group interview, 13 years old girl

⁴⁴⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴⁴⁸Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

attend school and/or did not perform well. In this sense, parental support and encouragement may in fact turn out not to be a source of resilience or strength for some children but a risk in terms of causing further pain and violence.

Many children stated that their parents purchased their stationary and books for school. The children provided mixed information about how or whether a parent would enforce school attendance. For instance, a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that when she is unhappy at school her parents allow her to leave because they believe in her. *"When I feel bad, when school is not going fine they pull me out. They trust me and I deserve that trust"*⁴⁴⁹. So high parental support might be a risk in relation to school attendance, a parent who listens to a child and empathises with their daily troubles might permit this child to stay at home and not go to school.

Peer-to-peer violence in schools emerged as one of the reasons why children did not want to attend school and why some parents were willing to allow them not to attend. For instance, a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that her parents complained about bullying to the school, so a school policeman was provided. A child working on the streets in Kosovo stated that her father had to speak to a teacher about the manner in which his daughter was being bullied by a peer. When this failed to elicit results, he decided to stop her from attending school⁴⁵⁰.

Sometimes, parents accompany their children to and from school to guard against this potential violence. Another issue of concern for both parents and children was physical violence at the hands of teachers. For instance, a child in Kosovo stated that her father had to intervene and speak to her teacher about it: *"I told my Dad, and he went to talk to the teacher, and he asked her why you are beating up my daughter. If there is a need for it I will do it myself. Then she told him that I did it so she would learn for the future and read the books I tell her to"*⁴⁵¹. On the other hand, a child in Kosovo said that parents often complain that teachers treat their children too well: *"There were also those parents who came to school and said to the teacher why are you spoiling my son or daughter"*⁴⁵².

Parents' decisions to allow their children to attend school are also contingent upon their relationships and interactions with other actors such as teachers, school inspectors, social workers and policemen. A child in Serbia stated that when he was picked up from the streets by the police, his father was ordered to send him to school: *"When the police brought us in, an inspector told my old man that if she heard that his children were not at school, she'd put him in prison. My old man got scared and that is why he tells us to go to school"*⁴⁵³.

Macro-factors were also raised as important by children when discussing school attendance. A child in Montenegro stated that when his family first arrived in the IDP camp from Kosovo he was not able to attend school for two years. A child in Kosovo stated that after the war her parents did not allow her to attend school because *"it was a scary time"*⁴⁵⁴. Poverty is another factor that should be considered. A child working on the streets of Bosnia-Herzegovina described a friend whose father begs door-to-door so that he can send his children to school. A child in Bulgaria stated that children only attend school because there is legal requirement that they do so if they

⁴⁴⁹Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 8 years old girl

⁴⁵⁰Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁴⁵¹Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁴⁵²Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁴⁵³Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴⁵⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, street child

would like to receive social benefits⁴⁵⁵. Some children complained that their parents do not help them with studying because they are illiterate and/or have never attended school since they grew up in times of poverty.

A child in Montenegro suggested that he stopped attending school because she was ashamed that he had to assist his parents with work. In terms of priorities, some parents do not see the longer-term value of school attendance and instead feel it is more important to ensure the immediate survival of a household: *“They think it is possible to live without school and they needed me to help out so that was how that went”*⁴⁵⁶. This involves caring for younger siblings, doing house chores or earning money.

Some parents simply cannot afford to send children to school. As a child working on the streets of Kosovo stated, *“In the beginning of the school year my parents would ensure my books, notebooks, my school bag and a piece of clothes but you can not go one whole year with only one pair of clothes, I needed more... We get through somehow. It is like this; my father goes to weddings and we assure from that the things we need for the whole year, for example fire wood, flower, sugar, oil. So, we have very little left for school, we don’t have enough. Because of that I had to quit school. This year it is even worse, because previously there was something that could be made but this year it is very bad...”*⁴⁵⁷.

School enrollment also depends on socio-cultural norms around gender. Some parents forbid girls of a certain age from attending school, for some of the reasons highlighted in previous sections: they do not want the girls to interact with boys and/or be sexually harassed or abused as this would bring shame on the girl and on the family. So it was said to be done out of concern for their daughters’ wellbeing. Some children are willing to accept these restrictions even though they do not agree with them. For instance, a girl in Montenegro stated that she was willing to accept these restrictions because it is her duty to obey them.

When describing a drawing of her life, a girl described the day she left school was said to be the saddest day of her life. This was seen as unjust given that her brother, who did not enjoy attending school, could continue to attend: *“I’ve been put here on my life path, as the saddest day of my life, the day when father said I was not to go to school any more, I’d gone enough and it was time for me to stay home and my brother could continue going to school if he wanted. There, he could and I couldn’t. And I like going to school more than he does”*⁴⁵⁸.

A child in Kosovo stated that this will have negative longer term effects for women: *“Boys have more rights because boys are allowed to go to school by their parents, while girls aren’t. Girls are made to stay home by their parents... That’s a big problem, they are not capable to manage their own lives, they can’t get jobs, not even as cleaners, and when they get married then they children will laugh at their mothers for not being able to write and read”*⁴⁵⁹.

Parents often believed that education is one way in which children can fulfill their hopes and dreams. Children agreed with this to varying extents. For instance, a child in Montenegro suggests that education needs to be placed within a social context and even when one is educated, one

⁴⁵⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁴⁵⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴⁵⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

⁴⁵⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁴⁵⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, street child

will not necessarily succeed because it depends on a range of factors: *“I often talk to my father about life. He always urges me to study and he thinks that’s the most important and everything is going to be OK, I just need to finish school. I am not that sure it works that way, although I too think that school is important and I like it and wish to finish it. I think much depends on other people as well, and the state, and if I finish school, that would not guarantee me a good life”*⁴⁶⁰. On the other hand, it was held by a child in Kosovo that uneducated parents will not see the value of education and will therefore teach their children that it is not important.

Fears about trafficking also affect school attendance. In Bulgaria, a girl suggested that parents do not let their children study in town because they are afraid that they will be trafficked. A child in Albania stated that she would like to attend school to become a singer, and although her mother supports her, her father feels that she should not attend school because she is a girl, and because she might be at risk of being trafficked: *“My dad says to her “someone will kidnap her and you will find your daughter somewhere cut into pieces”*⁴⁶¹.

Teachers and school

Some children described their teachers in a positive light and suggested that these positive relationships inspire them to attend school. The desire to fulfill their interpersonal duties towards a teacher motivates them to perform well: *“When she gives me praise like that and says I’m good, I study more”*⁴⁶². This praise was said to make children feel *“happy, cheerful and great”*, particularly if it is sincere. Teachers’ recommendations were seen as an important requisite to allow children to continue attending school at the next level, and to allow them to attend school events, camps and workshops. Some children said that it was important to share their problems with teachers and/or listen to them. It was also said that teachers notice when children are missing and can notify parents if they think there is a problem. So in a sense, teachers are an early identification mechanism for children who may be at risk, as described by a child in Romania who stated that a girl decided to run away from school but after the teacher notified her parents and authorities she was found.

Children also stated that teachers intervene when they are being bullied by their peers: *“she takes them by the ear and its over”*⁴⁶³. A child who was begging on the streets of Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that a teacher, who had seen him work, scolded him initially but also provided books which he could use at school.

So in this sense, attending school could be a resiliency factor because this environment is seen as protected and safe from strangers who children said, could hurt and trick them. It is also said that teachers provide them with information about trafficking and warn them *“not to speak with people whom we do not know”*⁴⁶⁴. In general, it is said that some teachers help children to make good decisions: *“they help me to choose what to do. They give me examples”*⁴⁶⁵.

On the other hand, children often described their relationships with their teachers in a negative

⁴⁶⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴⁶¹Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

⁴⁶²Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴⁶³Serbia - focus group interview, 13 years old boy, shelter child

⁴⁶⁴Albania - focus group interview, 8 years old girl, internal migrant

⁴⁶⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

light and stated that this had an adverse affect upon their school performance and their desire to attend school. Children complained that they were criticized and insulted by their teachers not only for not doing well but because they come from a particular family. For instance, a child in Romania stated that teachers criticize children who come from large families: *“She has had problems with some teachers in the past because they have had preconceived ideas concerning the families with many children, and she is part of a family made of 8 children”*⁴⁶⁶.

So teachers are influenced by their own beliefs about childhood and child rearing and communicate this to children. Alternatively it is said that children are subject to corporal punishment, or other forms of extreme punishment. For instance, a child in Serbia stated that children were scared because they were made to stand facing a wall by a teacher. They also complained that instead of helping them overcome bullying, they are punished by their teachers for being disruptive. They stated that if they complained they are blamed and conditions become worse for them. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“Pupils should have freedom of speech and the teacher should not always be the one who is right. We do not even dare to complain because we are always found guilty”*⁴⁶⁷.

Some children complained that if they tell their parents about the way they are being treated by their teachers they are not believed by their parents or teachers. Children generally complain that parents and other adults do not give them the benefit of the doubt, and because they do not trust them, they are more likely to blame them than support them in times of trouble. Instead, the peer group is often seen as a more reliable and effective form of support.

Often children need to get their peers to intervene on their behalf when dealing with a violent teacher. A child in Kosovo stated: *“Once I had this problem with my Albanian language teacher, because she gave us this book to read and I didn’t have that book and I couldn’t find it, so I didn’t read it, and then she beat me up very much. My friend also didn’t read that book, but because the teacher knew her from somewhere else she didn’t even lay a finger on her, but beat me up. I stood up for my self, and then a friend of mine, he was very nice to me, he told the teacher not to beat me up and that I was the oldest in the class. But then there was nothing else I could do, so I just went home”*⁴⁶⁸.

It is said that teachers cannot be relied upon to provide support, so children turn to their friends for advice: *“I usually go to my friends as I don’t have any other place I or we can go and complain. For example, we can not go to the principal because he does not care about us much, he tells us to deal with it ourselves”*⁴⁶⁹.

In terms of being able to identify children at risk, some children stated that as teachers do not care about children they do not care whether a child is facing problems. A child in Kosovo stated that her teachers did not even try to find out why she was absent from school; this was in fact related to maltreatment at home: *“As long as I was in school I have never able to talk to anyone about my problems, because the teachers never actually asked me what was wrong with me. I was absent from school a lot and no one even bothered to ask why was I doing that”*⁴⁷⁰.

It is said that teachers only favour certain children. A girl in Kosovo stated that only certain

⁴⁶⁶Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl

⁴⁶⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁴⁶⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁴⁶⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁴⁷⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

children are allowed to participate in activities and the school principal only selects favoured pupils to see the Advisor for the Children's Rights. Another child in Kosovo complained that only the "best students" are included in activities, celebrations and memorial day events. A child in Bulgaria stated that some teachers demand sex in exchange for good marks: *"There are teachers who want to have sex with you to write you an excellent"*⁴⁷¹. It was held that teachers are easily bribed by children and as a result, children from wealthier families are favoured more. For instance, a child in Romania complained: *"The teachers are also a problem. They give worse marks to children who do not bring "presents" to them. I rather take a mark on what I know than giving "presents" to teachers... It doesn't seem normal that such a thing would happen in the sense that differences are made when giving marks and children from wealthy families are favoured"*⁴⁷². This was echoed by another child in Bulgaria who stated that teachers will only pay attention to children or answers their questions if money is given to them, often to the disadvantage of poor children.

A child from a poor family in Kosovo complained that simply because she needed social assistance and free books, she was branded and labeled by the teachers an orphan. Not only did this make her feel unhappy but it enhanced levels of teasing and bullying at the hands of her peers.

The manner in which teachers treat children is also affected by ethnic prejudices. For instance, a child in Romania stated that teachers only borrow money to poor Romanian children, but not Roma children⁴⁷³. It was also said that teachers do not accommodate language differences so that Roma children find it difficult to follow lessons: *"they gave us difficult home works in Romanian and oh, when they make me study and when they teach in class... it is tough, I couldn't understand it anymore"*⁴⁷⁴. This cannot be seen apart from the broader discrimination that Roma communities face, problems with official recognition and the fact that minority rights are rarely promoted in many communities.

Many Roma children stated that they were discriminated against by teachers in terms of seating in the class, grades and punishment. A child in Kosovo stated: *"Roma pupils are never put in the front benches in school, they are always pushed at the end of the classroom, the teachers don't show interest for them, they only work with the children that are in the front benches, they don't even look at the Roma's who are at the end. When the end of the school year comes they give them a pass grade, but don't ask whether these children have learned anything or not"*⁴⁷⁵.

So it is argued that a trafficker may exploit children and parents' desire for further education, or their desire to leave school. In terms of the former, in the literature school attendance is often described as a resiliency factor. Many children agree as it gives them access to information and social supports. However, the desire for further schooling might increase the likelihood that a child will believe the promises of a trafficker. In terms of the latter, many children are unhappy about their experiences at school, and their treatment at the hands of their teachers and peers, so might be willing to accept the offers if a person who promises them that they can leave school and take part in other activities.

⁴⁷¹Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁴⁷²Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl

⁴⁷³Romania - individual interview, 10 years old boy

⁴⁷⁴Romania - individual interview, 4 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴⁷⁵Kosovo - focus group interview, girls 10-17 years old

Claiming to be or know a relative

“Can you imagine a close friend or a relative to deceive you and to sell you in order to make some money?”⁴⁷⁶

Despite the attention directed to the danger posed by strangers some of the children highlighted the role of relatives in the process of trafficking. This was mentioned in relation to arranged marriages: *“There are even relatives and people who allegedly ask the girl’s hand to marry, the marriage takes place and they take the girl”⁴⁷⁷.*

Relatives are also said to play a role in the context of migration, although some children are skeptical of whether this amounts to trafficking: *“I’ve heard of these things I’ve just told you about children going to live with a relative, and there is talk of some parents taking money from someone and sending their children to live there with a relative and some people say they are not their relatives at all. I don’t get that. It’s just people saying such things. How could it happen that someone sells his own child - that’s impossible.”⁴⁷⁸*

It is also said that traffickers pretend to know a relative and on this basis are able to “trick” children into going with them. For instance, a child in Albania stated: *“In the street, for instance they can cheat them pretending to be dad’s friend and asks them to go out for coffee. The car is empty, he gets the child on the car and takes him wherever he wants”⁴⁷⁹.*

In order to understand the potential role played by relatives in the process of trafficking and why traffickers would pretend to be a relative or friend, it is necessary to first describe children’s relationships with their relatives, and how this is often compared to their fear of strangers. Emphasis will be placed on the importance of trust in defining children’s perception of these relationships.

Strangers

Across the seven countries/entities in which this research was conducted, child respondents emphasised that it was important not to trust people too easily and that children should only listen to, or follow the advice of someone that they know or care about. It is said that children need to carefully evaluate the other person’s character and intentions.

For instance, a child in an institution in Montenegro stated: *“I don’t like the people whose intentions you can’t be sure about, and I am sometimes afraid of what they may do”⁴⁸⁰.* This is echoed by another child who stated that one needs be wary of people who act too nice or are too complimentary: *“I’m immediately suspicious of those who suck up to me too much and I don’t see the reason. I always think someone wants something from me”⁴⁸¹.* As a recommendation to children who might be at risk of trafficking, a child in Romania suggested that children should know who to avoid, who to believe and who to turn to for support. Trust seemed to be the key criterion: *“They should not talk to just anybody, they should not follow those who promise them I don’t know what. Otherwise how can you*

⁴⁷⁶Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls 14-16 years old, school children

⁴⁷⁷Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

⁴⁷⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴⁷⁹Albania - focus group interview, 11 years old girl

⁴⁸⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁸¹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

protect yourself? If you are smart, it cannot happen to you. You must not trust everybody. And you must know who to turn to when you are in trouble because there are plenty of people who can help you"⁴⁸².

In particular, children emphasised that it is important not to trust strangers because their intentions are unknown: *"I am afraid of strangers. Well, I am afraid they might hit me or kill me... because I don't know them and they are worse if they don't know you"*.⁴⁸³

Children stated that they would not ask strangers for assistance. As a child living on the streets of Kosovo stated, *"I would never ask for help from people I don't know"*⁴⁸⁴. This is echoed by another child in Kosovo in relation to safety and danger: *"People I don't know make me feel unsafe... I would never ask for help from people I don't trust"*⁴⁸⁵.

Hence, there is a general fear of strangers and hesitation about asking them for help or assistance. The strangers that must be avoided have particular characteristics according to different children in different communities. Many girls emphasised that they fear men in particular. This fear emerged from the warning they received from their parents, stories that had been relayed to them by friends and other members of the community, and actual experiences of harassment and violence at the hands of men. Many of the girls complained about being called names by men walking on the streets or driving in their cars. Some said they had been chased by men or had been nearly assaulted by them. They were particularly concerned about being raped. Their fears of men were often related to deception, being *"tricked"* and *"cheated"* in the course of trafficking.

When explaining why she feared men, a girl living on the streets of Kosovo recounted an incident where someone tried to *"trick"* her into going with them through the offer of money, which she was able to thwart by running away: *"Me and my sister we were at Kaqa's, and so was my cousins, and it was almost 22:00 and there was this man who approached us and wanted to cheat us with 10 cents, and when he saw that we weren't going along he offered 50 cents and he wanted to put us in a car. I saw that he was keeping the door of his car opened and I knew straight away that something could happen to us, so we crossed the road very fast and we ran. My sister got very scared, like very scared, but not me, I didn't even cry, and my sister and my cousin cried a lot"*⁴⁸⁶.

It was said that the threat posed by men, was not something that only girls should be concerned about. A girl in Kosovo highlighted an incident where a boy who was working with her on the streets was murdered by a man who promised him employment, and on this basis she has decided to never accept job offers, especially if they come from men: *"He could do something, for example a boy who was working by the traffic lights, he was a friend of mine, I knew him, and then this man told him would you want to come with me to work and he did. And then this boy disappeared, and his family found him few days later dead, killed. And ever since that happened I do not go anymore with anyone to work for them, especially if it is a male. It might happen that they can ever rape. This one time for example this boy told me do you want to come with me for money, and I told him no, and I started running away straight away and went by this other car, and it was day time when he said that to me"*⁴⁸⁷.

⁴⁸²Romania - individual interview, 18 years old girl

⁴⁸³Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy

⁴⁸⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁴⁸⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, school child

⁴⁸⁶Kosovo- individual interview, 9 years old girl, street child

⁴⁸⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

In other contexts, the children identified criminals, “drunks” and “junkies” as people who could not be trusted. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“The safest place is the family, the school. For me these places are safe, as for unsafe places it is the places where there are criminals”*⁴⁸⁸. It has been shown that the family and school environments are not always perceived as safe by children. Nevertheless, the fact that they are taught to fear strangers and on this basis make decisions is important, since the people that often hurt them are their parents, siblings, friends and relatives; in other words, people they know.

Children in the institution in Montenegro complained that former residents would become intoxicated and sleep near their institution. In Montenegro and Romania children raised concerns about people who take drugs or drink on the streets. As one child stated, *“I am afraid of strangers. I was once in the street and a drunk hit me because I didn’t give him money. Well, I am afraid they might hit me or kill me... because I don’t know them and they are worse if they don’t know you”*.⁴⁸⁹

In regard to drugs, children highlighted marijuana, sniffing glue and the use of heroin. These children were concerned that drug addicts would steal their money to purchase more drugs. It is said that people who drink are more likely to get into a fight and hurt children without due cause: *“They’d disfigure you just like that, just because you didn’t engage in their talk or you answered back to them, they don’t need any special reasons or motive”*⁴⁹⁰.

Children in Romania in particular highlighted their fear of strangers who belong to Roma ethnic groups. As a child from an institution stated, *“For me and many children in here, Gypsies are the worst people of all”*⁴⁹¹. Some state that they have had negative experiences with these individuals, but others suggest that they have heard of these stories or been warned about them from other individuals. For instance, a child in Romania said that he is scared of “Gypsies” because they steal from children because *“it has happened to a boy and he got robbed and beaten by the Gypsies”*⁴⁹².

Another girl described the experiences of a friend who was robbed by “Gypsies”: *“She doesn’t go out to take a walk in the street because in the neighborhood where she lives there are a lot of Gypsies. They come at girls, they spit girls they touch their bottoms.” She says: “Gypsies are dangerous, they steal and they bang people in the head. They even broke into their house once, even in their kitchen and they took several things from their house. She and her mother, they were lucky because they were not at home because she believes they could have done something to them too”*⁴⁹³.

From their accounts, it is evident that many of their fears are based on or are derived from general discriminatory attitudes towards the Roma in many Romanian communities, and that they are not grounded in truth or reality. Nevertheless, the fact that children may make decisions on the basis of these false beliefs needs to be emphasized. This may mean that they avoid Roma people, and unwittingly place their trust in people who come from other ethnic groups, who might actually be more likely to harm, exploit or traffic them.

Children from Roma communities feel this discrimination acutely. A child working on the streets

⁴⁸⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁴⁸⁹Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy

⁴⁹⁰Montenegro -. focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁴⁹¹ Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁴⁹²Romania - individual interview, 4 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁴⁹³Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl

of Kosovo complained, *"I like that I am a Roma, but I hate it when they call me Gypsy"*⁴⁹⁴. This was reiterated by another child in this context: *"It happens that sometimes someone calls you Gypsy, and when that happens I feel very bad then"*⁴⁹⁵.

Interestingly, many non-Roma children living in an institution state that Roma adults and children tease them or discriminate against them. So in a sense, social exclusion and discrimination operates at multiple levels. When asked how she would like to improve her town, a girl from a Romanian institution stated:

*"At first, I would like our town to be cleaner, with less Gypsies, who swear and spit you. I would like to change the behaviour of the people around us, even the elder persons take it against you with no reason. In what concerns the Gypsies, what bothers me most is that they always say: "look, there's one of those in the placement centre". I got angry one day and I told them: "you don't eat at home the food I eat here, the heat I have here you don't have at home, so shut up and stop saying that, it's true, I live in the centre, but look at the place you live in, you don't have what to eat, you have to beg for living, tell your mother to get a job and stop begging"*⁴⁹⁶.

She responded to their discrimination and harassment, by referring to various stereotypes about the Roma (e.g. that *"begging is in their blood"*) as a means of retaliation against their teasing.

In addition to ethnicity, some children highlighted nationality as a factor that needs to be taken into account when deciding whether to trust a stranger. For instance, in Northern Mitrovica, a child was concerned that they will be attacked by Albanians across the bridge. In Kosovo, children also highlighted the role of Italians, Americans and criminals from the Czech Republic who collaborate with Albanians when trafficking children.

Children adopt a range of strategies when attempting to deal with these individuals whom they fear. One of these strategies is simply not to talk to strangers or place trust in a stranger. Another strategy is to turn only to relatives for support in times of trouble. It will be argued that while some children depend on relatives whom they regard to be trustworthy, in some cases these relatives are actually responsible for maltreating, exploiting or trafficking them. In addition, traffickers may pretend to be friends with a relative in order to *"trick"* a child into going with him/her; in other words, they exploit children's fear of strangers and reliance on relatives.

Trustworthy relatives

Apart from parents, siblings and members of the wider kin network were often described in positive terms. It is said that siblings not only provide general guidance and moral support, they also play an active role in teaching their younger siblings how to act, and in protecting their younger and/or female siblings from negative advances, harassment or violence.

These siblings play an important role particularly when a parent is absent. They often encourage their siblings not to work on the streets and to attend school. They advise them on how to avoid physical hazards on the street and how to avoid being taken to an institution by the police.

⁴⁹⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, street child

⁴⁹⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁴⁹⁶Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

As a child in Serbia stated, *“Well, for instance, if I didn’t have dad and mum, my brother would help me, at least a little. He would help me, for instance, if I didn’t know how to do something. He would tell me to go to school and so on and not to wipe windscreens. Wiping windscreens is no good; some children died; it’s dangerous. They could put you in a home, take you anywhere, and stuff”*⁴⁹⁷.

In Kosovo a girl working on the streets stated that her brother, who was also working on the streets, had informed her that she has rights and has told her who to contact him if she is threatened or hurt: *“Well, we children also have rights, and I got this idea from my brother, he works with trolley, he told me “You have your rights”, and he said should anything happen to me then I should go and tell the police immediately”*⁴⁹⁸.

The relationship between siblings was often gendered, in that girls turned to their sisters for advice and “cheering up”. On the other hand, both girls and boys stated that they turn to their brothers for protection against harassment and violence. As a child in Albania stated, *“when somebody beats me or calls me bad names, I tell my brother. He always helps me. He [brother] keeps me close and always protects me when someone beats me up. Here there are many bad people. They know that I am working and want to take my money on my way back home. Once they beat me and my brother came back and gave them a taste of their own medicine”*⁴⁹⁹.

It is interesting that in a number of cases the children state that they initially contact their fathers if they need protection but their fathers tend to send their brothers out to come to their assistance. For instance, a child working on the streets of Kosovo said: *“This boy hit me last night, and then I pushed him and poured all his peanuts on the ground, and then my brother came and beat him up... One day there were these girls who also wanted to beat us up, you know, they told me and my sister that we have stolen their idea about selling peanuts. I am telling you no one dares to even touch me, because I just pop to the post office and call my dad. It is only 30 cents and he gets my brother out to get me straight away”*⁵⁰⁰.

This was a deliberate strategy that children working on the streets developed in discussion with their parents and siblings when faced with threats to their safety and security.

In the IDP camp in Montenegro, the children stated that it is not safe for girls to walk around on their own, so they tend to be accompanied by a male sibling. Some of the girls appreciated this protection but also highlighted the fact that their brothers have the right to use violence against them if they step out of line by breaking a rule or social norm. As one girl stated, *“Well, they are ready to help me, so I think they are good, and my brothers will protect me always; I just shouldn’t do something wrong because then they would get angry with me and they may punish me”*⁵⁰¹. Boys in Albania testify to accompanying their sisters to and from school to protect them.

Children also protect their younger and physically smaller siblings from harassment and violence. A working child in Kosovo explained that the source of her insecurity on the streets lay in the fact that she could be easily beaten up because she is smaller, when compared to her brother. He is enlisted to protect her, *“Because we are smaller and someone could beat us up, some other boy but*

⁴⁹⁷Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁴⁹⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁴⁹⁹Albania - focus group interview, 11 years old boy, internal migrant

⁵⁰⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁵⁰¹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

they don't beat up my brother because he beats them... my brother he looks after us when we go out selling"⁵⁰². Disabilities were also a factor behind sibling protection. For instance, a child in Serbia stated: *"My brother was disabled... My brother says to me, "Hey, that boy over, he is hassling me." And I tell to the boy, "Why do you hassle him? Don't you hassle him anymore." I've always protected him"*⁵⁰³.

Siblings also share money or work to fulfill their interpersonal responsibilities towards each other. A child in Kosovo stated that her brother carries and sells goods in the market and uses some of this money to purchase her school books. She stated that he also purchased her a telephone which she can use when she is in trouble or needs assistance.

Siblings also pool resources or divide work tasks to increase their earnings and/or improve their working conditions. For instance, a child in Albania stated that in order to shorten their time selling newspapers on the streets, he collaborates with his brother: *"We work together and share the newspapers. So we are done earlier and may sell all the newspapers. I get thirty or forty newspapers while my brother gets twenty or twenty five"*⁵⁰⁴.

Members of the wider kin network also emerged as significant in the children's lives with particular reference to cousins, uncles, aunts and grandmothers. They provide material support to a struggling family; advice and support to a child who has particular concerns about a parent or does not feel free to share their problems with a parent and cares when a parent was absent. In some cases they intervene in cases of abuse.

In terms of sharing problems, children emphasised that it is important to find someone who listens to them, someone that they can trust and trusts them in turn as well as someone whom they know will keep their concerns confidential. In many cases, children stated that their parents fail on all three accounts. They do not listen to them, they do not trust them and they share their problems with the rest of the family and sometimes neighbours and other people in the community. On the other hand, children said that sometimes they can share their concerns with a relative, particularly when they relate to the action (e.g. abuse, punishment) of a parent, breaking rules set by a parent (e.g. dating boys) or when a relative lives outside of their home community and will therefore maintain confidentiality and *"keep their secrets"*.

Children are very careful and selective when it comes to divulging personal and often traumatic stories, as is evident in the following quote by a child working on the streets of Bosnia-Herzegovina who had experienced abuse: *"My aunt, I mean, I didn't want to tell her as well; I told and trusted no one. They told me I would feel better if I told the story to someone but I kept on saying that nothing happened to me and that I was OK. That's what I was saying, but when I wasn't able to keep it all inside I told them everything"*⁵⁰⁵.

This process of sharing has a significant impact on a child's sense of well-being. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated that she discusses her concerns about her mother's illness with her aunt and this helps alleviate some of her pain and worries: *"When my mother is sick, or someone else in the family, that's when I'm saddest, really, I feel lost. Then I spend time with my sister-in-law or my best*

⁵⁰²Kosovo - individual interview, 8 years old girl, street child

⁵⁰³Serbia - focus group interview, 11 years old boy, shelter child

⁵⁰⁴Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, internal migrant

⁵⁰⁵Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, street child

friend. The sadness doesn't go away immediately, but I feel better. My sister-in-law can help me when I'm sad, I share that with her and then I'm cheerful again"⁵⁰⁶.

The absence of a parent was related to divorce, abandonment, death or work. For instance, a child in Romania was living with her grandmother because her mother works as a waitress and her father as a car mechanic abroad. When asked how she feels about her mother's departure, this girl responded: "I felt good because I know she went there for our sake. She is not like other parents are, they don't care about their children. I am not alone here, I am with my grandma. I like to be with my grandma, I get along fine with her. How can I be sorry when I know that everything she does, she does it for our sake?"⁵⁰⁷. In other words, she did not complain about her mothers' absence because she knew that her mother was working to support her, and she was well-cared for by her grandmother. However, she also expressed the desire to migrate to join her mother, which her grandmother cautioned her about but did not seem to discourage.

The death or absence of a parent was said to cause great distress and for some children this absence was described as more painful than an experience of violence. For instance, a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina was orphaned after her mother died when she was 5 years old, and her father died of lung cancer. She stated: "It's very embarrassing. When my father died I wasn't able to talk at all for 3 days and when I started to talk I faltered and it remained that way... Yes, it was a shock, I've seen doctors for that. They told me it would stop as I grow older"⁵⁰⁸.

Children, whose parents migrated abroad for the purposes of work, also expressed initial shock and a feeling of loneliness. For instance, a child in Romania stated: "I was upset, I was feeling abandoned"⁵⁰⁹ after her mother went to Spain to work as a waitress and she moved in with her grandmother.

These children often stated that they were not willing to forgive their parents for this abandonment. A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that she was left with her grandmother and aunt when her mother died and her father left her and refused to see her.

Another child in Bulgaria described parents who abandon their children as "evil", "cruel" and "unforgivable", even if they leave them with relatives⁵¹⁰. Many children who have been abandoned also describe a sense of loneliness and the feeling that they have been excluded and don't belong. As a result many rely on their relatives for support, protection and advice.

Some relatives advise children not to work on the streets, and even provide them with material assistance to remove the need for working on the streets. This material assistance often comes with strings attached, which children are not able to fulfill. Many children highlighted the fact that their relatives living abroad (e.g. Germany, Switzerland) send their families money to assist them. As discussed in a previous section, these relatives also facilitate children's journey abroad by providing letters of invitation, finding them jobs and providing them with accommodation.

So it is argued by children that one of the mechanisms by which traffickers "trick" children is by

⁵⁰⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁰⁷Romania - individual interview, 13 years old girl

⁵⁰⁸Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁵⁰⁹ Romania - individual interview, 14 years old girl

⁵¹⁰Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls 14-16 years old, school children

pretending to know a relative. This is significant because many children trust their relatives whom they describe in a positive light for the reasons mentioned above, and on this basis they may decide to go with a person who on the surface, and by virtue of his relationship with a relative, no longer seems to be a stranger.

Untrustworthy relatives

While siblings were described in a positive light by many respondents, they were also criticized for failing to listen to them, trust them or provide them with adequate support. For instance, a child in Montenegro complained about his brother's way to assisting him with problems that he faces: *"He also deals with everything by shouting, like father. That's why I don't call him. He knows how I feel and how much I feel afraid of father. Why shouldn't he try to talk to father and explain him? Maybe, if my brother were different, he'd understand that and would do that, but as it is he doesn't understand what I want from him even if I spent the whole day explaining it to him. My brother thinks I keep making things up"*⁵¹¹.

A girl in Bosnia-Herzegovina was worried about her brother's behaviour. She stated that he is connected to a gang, uses drugs regularly and believes that he might have murdered someone. She complained about being placed in a difficult position because the police have asked her for information but she doesn't want to betray him, and yet she feels that she cannot share her concerns with relatives who will not believe her.

Some children complained that their siblings use physical violence against them, and this is permitted because they are older or are male: *"For example in my family my oldest brother can do whatever he wants, but us girls can not, besides that he hits us sisters"*⁵¹². It is said that boys attempt to protect their sisters is often misguided and unwanted in that *"We girls mind that sometimes and it causes problems for us"*⁵¹³. Some children stated that their siblings actually force them to work and take their earnings; in other words, siblings may be exploiters in different contexts.

Other relatives are also described in a negative light. Some children complained that their relatives did not provide their families with material assistance or failed to help them migrate abroad. Other children complained that their relatives do not listen to them and do not respect the decisions that they (or their parents) make. They are very critical of relatives who criticize members of their immediate family. For instance, a child in Montenegro complained about an aunt who does not understand and does not respect his decision to work and the economic struggles that his father is facing and seeking to overcome:

"When I go to these other ones, my aunt just criticizes me and she doesn't care how I am doing and what happened or didn't happen to me in the town. She always says it's a great shame my father has taught me to beg and makes me go to the town and beg. I tell her my father does not make me go, I want to go myself, but she never listens to what you have to say, she always tells just the things she has to say... My aunt says my father has to find a way to earn some money himself, rather than send me to the streets to beg. My father is good and things are not as she says. He walks, searches the bins each day to find something and that's why I have to help. Maybe my father can't find any other work? It's not that he

⁵¹¹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵¹²Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

⁵¹³Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

wouldn't be doing something if he had a chance"⁵¹⁴.

In other words, the aunt not only failed to listen to him but she did not respect his father, or the boy's decision to fulfill his interpersonal responsibilities to his father by working.

It is also said that relatives do not provide support when it is needed or that their assistance is misguided or unwanted. A child in Montenegro complained that even though her aunt and uncle live next door and witness the violence that he experiences at the hands of her father, they do not interfere because they want to avoid an argument with her father and because they see this as a private, family matter: *"My uncle knows he shouldn't help me if I have done something wrong, that's for my father to deal with"*⁵¹⁵.

It is also said that relatives break children's trust, they gossip about their actions and often tell their parents if they have broken a rule or a social norm. For instance, a girl in Albania complained that her relatives make up stories about her movements to suggest that she was spending time with boys: *"It is my aunts and uncles. They come here and insult me even if I have not done something bad. They collect information and say "you were there". I do not accept it and say "No", then they beat me"*⁵¹⁶. Relatives also use violence against children. For instance, an Albanian child living in Greece with her aunt, complained that her uncle used to hit her if she did not earn enough money: *"One day my aunt's husband hit me in my lips as I had not made enough money"*⁵¹⁷. Some children stated that these relatives actually pushed them to work or engage in criminal activities using deception and manipulation. For instance, an identified victim of trafficking in Bulgaria stated: *"My other aunt taught me how to steal when I was young. I was living with her when I was small... She told me that if I don't learn how to steal my mother and father won't love me"*⁵¹⁸.

Hence, it is suggested that traffickers may pretend to know a relative, be a relative or care for them as relatives should do, in their attempts to "trick" children to go with them. Positive relationships with relatives have been described in the literature as a resiliency factor for children as they are a source of advice and protection. This section has revealed the extent to which this can be manipulated by traffickers, who exploit the fear of strangers and positive view of relatives. It has also been shown that relatives may themselves provide negative advice, hurt or exploit children. In general, teaching children simply to "fear strangers" does not provide them with enough information about the risks that relatives can pose or place children in.

Claiming to know a friend or pretending to be a friend

When discussing the mechanisms by which children are trafficked, many children highlighted the role of friends. It is said that some traffickers pretend to be a friend or know a friend, and on this basis "trick" children into agreeing to go with them abroad where they will be trafficked at a later stage. It is also said that friends encourage children to go with traffickers or advise them to become involved in activities that might put them at risk of trafficking. It is said that some friends can be relied upon to protect children against trafficking, but in some cases they are complicit or simply

⁵¹⁴Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵¹⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵¹⁶Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

⁵¹⁷Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl

⁵¹⁸Bulgaria - individual interview, 10 years old girl, trafficked child

fail to provide timely support and assistance. Alternatively, it is said that traffickers specifically target children who have no friends.

Some of the children argued that traffickers pretend to be friends. For instance, a child in an institution in Romania stated: *“There are many girls who do this in Spain and Italy, I know a girl who lived in the centre and decided to go there without being forced. A friend of hers invited her there but he actually made her go so she would prostitute herself. She thought she was going there to be near her friend”*⁵¹⁹. A child in Bulgaria suggested that if he was a trafficker he would try to develop a friendly relationship with a child who he would like to traffic, in order to gain her trust and consent: *“At first I was thinking how to impress her that’s why in the beginning I was talking to her as if I was flirting with her because there are girls who are easy to impress. When she told me that she had bought a drink and she didn’t want me to buy her a drink I decided that I should change the tactics and I started a normal conversation to make her my friend. In the summer everyone wants to go to the seaside and that’s why I started with the job at the seaside. As for the work abroad in Turkey, I wanted to mention it just as a possibility and that it is better to start in Bulgaria, in Primorsko. She had to show me that she is suitable for Turkey, to show that she wanted it”*⁵²⁰. A girl working by the traffic lights in Kosovo stated that a peer tried unsuccessfully to persuade her to climb into his car but she ran away instead.

It is also held that peers may encourage children to go with a trafficker: *“For instance, you have a friend and she asks you to see a certain boy”*⁵²¹. These friends may encourage children to go abroad or carry out certain actions that might lead to trafficking. For instance, a child in Bulgaria linked the incidence of trafficking with leaving the family and the influence of his friend: *“My friend told me that it was very nice, that it wasn’t dangerous so I can do it”*⁵²².

The children said that friends can exploit each other: *“They approach them as if they were friends with them and they say “Let’s earn some money, OK? If you keep your end up, we’ll split the money.” They agree and sometimes they give them some money, but sometimes they beat them up and warn them not to tell anyone or they’ll beat them up”*⁵²³. It was also held that force is used by peers when trying to exploit children or make them take part in criminal activities. In a shelter in Serbia, a child stated that older children often hurt younger children, force them to beg and/or steal their belongings.

In Bulgaria, a child suggested that she knows a girl who is friends with boys, but they pressurize her to break the law with the intention of exploiting her: *“She is around 12 now. She always goes with the boys; they make her steal and collect them money”*⁵²⁴. Another child in the institution in Bulgaria stated that he decided to steal under pressure from his friends: *“The others were mocking at me that I can’t steal. V and I got to know each other and he said “lets do it” and that’s how it happened”*⁵²⁵.

The fact that older children pressure them to work by means of force was echoed by another child living and working on the street. In particular she highlighted the role of the female leader of

⁵¹⁹Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵²⁰Bulgaria - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁵²¹Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

⁵²²Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵²³Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵²⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵²⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

a group of street children, who for the sake of protection, pretended to be a man: *“I know many children who were threatened, but I don’t want to talk about it right now. It happened on the street, usually by older children. I personally was threatened by that girl from the previous group I lived with. She was posing herself as a boy, but in fact she wasn’t. She made the kids, children younger than us, go beg for her, steal, and simply work for her. . . . It was that girl I was telling you about earlier who poses as a boy. She blackmailed me, telling me that I lived under her roof and that she put food on my table and that I had to bring something into the house as well. Of course, that was neither her roof nor her food and I simply left. Thank God, I’m alright now. She wanted me to steal and beg for her. All children in our group were involved”*⁵²⁶.

Her strategy was to leave this group. In other words, peers may be exploiters and children need to carefully devise strategies to deal with these threats.

Furthermore, it is said that these children who do not have the support of their friends, are more likely to be “tricked” or “cheated” into believing a lie of a trafficker: *“If they get mistreated everywhere they go, nobody wants to hang out with them, nobody cares, and then they don’t care. They accept whatever’s offered”*⁵²⁷.

In other cases, it is said that peers cannot always be relied upon to protect children from trafficking: *“Maybe the friends can protect you but it depends on the friends you have, it’s really important because if they are fake they will leave you at their hand and if they care about you they won’t leave you when you’re in trouble”*⁵²⁸.

It is held that traffickers may target children who appear to have no friends to protect them: *“They also take the girls who don’t have friends and who do not spend time with people, but instead they only spend their time in their close environment”*⁵²⁹.

For this reason, one child in Montenegro stated that in order to guard against being “tricked” by a peer who pretends to be a friend, or to avoid being let down by a friend in times of trouble, it is necessary to select friends carefully and know them well: *“Because I think nothing bad can happen to me, and I can make the judgment, like I did about that boy. There, now I am not friends with the people I can’t say I know what their intentions are”*⁵³⁰.

In order to understand how traffickers are able to trick children by pretending to be friends, it is necessary to understand the role of the peer group in children’s lives and their attempts to be selective about the types of friends they interact with and turn to for support. From the children’s accounts, they clearly distinguish between friends whom they regard to be “good” or “bad”.

A good friend

For many children, *“friendship is the most important thing”*⁵³¹ A good friend is one who does the following:

⁵²⁶Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

⁵²⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵²⁸Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵²⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁵³⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵³¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

- Listens to you
- Understands you
- Advises you
- Teaches you how to behave
- Cares for you
- Shares their belongings with you
- Keeps your secrets
- Defends and protects you
- Cheers you up
- Boosts your self-confidence
- Sticks by you in times of trouble
- Breaks rules with you
- Shares and acts in accordance with the same norms

From the children's accounts, few people listen to what they have to say. As a result, many state that a good friend listens when no-one else does. Reference is made by girls in Kosovo to the fact that it is often difficult to talk to their parents about boys and relationships so they discuss these matters with their friends. Other children complained that they could not share their concerns with their teachers so would speak to their friends: *"I usually go to my friends as I don't have any other place I or we can go and complain. For example we can not go to the principal because he does not care about us much, he tells us to deal with it ourselves"*⁵³².

These friends would often advise them on how to deal with a teacher with whom they have a negative relationship. As a child in Montenegro stated, *"I had a problem with this teacher and I didn't want to study that subject at all, she kept insulting me, called me a cow, and other things, so I talked to some of my friends from school and the form mistress and they persuaded me to do some studying after all, and I eventually got a pass"*⁵³³.

They would also provide advice about interpersonal relationships: *"Well, I told you I like to decide for myself what I want and what I don't want but I often talk to my friends about something that's important to me. My friends sometimes tell me that some boy is not good for me and I should not see him. Then, sometimes, I do as they say, and sometimes I don't, but do as I wish. Sometimes they have influence, sometimes they don't."*⁵³⁴

This quote suggests that some children do not simply submit to the instructions of a friend (otherwise known as peer pressure) but often actively evaluate them in line with their own needs and beliefs.

Nevertheless, some children see the advantages of making decisions together. It is said to be "easier" and "nicer" to plan together⁵³⁵. It is also said to reinforce or provide legitimating a decision or course of action that a child would like to take. This is seen as important to guard against unintended risks: *"I prefer discussing everything that's important to me with them. I think it's better and safer that way so I don't do something wrong. I saw many times that what I intended and decided was*

⁵³²Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁵³³Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵³⁴Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵³⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

*fine, but I was also pleased when I saw they thought the same as me. I could decide on something myself sometimes, and sometimes I do, but I like discussing things with them before I decide, too*⁵³⁶.

It was also stated that on the streets it is important to consult one's friends about where to work, and it was often easier to go along with them if one does not have strong opinions. A child begging on the streets with his friends stated: *"Sometimes I don't know exactly where I want to go that day or I have not made any decisions, or I don't care where I go that day, and then I listen to them and go where they want... I make decisions myself when I decide so. Sometimes I can't do without them, and then we discuss and decide together. Not just where to work, but everything else as well"*⁵³⁷.

It is said that children can provide valuable lessons to other children in a peer group. On the one hand, these lessons relate to social norms particularly in relation to gender relations. Many of the girls in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro stated that they try to teach their friends how they should behave with boys: *"It is basically moral support. We tell our friend do this, do not go out, do not talk with him or even when you talk be hard on him, tell him that you have no feeling for him"*⁵³⁸. Other lessons relate to practical matters such as school, recreational activities (e.g. riding a bike, learning how to sew), survival on the streets and income generation.

Age, knowledge and experience emerged as important in this regard. In relation to school, a boy in an institution in Montenegro stated that he explains lessons to younger children who don't understand⁵³⁹. Another child in this institution stated that his roommate is older and about to leave, and teaches him *"how and what to do later, when he leaves"*⁵⁴⁰. On the streets, the children also assume the role of instructor-pupil. In Kosovo, a girl working on the streets said that she listens to her older friend who tells her how to earn money: *"She is older than me and advises me about many things I can learn from"*⁵⁴¹. Another child stated that his friend advised him to change his begging location: *"They asked me to come here because the business is better here and now I make more money here, and have friends"*⁵⁴².

This advice also extends to self-defense and protection. For instance, one boy in Serbia stated that he warns younger children how to protect themselves in this environment. This protection includes knowing who to trust and how to guard against the risk of trafficking: *"I always tell them, when they come to the traffic lights, whenever a new child comes to work here, that they should say no to anyone who asks them something like that. Even if they offer them millions, they should say: "No". I would get that through their thick skulls and even beat them a little so that they would understand, you know. Everyone here at the traffic lights knows that. I told them not to do it. I've been working here at the traffic lights longer than any of them and I've told them to say: "No, no, no, no, and only no" to any adult who offers them drugs, marihuana, and stuff... Older children usually teach the young ones what to do, to be careful of cars, not to be aggressive because someone may thrash them. Things like that. I don't know"*⁵⁴³.

Hence, peers encourage each other not to trust strangers as has been highlighted throughout this report. Another child complained that even though she has tried to advise her younger friend on

⁵³⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵³⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵³⁸Albania - focus group interview, 18 years old girl, internal migrant

⁵³⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁴⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁴¹Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁵⁴²Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁵⁴³Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old boy, street child

the streets, she often does not listen to her: *"I did take care of a friend of mine, but it's her business that she didn't listen to me afterwards"*⁵⁴⁴.

It is also said that one's friends can provide care particularly if a parent is absent. In an institution in Romania, a girl stated that together with other friends, she helps younger children and a disabled child: *"I play with children, I help the small ones, especially that we have here a small child who is two years old and who fell down from his bed by mistake and I don't know what happened to him that now he has his bones broken here and his hand is immobilized now. And I play with him, I look after him, I wash him. Other girls look after him too"*⁵⁴⁵. Another child in this institution emphasised that this care was reciprocal in that all the children help each other: *"If they need to be helped with something, with cleaning, with anything else, I go and help them because they is in my group. Why shouldn't I help them? If they help me, shouldn't I help them also?"*⁵⁴⁶.

It is also held that children share their belongings with each other, even in contexts characterized by poverty and desperation. For instance, on the streets some children share their earnings: *"I beg with my friends around the town and bring some money home, and when I do, we buy bread and things at the shop, and we all eat..."*⁵⁴⁷

Although some children prefer not to share this income, they do recognise the importance of working with other children in terms of loneliness, protection etc. As one child in Montenegro stated, *"Well, I consider what is more useful for me to do that day and then I decide. Sometimes I consider whether it is better to go to the town alone, because I may take all the stuff I find, and if someone is going with me I have to share, and each cent is important for me. Then I decide to go alone. Another time it's more important that someone accompanies me and I have someone to talk to and am not alone, and that day it is more important for me not to be alone than to earn more money, so I consider all that and call my friends to join me"*.⁵⁴⁸

A child who is living and working on the streets in Serbia stated that he gives money to other children who beg but doesn't expect them to reciprocate. *"I give even to those who mooch on the trams. I always give them something. Every time I can afford... I simply give it to that person, but I'm sure they'll pay me back. And if they don't want to pay it back, they don't have to"*⁵⁴⁹.

Another child in this context said that his friend invited him to share his lodgings in the underground system: *"So he saw me sleeping outside, you know, not inside the underground. He saw where I slept and he saw that it was cold out there so he allowed me to live there, so I slept there and everything, normally. I still sleep there. I can go there whenever I want to"*⁵⁵⁰.

To explain, these relationships and kind acts, one child in Serbia stated: *"We've spent most of our lives together, meaning we had to make sure we had something to eat"*⁵⁵¹. On the streets, many of these children have over time formed a pseudo-family or network of support, which they can rely on in times of trouble. Children are also supported by other children who are not living on the

⁵⁴⁴Serbia - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁵⁴⁵Romania - individual interview, 10 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁴⁶Romania - individual interview, 10 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁴⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁴⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁴⁹Serbia - focus group interview, boys & girls age 11 – 17, shelter children

⁵⁵⁰Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁵⁵¹Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old boy, street child

streets. For instance, a child in Kosovo stated that her German friend gives her money and even brought her old school books.

One of the most important criteria that the children highlighted in relation to being “a good friend” is the ability to keep secrets. As a child in Montenegro stated, “I like being with them and hanging out because they are good to me and understand me... We think alike, they keep my secrets and I can confide in them, and that’s not easy to find.”⁵⁵². These secrets revolve around relationships with the opposite sex and the desire to run away and/or immigrate. In other words, they are central to the protection strategies that children develop. In terms of the latter, a child in Albania stated: “For instance, if I had a friend who would like to go to Tirana or Greece, I would walk her to the mini bus station, and if here parents would ask where is she I would respond “I do not know”. We have promised each other, if one leaves the other will not speak up”⁵⁵³.

It is said that together with their friends, they travel to forbidden areas. For instance, a child in the IDP camp in Montenegro stated: “Sometimes we go and sit somewhere in the camp or sneak out and go to that wood next to the camp or that runway, to fool around”⁵⁵⁴. In relation to their relationships with boys, it is said that their friends often lie or “cover for them”. A girl in Montenegro stated that when she visits her male friends they conceal her whereabouts from her parents: “When mother asks them about me, they cover for me and say I was with them even when I wasn’t”⁵⁵⁵. This often poses risks for both children: “That’s a big thing she’s doing for me, because we both know that if they find out she was lying, then my father would go to her father and he’d beat her up and ground her, for lying. That’s a good person and a friend, according to me, when she’d put herself in danger for my sake. I do the same for her when she needs it”⁵⁵⁶.

Sometimes children play together instead of working on the streets as instructed by their parents, even if it increases the risk of punishment and/or violence: “Sometimes I didn’t go to the town to work but went to play football with my friends and for a swim in the Cijevna, and I decide and tell myself I would go to the town the next day and work hard to make up for that day I spent with my friends. Then I come home and father turns that day into hell, and I can’t manage to explain to him that I have a plan to make up for it the next day. Then I regret having gone with my friends instead of working, when I knew what would happen at home”⁵⁵⁷.

In their attempts to fulfill their desire for play, recreation and entertainment, many children band together, often against the instructions of a parent.

In the institutions, children develop strategies with their friends against their social workers and the rules that they perceive to be set in an illegitimate, top-down manner. For instance, a child in Montenegro described a drawing in which children ganged up together against a teacher who was “insulting them”: “And this is the kids, laughing at her and ignoring her”⁵⁵⁸. When she snuck out of the institution one evening, a girl stated that her friends would lie about her whereabouts: “I have to admit I lied, but I know that if I asked some of the older ones from the Home they would

⁵⁵²Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁵³Albania - focus group interview, 9 years old girl

⁵⁵⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁵⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁵⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁵⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁵⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

definitely back me up"⁵⁵⁹. Their peers' assistance is central to their strategies and in this way may be a source of resilience, but these strategies may in themselves turn out to be dangerous; by concealing this information from a staff member might mean that no-one will notice when a girl goes missing or be concerned about her whereabouts. The peer group is also said to be very important for protection as they provide physical defence against dangerous individuals. There is some notion of safety in numbers and they offer protection from parents.

On the streets, it is said that children protect each other from dangerous people. As a child in Montenegro states, *"And then, even when we don't want to swear or fight, we have to because he attacks us, no way you can defend yourself, you gotta hit him. Then we all go together, as one, to fight. We're like brothers and we fight those bad ones together, when we have to"*⁵⁶⁰. So friends may become an important social support as they provide protection against violence.

Peer to peer violence emerged as significant in a range of settings. In the IDP camp, a child highlighted not only the high incidence of bullying and violence but also the strategic thinking and reliance on the group as a means of coping with it: *"Me and my friends usually don't like to just let them go if they insulted us badly and swore at us, but we fight. Sometimes they beat us, sometimes we beat them, especially if it takes place here in the camp. When something like that happens in the town we give it some more thought before we get into a fight, because sometimes we don't know what kind of boys they are and what they would be up to"*⁵⁶¹.

A child in an institution in Montenegro also emphasised the importance of safety in numbers when confronted with bullying stating: *"I know some rascals here in the Home, and I avoid them as much as I can and if things get rough, I have my friends. So it often ends in a fight what can you do, they asked for it. They have one good characteristic, though: if someone else bothers you, you can turn to them and they'll always help you. But I try to avoid such people more and more"*⁵⁶².

This protection is seen as particularly important when living on the streets, where there are a number of perceived threats in relation to strangers hurting children, stealing their earnings, raping girls etc. In both Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina children stated that their friends called the police when they were attacked: *"For example, if someone would come here to bully me or if he wanted to take my money or something some of my friends would go to get the police and they would come and help me"*⁵⁶³.

A number of the girls in Montenegro, Romania and Kosovo in particular expressed concerns about walking home alone in the dark, going to the shops alone, passing certain areas (e.g. sea front) because they are scared of being harassed or attacked by boys and men. As a result, they move around with their friends for protection.

Some of the children living at home stated that their friends protect them from their parents, when they become violent or intoxicated. A child in Serbia stated that he provides shelter to his friend when pushed out of the home by his father: *"X's father, for instance, there are times when he drinks and kicks him out. What can A do? He doesn't go to sleep on the street; he either comes to my place*

⁵⁵⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁶⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁶¹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁶²Montenegro - individual interview – 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁶³Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

or to his godfather's place to stay the night..."⁵⁶⁴.

Trusting and knowing someone for a long period of time appeared to be very significant in this regard, as was echoed by a child in Bulgaria: *"I trust them. I am afraid of my parents because I don't know what they will do"*⁵⁶⁵.

It was said that when parents no longer care for their children or provide them with attention, their friends will continue to do so: *"After that even if your parents don't pay so much attention to you, you can still rely on these friends and they won't let you lose the right direction and will still keep you on the right track, even though they are not your parents"*⁵⁶⁶.

Friends play an important role in cheering children up when they are feeling upset or unhappy. As a result, some children deliberately seek out their friends as a strategy to feel better: *"I don't like being on my own when I'm in a bad mood, no way I want to be alone, so I go and look for a friend, and they tell me something nice and I feel better"*⁵⁶⁷. Many found that just the act of talking about their problems to someone, helps improve their mood: *"It often happened to me that, after I tell my friend or sister why I am sad and down, as soon as I tell them, I start thinking that it's not such an important reason for me or anyone else to feel so sad"*⁵⁶⁸; *"I wonder where such strong fears came from when after an hour of walking with friends it seems completely different and better and nicer, and everything seems possible and doable"*⁵⁶⁹.

Some children found it beneficial to receive the advice of their friends when attempting to deal with a difficult incident or memory often related to violence at home: *"Because when they ask me something I say-why do you care, leave me alone, and they knew how good I was before that. Then two of my friends told me they would help me, that I should get over it so I calmed down a bit and started to be friends with them"*⁵⁷⁰.

In Bulgaria, a girl stated that her friends have repeatedly helped her by advising her not to commit suicide: *"Well, usually my girl-friends help me when I am in such a situation. I have very often tried to commit a suicide and they have always supported me, helped me and advised me not to do it"*⁵⁷¹. It is said that in certain situations, friends are best positioned to give this type of advice.

This positioning is related to the fact that given that they interact in a range of social settings on a daily basis, friends are often the first to notice that a child is unhappy or upset. A child in Bulgaria stated: *"I won't tell you what the problem really was. I didn't want to share it with anybody but a friend of mine found out because every day he saw my fake smiles and that I was not feeling well... He found out and talked to me and told me that he knew but I thought that he can't help me at all. But he talk to me and the one who caused the problem and finally everything was OK"*⁵⁷².

This positioning is also related to the fact that children share many of the same experiences and

⁵⁶⁴ Serbia - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁵⁶⁵ Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old boy, school child

⁵⁶⁶ Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁶⁷ Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁶⁸ Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁶⁹ Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁷⁰ Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

⁵⁷¹ Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁵⁷² Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

concerns, they therefore “understand” each other better: “We can tell them when we’re having a difficult time without being laughed at”⁵⁷³.

It is said that the supreme marker of a good friend is someone who sticks by you during times of trouble. A child in Montenegro described a good friend as follows: “The ones who talk to me and keep me company regardless of anything and all the time, never mind if they are from “family” or not”⁵⁷⁴. A child in Romania echoed this sentiment in relation to the importance of trust and loyalty: “Maybe the friends can protect you but it depends on the friends you have, it’s really important because if they are fake they will leave you at their hand and if they care about you they won’t leave you when you’re in trouble”⁵⁷⁵. So certain friends are seen as important social supports for children facing a range of adversities.

A bad friend

“You should be very careful because sometimes the things that your friends can do to you no one else can”⁵⁷⁶.

A bad friend is said to have a number of characteristics. They...

- Gossip about you
- Want something from you
- Show off
- Ignore you
- Tease or hurt you
- Pressurise you to do something
- Do not conform to certain norms or mode of behaviour

In a number of contexts, children were very concerned about gossip and the possibility that information about them would be circulated. Friends who reveal their secrets were described as having committed the ultimate betrayal, which is why children were very selective about their friendships and who they would turn to for help. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated that a friend had told everyone in the institution about her life. In response she states: “So I am very cautious about friends now. I don’t choose to open up quickly as I did with that one”⁵⁷⁷. For some children, this gossip was worse than any punishment metered by an instructor (e.g. gardening) for breaking rules in an institution⁵⁷⁸.

Children also complained about their peers wanting to use them for some purpose, rather than offering them sincere friendship and support. For instance, a child in Montenegro complained that children are only friendly if they want money or a gift; as she receives some presents from her family with whom she is intermittent contact, she needs to be careful that her friends are not using her: “When you have money and when you can buy something, everyone’s there. There are as many of those as you like in the Home. There are, among us, those who want something from you and that’s why they are in your company because you have something but I see through them right away”⁵⁷⁹.

⁵⁷³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁷⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁷⁵Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁷⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁵⁷⁷Montenegro - individual interview, a 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁷⁸Montenegro - individual interview, a 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁷⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

For this reason, a girl who works on the streets of Bulgaria stated: *“If you have money and cigarettes they are all around you and then they leave you. I don’t have real friends here”*⁵⁸⁰.

Although it is important to help one’s friends, one must be careful that they are “real friends” and not simply using children for their own ends: *“I have experienced disappointments among friends. There are cases when people make friendship with certain people only because they think it is beneficial to them, they want to benefit something”*⁵⁸¹.

As a result, it is important to be careful about which friends one trusts. For starters, it was said that one should not trust strangers who would like to be your friend. As a child in an institution in Montenegro stated, *“When someone new comes, then everyone starts asking questions, and I have questions of my own that I want to ask and have that person give answers only to me for a while. Just like you have explained all the details about the purpose of your coming here”*⁵⁸².

It was also said that one should not trust children who brag or show off. For instance, a child in Romania complained about a friend who was trying to impress the others by the fact that his mother was working abroad. A child in Romania complained about his peers who bragged about the fact that their parents were working abroad.

Many of the children complained about children who ignore, tease or bully them. This was related to a number of individual characteristics as well as factors associated with their age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and circumstances. At the individual level, the factors that were highlighted included appearance (e.g. clothing), wearing glasses, having a stutter or disability, being new to school or not doing well at school, and falling pregnant or being raped.

This exclusion from the peer group operates in different ways. For instance, some children are simply ignored because they do not conform to certain norms or standards of behaviour: *“When someone does not behave the proper way, then nobody wants them and everyone avoids them”*⁵⁸³.

In some cases, it involves direct expulsion from an existing social group: *“I was thrown out of a net by some friends who didn’t want to be friends with me anymore. I felt sad and wretched and lonely then. I don’t know why they rejected me and disliked me, but that’s what happened”*⁵⁸⁴.

It is said that when they are excluded it is very difficult for them to be accepted back into the social group: *“There are so many that say something is awful and they don’t give anyone a chance to be different. For example, if I have done something bad today, that does not mean I won’t do something good tomorrow. The same goes for these children, everyone thinks that after that, for example the one with the stutter, he’ll probably be ridiculed in school and few people would be there to help him”*⁵⁸⁵.

Pregnancy or having sexual relations was highlighted as an issue that is frowned upon by many friends. It was also the source of teasing and ostracism. For instance, a child who was pregnant in an institution in Bulgaria stated: *“I don’t have friends. I can’t share with anyone. They call me an*

⁵⁸⁰Bulgaria- individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁵⁸¹Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

⁵⁸²Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child.

⁵⁸³Montenegro- focus group interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁸⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁸⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

*elephant and crazy; they make fun of me and insult me all the time... I trust neither my friends nor the police. My friends are mocking with me. I become fat because of the medicines and they call me an elephant now. This is very hard for me; they think I am crazy*⁵⁸⁶.

Some children are teased at school because they cannot afford to purchase expensive clothing, or because they have to work after hours on the street. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"This boy in my class is very withdrawn, very closed, and perhaps someone should be putting more efforts in working with him, but no one approaches him, there are even some other guys who make fun of him and told him to go and sell things on the streets and don't stay here"*⁵⁸⁷.

With few people to turn to for support, it is said that these children will follow the "wrong" course of action. For instance, these children will engage in or continue to engage in behaviour that is in conflict with dominant social norms or in conflict with the law: *"Well, she started to use drugs, what else? She could not go to school, she had all failing marks because she did not attend. And her friends dumped her as well, her best friend did not even believe her about the things she had done, she thought that she was lying. So the only thing she could do was take drugs. So that's what she did, and she too died..."*⁵⁸⁸.

Bullying or physical violence at the hands of their peers - was a pervasive fear shared by all children in this research. This bullying was often related to age. In the institution in Montenegro, younger children stated that they need to respect and be polite to other children who are older, while older children stated that they cannot let the younger ones get away with everything, because they *"should know who's older"*⁵⁸⁹. An older boy explained that when you reach a certain age, *"then you're the boss in the Home. I used to be small once so I wasn't the boss. Now I want to be in charge a little"*⁵⁹⁰. A younger child in this institution complained about this hierarchical system: *"All the older ones, both boys and girls, think they are the bosses and they are much smarter than us, so they mock us and tell us what to do. I don't even listen to them, although some get annoyed and they even want to fight with them. I'm not like that"*⁵⁹¹.

The same complaints were made by older and younger children in an institution in Romania with older children stating that they have to hit the younger ones to keep them in line, and the younger children stating that they have to defend themselves or protect each other from older children.

Girls across the 7 countries/entities complained that they are harassed or hurt by their male peers, because they are girls. This fear was derived from their own experiences of violence and from the stories of their friends' similar experiences.

A child in the IDP camp stated that she does not attend school because it is too dangerous for her to go because she could be harmed by some boys. Another girl in Albania stated that she is too scared to use the school bathrooms because that is where *"boys close the doors and frighten the girls"*⁵⁹².

⁵⁸⁶Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁸⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 14 years old boy; school child

⁵⁸⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁵⁸⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁹⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁹¹Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁵⁹²Albania - focus group interview, 9 years old girl

Many of the girls complained that there are few recreational activities for them, and that they often feel scared to visit internet cafes because they are harassed by boys there.

Some children place blame on the social context which leads them to engage in these activities. For instance, it is said that boys in the IDP camp *“the boys go to town and do all kinds of things, because its awful here and they can’t endure it, so they linger about the town and become no good and start doing bad things”*⁵⁹³. As mentioned previously, in this camp the children complained about the relative poverty in relation to their experiences in Kosovo and in relation to the standard of living enjoyed by the local population, they complained about the absence of employment and the dearth of recreation activities. It is said that these factors also help *“bad”* boys *“trick”* and possibly traffic other children: *“I told you about those bad guys who wish to involve you in some bad things, and I think they do more work at night than during the day. I don’t know, but I get that impression. They think the boys who wander at night would more easily fall for their promises than the ones who walk about during the day. Because the ones who walk about during the day must have some work in the town, and the ones who just hang about at night are easier to entice because they are ready to do anything to earn some money”*⁵⁹⁴. It is also said that these *“bad”* boys are more likely to fall for or be *“tricked”* into accepting promises of *“easy money”* because *“those boys don’t want to do any normal work for peanuts, they want to earn a lot of money without any work”*⁵⁹⁵.

This was related to the socio-economic context and in particular high levels of unemployment and the dearth of recreation activities for children. For instance, in the IDP camp, a girl stated: *“Well, those are boys who don’t do anything and they don’t want to work, because they don’t want to do any kind of work, so they have plenty of time and nowhere to go, and they just linger about the camp. Then they argue with everyone, swear at people, talk all kinds of things, and they often tell all kinds of things to the girls passing by and often approach them and don’t leave them alone, that kind of thing, you’re better off when you miss them, then you have some peace”*⁵⁹⁶.

Some children focus on parental child-rearing practices when trying to explain why some boys are *“bad”*: *“His father doesn’t beat him, so that’s why he quarrels with everyone in the camp and roams around the town. If his father paid more attention to what his son was doing and beat him when he wasn’t behaving well, then this son would be good, a father can make his son a good boy if he wants to”*⁵⁹⁷.

So this child attributed *“bad behaviour”* to the absence of parental corporal punishment.

It is said that girls are not only in danger of being physically attacked, but also of being *“tricked”* or *“cheated”* into having sexual intercourse or into accepting a *“false offer”*: *“Everyone knows that, the things that could happen to such girls. When you come across such awful boys who do all kinds of things, they can rape a girl, beat her up terribly, take her somewhere and do what they want with her and leave her in the middle of the wood if they feel like it. Or he can tell you some lies and all kinds of things, and none of it is true. And there are girls who’d instantly believe anything they tell them. And what can such a girl hope for - nothing but some sort of trouble”*.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years girl, IDP camp

⁵⁹⁴Montenegro- focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁹⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁹⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁵⁹⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁵⁹⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

With regards to girls, it is said that there are certain “*bad girls*” who children should stay away from. In the comments of children in Montenegro and Kosovo, it is evident that behaviour that is frowned upon or criticized by children is related to their sexuality and/or relationships with people of the opposite sex.

This is closely related to their freedom of movement in that girls who break certain rules set by their parents (often with the aim of restricting their contact with men) are described negatively. It is said that these girls “*talk to boys a lot and ramble around*”⁵⁹⁹ and “*have loose manners, leave the camp, walk with boys, sometimes they even go to the town*”⁶⁰⁰.

Sometimes girls who were harassed by boys were said to have been responsible for this action because they are overly nice or familiar with boys and thereby leading them: “*There, I tell them, it only happened because you were nice to him and he thinks you want something from him*”⁶⁰¹. It is said that these girls in particular, are more at risk of being harassed, assaulted and even “*tricked*” because they draw attention to themselves: Girls should be smart they shouldn’t be deceived easily. They should be advised by their parents.... because when a girl goes out dressed all like that then the boys look at her, she draws attention and she wont cross the street without someone picking on her

A boy in Montenegro stated that it is easy to “*trick*” girls into having sexual intercourse by threatening to leave them, even when they appear to be unwilling initially: “*But he can persuade you to do it against your will and you sleep with him so he doesn’t leave you. These older ones have told me about that - if she doesn’t want to, you just persuade her*”⁶⁰².

It is said that some girls can be easily “*tricked*” into engaging in prostitution by men who appear to be their friends or boyfriends. As a child in Romania states, “*Sometimes it happens to walk on the street with a friend or meet somebody and he says that he is his best friend and he invites you to have a soft drink. If you accept, he will invite you then to have a beer and after that he will take you to his house and there he does what he does and he abuses you (have sexual contacts) and then he gets you out. I have heard of such situations, the girls have told me. I know a girl who lived in the centre and decided to go there without being forced. A friend of hers invited her there but he actually made her go so she would prostitute herself. She thought she was going there to be near her friend*”⁶⁰³.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, a girl in a shelter stated that in bars and discos some men purchase drinks for girls and then spike them with drugs: “*Like, you leave the juice on the table and you are going out and someone previously asked you to date him, so you go to use the toilet and someone puts something in your drink and you go with him and so on*”⁶⁰⁴. It is said that some girls fall for promises of money but end up being sexually assaulted: “*boys can trick on girls, upset them and beat them up... they tell them: “come on I’ll give you money” and they rape them*”⁶⁰⁵.

It is also said that boys face greater physical threats from other boys, who expect them to be able to fight and use physical force. In this sense, constructions of masculinity must also be taken into

⁵⁹⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁶⁰⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁶⁰¹Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁶⁰²Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old boy, child, institutionalized child

⁶⁰³Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁰⁴Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, girls -16 years old, shelter children

⁶⁰⁵Kosovo - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, street child

account when considering the risks that children perceive. For instance, a boy in the IDP camp stated: *“It’s dangerous for girls to leave the camp, and they shouldn’t go anywhere unless accompanied by their brother or father, especially not at night, it’s much more dangerous for them than it is for us boys. We are often together, so if someone bothers us, we fight, especially if it’s the boys from the camp. It’s always more difficult when it’s the boys from the town, because they sometimes return with more friends and wait for us to have another fight, they are very dangerous and they can’t stand not having their own way in everything, and they underestimate and discredit us in everything. If we don’t want to fight, then we need to be humiliated and leave with our heads bent down, and they even follow us and tell us things to get us to say something, just one word, so they attack us”*⁶⁰⁶.

So boys do not feel like, or are treated as men by their peers if they do not participate in violent activities. The issue of neighbourhood gangs emerged quite clearly in Romania and Kosovo, with boys stating that they are often physically threatened by other children of the same age, using knives and other weapons.

Many of the children across the seven countries/entities state that they are teased or excluded by their peers because they are Roma. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated: *“Sometimes they tell me: “Look at you, dirty, ugly Gypsy” and they start pushing me and then hitting me harder and harder and swearing at me, and I didn’t do anything to them”*⁶⁰⁷.

In Serbia a child stated that he is forced to fight in response to teasing: *“It was when we had a fight here. A boy called us names, “You Gipsy cunts, you Gipsy cunts, you mother fuckers”, and we had a fight”*⁶⁰⁸.

Another child in Kosovo complained that she does not attend school largely because she was harassed for being a Roma: *“Well, those that are younger do socialize when their teacher is near them then they do play with the Roma children, but when he doesn’t look they say to them: “go away you Gipsy”... I went to school here in our area in Ortakoll. Right after the war no one talked to me at school, there was only one girl that did. She would stay near me at school, but none of the other one’s would, simply coz I was a “Gipsy” so no one spoke to me for 6 years”*⁶⁰⁹.

A boy explained that he was not simply teased because he was Roma but because his clothes were not suitable. Given socio-economic realities, and the poverty that this ethnic group faces, it is evident that this bullying cannot be seen apart from an interaction of macro factors related to ethnicity and poverty, which are played out at the interpersonal relationships in the form of peer-to-peer violence. This had an effect upon the individual level, and his decision to leave school: *“They pick on you when you don’t have decent clothes, they say ooooooooouuuuuu, look at the Gipsy, look at his clothes and because of things like that I quit school. If I would go then I’d be in grade 9 now”*⁶¹⁰.

For some children this teasing was related to the fact that they were refugees or internally displaced migrants in a politically unstable environment; this cannot be seen apart from macro political developments. For instance, a child working on the streets in Kosovo described the teasing as follows: *“Well they were calling us Gypsies, don’t come to school, go to Serbia”*⁶¹¹.

⁶⁰⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶⁰⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, boy- 14 years old, IDP camp

⁶⁰⁸Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁶⁰⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁶¹⁰Kosovo - focus group interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁶¹¹Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, street child

On the other hand, some of the children complained that they are targeted and bullied by children from Roma communities. For instance, a child in an institution in Romania stated: *“Most Roma are dangerous. They pick on us all the time, when we went to buy seed for our teacher, when we went to carol they asked me and my friend to give them our money and we refused but he had a knife and told us that he would kill us. I began crying and finally we succeeded to run away”*⁶¹².

Nationality and ethnic affiliation was also a source of bullying and this cannot be seen apart from macro political developments, war and political change. For instance, a child complained that she is teased by Croat children in Serbia. Street children in Kosovo were concerned about being beaten up by Albanian children. For instance, a street working child in Kosovo stated that he is harassed because Albanian children do not understand his ethnic background and think that he is Serbian: *“There are some Albanian children who pick on me and won't leave me alone because I am of the Gorani community and they say that I am a Serbian and won't leave me alone. It is difficult for me here in Ferizaj because my neighbours pick on me very much for being a Gorani, and they think that I am a Serbian”*⁶¹³.

In Northern Mitrovica some of the children were concerned about Albanian children living on the Southern side. This was often related to the warnings that they had received from their parents: *“My parent says not to go to the Albanian part of the street because it is dangerous. Albanians may beat us if we go to their side”*⁶¹⁴.

Exclusion, teasing or physical violence at the hands of peers was also related to being a refugee or an internally displaced person. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated that he did not like attending school because the other children *“looked at us as if we were not people just like them”*⁶¹⁵.

Another child in this community explained that this is related to ignorance about their experiences and choices, and how their lives were affected by war and conflict – macro factors beyond their immediate control. It is also related to children's attempts to raise their own status. This child also associated this bullying with parental child rearing practices, and the freedom given to children:

*“Well, they don't like us because we are refugees and because we are Roma. I don't know why we are refugees, as if it were any fault of mine. I didn't want to leave Kosovo or my home, but it had to happen, there was a war going on and it was dangerous. They don't know what it's like when there is a war and bombardments and someone gets killed. Or someone comes and kills your neighbour, and we are all scared then. But they are like that, they show off, as if they were better people than us. I think it all depends on the parents: the way they teach their children, that's what happens. If they make them do good, then it will be good for the children and for everyone else, and if they leave them to do what they want, then that's bad”*⁶¹⁶.

School attendance and/or performance were also a source of bullying. For instance, children in the IDP camp in Montenegro complained that they are harassed or beaten up at school, or teased by those who attend school. On the other hand, some children complained that if they attend school they are teased by those in the camp who do not attend school.

⁶¹²Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶¹³Kosovo - focus group interview, a 7 years old boy, street child

⁶¹⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old boy, school child

⁶¹⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶¹⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

Children in institutions also complained about being teased or bullied. This seemed to work in multiple ways. They complained that they were teased at school because they live in an institution, they are ostracized by children still living on the streets; and children living on the streets complained that they are bullied by children living in institutions. In Montenegro children complained that they were teased by children who they attend school with. They relate this to ignorance and the fact that these children do not understand the complex reasons why they are in the institution, and how this will affect them: *“They often tell us that our mother has rejected and left us. Which does not have to be the case, but they don’t want to hear that. We can’t convince them of something different”*⁶¹⁷.

Boys complained that other children beat them because they know that there are few people to defend them. Children in Romania complained that they are teased not only because the other children think that they are “orphans” but because they are not well-dressed. This relates yet again to the sense of relative deprivation shared by children in these institutions and in particular the perception that they are not well-provided for in relation to children living in other contexts, including those who live on the streets and are able to support themselves.

Peer pressure

Apart from ostracism, teasing and bullying, the children stated that a “bad friend” is one who pressurizes you to do something that you don’t agree with. On the one hand, the extensive influence of the peer group cannot be denied. As a child in Montenegro stated, *“My friends have a lot of influence on me, in everything: going out, clothes, everything. If no one wants to go out and I decided to, I sure would not go out alone, but would stay in the Home with them”*⁶¹⁸.

This influence operates largely by means of fear of exclusion or expulsion from a social group: children are concerned that they will lose friendships, and all that comes attached to it (including status and support) if they do not comply with a friend’s wishes: *“they suggest I do something or we go somewhere and I go although I know I may get punished for it. And I do as they say because I want to go there with them too, and to stay friends with them because maybe they’d get angry if I said no every time, or they’d stop being friends with me”*.⁶¹⁹

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, children complained that some friends try to make them smoke or take drugs. A child complained that they try to make him drink alcohol because *“they laugh at you if you don’t join them”*⁶²⁰. A boy in this institution stated that this practice is gender-specific, as is the manner in which it is viewed in relation to social norms and the manner in which certain behaviour is prohibited for females: *“When everyone drinks alcohol around you, then it’s stupid if you don’t, they shut you out immediately. It’s a bit not cool when a girl drinks alcohol, then it’s stupid. Everyone looks at her in a different way”*⁶²¹.

In terms of the way in which gender is constructed, boys complained that they would be regarded as “wimps”⁶²² if they do not join in a brawl or are hesitant about using physical violence. A girl in

⁶¹⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶¹⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶¹⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁶²⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶²¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶²²Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old boy, institutionalized child

Romania stated that it is important to resist the pressure exercised by one's friends to have sexual relations with a boy: *"There are some girls who tell you that you should have a relation with a boy and try to persuade you to get involved in several relations and then they laugh at you. Yes, I've seen such cases. Or there are girls who say: "why don't you do it with that person", I mean, have sexual relations. If you don't want it, nobody can force you; they can tell you and hit you for nothing if you don't agree. There are persons who treat you kindly and try to convince me to go after some boys, to get me into what "go clubbing" means, to give up going to church and there are persons even here who want me to give up but I don't. You must always fight for what you want, because people tell you to do a thing or another, but if it doesn't fit you... I fight for what I want"*⁶²³.

Despite this pressure, many children continue to evaluate their friends' decisions against their own beliefs and standards, or after a period of time undertake self-evaluation. For instance, a girl in a shelter in Kosovo stated that although she initially made the wrong decision to spend time with certain children who encouraged her to take drugs, in the end she realized that she had made a mistake and decided not to be friends with them. She attributed this "wrong" decision to the fact that she was experimenting and had little information about the negative consequences of such a decision: *"I went to different friends, I just stayed with my friends, in the streets, and that was when I started hanging out with this bunch of wrong people. When you spend time with different people you get to know many people. Some good some bad, so me too got to know such people, but I know how to evaluate people who is good to be friends with or not... at that time I started smoking weed with them together. But I managed to get away after a while, because sometimes you want to do some things but once you do them they you realize that it was not much really. So me too, I just wanted to try it out, not knowing what will happen then, but then I got out"*⁶²⁴.

On the other hand, not all children agree with the advice of their friends: *"perhaps they can shout at me sometimes, but nevertheless I do as I please"*⁶²⁵. They may take it into consideration but then decide their own course of action: *"Sometimes my friends influence my decisions, but I am the one who decides, although I think of all of them when making a decision"*⁶²⁶. A child in Montenegro complained that his friends become too easily involved in physical fights. After attempting to negotiate with his friends, he often chooses to do otherwise: *"Sometimes I can put up with so much without feeling bad, and then I feel content with myself much more than when I give in to their pressure and get into a fight"*⁶²⁷.

Some children are selective about their friends and may even decide to end friendships if they do not agree with the way that their friends are acting: *"Well, when I see that a friend of mine, boy or girl, is not as good as I thought, but I see they are bad to me, I stop being friends with them"*⁶²⁸. Another child stated that he trusts his own judgment in this regard: *"I can certainly judge if a person is good or not. I proved right every time"*⁶²⁹. Some children complained that their parents would not let them decide who they could spend time with: *"Well, that depends on my mother. She doesn't know all of my friends as well as I do. So she says this one or that one is not good for me and she doesn't let me be friends with her, and I know this girl better and I know she's a good friend. So I quarrel with her, but she has her*

⁶²³Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶²⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁶²⁵Kosovo - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, street child

⁶²⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶²⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶²⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old female, IDP camp

⁶²⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, boy 15 years old, institutionalized child

way again. She's afraid of something bad happening to me, and that's why she doesn't want me to be friends with some girl she says is not proper"⁶³⁰. So their parents' restrictions are often made with their protection in mind. Girls were particularly concerned about the restrictions that their parents place on their friendships with boys.

Strategies to deal with negative peers

In order to respond to these "negative" or "bad" peers who exert a negative influence, tease or bully children, the respondents highlight a range of strategies. Some children feel that nothing can be done to stop them or alleviate the situation: "Well, you get insulted, humiliated, ridiculed. So you feel real bad, and you revolt inside, but you can't do anything"⁶³¹; "You just bow your head and leave, there is nothing else to do"⁶³². Others fight back or try to defend themselves, particularly if they have already tried various courses of action: "I really don't like to fight, and I try to prevent it. I often stay quiet when someone tells me something degrading, I try to act as if I never heard it. I have talked a lot about this with my friends, that it's a matter of intelligence, and we should not fall for their cheap tricks, you can get provoked wherever you go. However, there were times when we fought, but they were rare. Sometimes I can put up with so much without feeling bad, and then I feel content with myself much more than when I give in to their pressure and get into a fight"⁶³³.

Many ask their parents, teachers or other significant adults to defend them and stand up for their interests. This often has a range of unintended consequences. For instance, a child in an institution in Romania stated that she first tried to obtain a teacher's assistance when she was being harassed and beaten. When this failed to elicit results, she attacked the boy in class, and instead of helping her, the teacher punished her. In another case, a child in an IDP camp in Montenegro complained that by asking the camp leader to intervene, the boys used further violence in retaliation⁶³⁴.

Occasionally parents are called upon to intervene, with mixed results: "He took out a bat to attack me, but my father stood in front of me, asking him to stop. Then he hit my father on the head. What was I supposed to do? When he hit my father I saw blood and I hit him back"⁶³⁵.

A child in Montenegro was concerned that these "bad boys" would hurt his father if he called on his assistance, so instead he tries to negotiate with them or deflect their attention: "When they come, I offer them popcorn. They sometimes ridicule me for it and laugh at me and leave but sometimes they don't want to leave, but stand there just to make me feel afraid. I keep quiet and keep working and they leave"⁶³⁶. A child in this community expressed a similar concern: "It would be harder for me if something happened to my father or brother than if they didn't help me, and these boys did whatever they wanted to me"⁶³⁷. He was more concerned about the safety of his parent and sibling over his own wellbeing.

A child complained that his attempts at enlisting the support of his parent often failed and that his attempts to take matters in his own hands often led to increased violence from his father: "We

⁶³⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶³¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶³²Kosovo - individual interview, girl 15 years old, school child

⁶³³Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶³⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶³⁵Serbia - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁶³⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶³⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

used to go to the father and complain that his son was bothering us, and he does not do anything about it, so then we have to deal with it. Then my two friends and I deal with it immediately. And then my father punishes me, and his father does not punish him, and that's not fair. Because a father has to punish the children when they do wrong"⁶³⁸.

Alternatively, children call upon their friends to provide assistance. A child in Serbia stated that he often has to protect other children living and working on the streets: "I couldn't stand to watch him bully the children. I said to him, "If I ever see you again, you'll be dead meat". He said, "What do you mean by dead meat?" You know, he thinks that I will kill him, and I will not kill him, but beat him black and blue, and that's it, my man"⁶³⁹.

As a last resort, children run away from the scene and/or leave the environment where the bullying occurs. For instance, some children decide not to attend school as this is the site of where bullying occurs: "We don't feel good because now for example, we have to go to secondary school. Some can not come there because they are threatened that they will be beaten up, so that they must go to other schools, not in the school they like"⁶⁴⁰. Parents often take an active role in this regard. A girl working on the streets of Kosovo stated that her father first approached her teacher to stop the ongoing bullying that she faced, but when this failed he removed her from school.

Hence, it is evident that having friends is an important source of social support and resilience for many children who rely on them for advice, material assistance and protection. However, traffickers may pretend to be a friend to gain their trust and/or a friend might use direct and indirect pressure to exploit a child or push him/her into criminal activities and other activities that might place a child at risk. Peers are a source of teasing and bullying; a child seeking to escape such a situation may run away and be tempted by offers to go elsewhere.

Escape strategies

Thus far this report has described the mechanisms and processes by which it is believed that children are trafficked. It has related these to the adversities that children have faced and sought to overcome in their daily lives through the development of various strategies. This section will focus on the notion that one strategy that many children employ when faced with adversity, is to escape. This will be linked to their perceptions of how victims of trafficking escape and survive. The respondents highlighted a number of difficulties associated with escaping from traffickers. However, many felt that children can escape from such a situation. This success is said to depend on a number of characteristics which will be outlined in this section. These characteristics will then be related to the children's own experiences in their daily lives, to show that their perceptions around the survival and courage of victims of trafficking reflect their own survival and courage in the face of adversities such as violence and exploitation.

Escape from violence and adversity

The respondents in this study provided accounts of the ways in which they have escaped from situations which they have found to be adverse. This section will discuss the manner in which they

⁶³⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶³⁹Serbia - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, street child

⁶⁴⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

escape from their homes, institutions and other settings where they are subject to violence and exploitation. It will highlight in particular the manner in which these children exhibit the same strengths and resiliency factors which they regard as important for a child seeking to escape a trafficking scenario.

As has been mentioned throughout this report, children describe a sense of fear in relation to a number of different actors, places and events. They also highlighted the importance of courage in terms of survival on the streets and in other contexts where they feel unsafe. This bravery appeared in their descriptions of how they stood up to or defended themselves against a perpetrator of violence, and in the numerous accounts of how they protected someone else from violence and exploitation.

Many children expressed a high level of self-efficacy in relation to their ability to defend or protect themselves and that this requires a high level of courage. Some children described the manner in which they defended and tried to protect another person – adult or child – who was subject to violence. This person was often a parent who was subject to intimate partner violence, a sibling who was subject to physical abuse or a peer who was frequently bullied and beaten. In Kosovo, a girl claimed that a teacher knew she had been raped and then tried to convince her to have sex with him. When she refused he tried to do the same with her sister, so she intervened. Her comments suggest that he was trying to encourage her to convince her to go with him, and in response she threatened to inform the authorities. Her account reflects the bravery and courage that many children exhibit when faced with potentially risky situations:

“This one day my sister came from school and told me that the same teacher who picked on me also was not leaving my sister alone too. I told my sister not to worry because I would go to his office, and I did it the next day I met him. I told him I went there because I was older now and I have more experience now, so he started telling me about his dreams and was getting ready to go away from the city where we would spend time together and when we come back he would buy me a lot of clothes. When I saw that he was going on with it, and was serious about it, I told him do you realize that I could record all you have told me. I told the teacher that he will not be the one who would pick on my sister and my brother and make school hell for them, you are the principal because there was no one to protect me but there is someone who will protect them so stop trying to do that because I will go to the ministry of education and tell on you and you will be left without a job and on top of that you could be charged for misuse of your post and of the students...”⁶⁴¹.

These acts of courage often have a range of unintended negative consequences, so that they may be a sign of resiliency on the one hand, but they may also lead to increased risks such as abandonment, further violence and exploitation. In terms of defending a parent, a girl in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that she asked her father to stop shouting at her mother, but then she was beaten as a result. Other children used physical violence against an abusive parent. A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina tried to intervene in domestic violence, but was pushed out of the home as a result.

A girl in Albania stated that she tried to protect her brother’s wife from being maltreated by her father but in the process was also subject to physical violence: *“Sometimes when my dad quarrels with my brother’s wife and hits her and I go to support her, he hits me too. Look at my bruises”⁶⁴².*

⁶⁴¹Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁶⁴²Albania - focus group interview, 14 years old girl

A girl in Kosovo suffered a similar experience in that she was subject to physical abuse when she tried to prevent her father who had been drinking at the time, from hitting her mother who was suffering from asthma: *"The time he hit my mother, I could not take it any more and I threw my self at him to confront him because I could not stand it any more and then he beat me up really bad"*⁶⁴³.

Courage was also described in relation to other situations that they perceive to be adverse, such as countering a parent's choice of husband and running away to avoid an arranged marriage, as described in a previous section: *"Sometimes a girl has enough courage and confronts her parents and runs off with the boy she likes, if he wants her for his wife"*⁶⁴⁴.

Some girls deliberately lie to their parents about their whereabouts, even though they are aware of the potential risk of being physically punished for breaking the rules that restrict their freedom of movement: *"I make up a story to tell my father, all so he wouldn't find out"*⁶⁴⁵. The simple act of lying to a parent about the fact that one is not working is an act of bravery, particularly since a child may face violence if this is discovered.

The act of running away from home is also courageous because it is often undertaken alone and poses risks that are difficult to anticipate. The children described the process by which many weigh up the various options before deciding to leave. Many respondents were aware of the risks and potential outcomes, such as having to survive on one's own, and on this basis said that they would not consider running away: *"What child has enough strength to confront his father and manage to get by alone? They would stay in the street on their own, all of their people would leave, I think that would be impossible. Such a child would be in great danger"*⁶⁴⁶.

Another child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated: *"How can she run away? She might get lost and someone else can pick her up"*⁶⁴⁷. So running away might lead to trafficking, exploitation and violence. A child in Kosovo suggested that such a decision is taken without forethought and proper consideration of the trafficking risks: *"Perhaps she is getting beaten up in her house so she then tries to simply run away without putting any real thoughts on what could happen to her and believes people easy only not to return home, and the traffickers look for exactly such kinds of girls"*⁶⁴⁸.

For some children, this decision was incomprehensible because it involves a loss of social supports: *"I think they are stupid for running away from home because there they were protected by their parents in a way. They had roof over their heads and someone to help them"*⁶⁴⁹.

On the other hand, after weighing up the options, some children felt that living on the streets is preferable to being subject to various forms of violence at home, as has been highlighted in previous sections. This was a risky strategy which some children were brave enough to take, largely because they have few other options.

As mentioned previously, the streets offer escape from violence, rules and restrictions and therefore provide children a greater degree of say, power and freedom of decision-making.

⁶⁴³Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁶⁴⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁶⁴⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁶⁴⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶⁴⁷Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁶⁴⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

⁶⁴⁹Serbia - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

However, the unintended consequence of this decision is that they are subject to harassment and violence from a range of actors, and may even be subject to coercion, exploitation and trafficking. This brave act of resiliency amounts to a risk for some children but when weighing up the risks, violence in the home is a more salient and possibly more tangible and immediate concern, than the vague, possibility of being trafficked.

Some children also decide to run away from institutions when they perceive it to be unfavourable, undesirable and often adverse. This is said to require planning and acting with forethought, which is often undertaken with the peer group: *“I also think it’s on their mind all the time and they make plans, especially if there are more children there, and I think they can get organized in a way”*⁶⁵⁰.

Despite, the fact that they feel as though they are under constant surveillance by the staff in the shelter, they stated that there are ways to circumvent these constraints: *“Well, yes, but you see, they control us and check we are here all the time, and still someone manages to run away, at least in the evening. There are ways. And I think children can find those ways”*⁶⁵¹.

This is one way in which they feel that they can exercise some control over their lives. Given the planning necessary to organize an escape, certain abilities and skills are said to be important: *“But I think there is a way to escape from any situation; there are ways, they just need to be smart enough to discover them. There must be some children who manage to escape”*⁶⁵². Apart from considering how to escape, the children stated that it is necessary to consider the consequences of this decision, follow-up actions and possible supports. In this sense, it is often important to rely on the assistance of other children: *“I think they also sometimes think of the ways to get out and what to do later, who they can turn to and such things. Also, if there are more children there with them, they sometimes hang out together”*⁶⁵³. This once again highlights the value attached to the peer group as a form of social support.

For some children it is very important to leave the institution, even if simply for short periods: *“I can’t change being at the Home, but I can run off and be with my friends when I feel like going out, so those children can do as much. It’s a tiny thing, but it’s enough for me to fulfill my day”*⁶⁵⁴. This reflects a previous argument that children desire some freedom and control over their lives. Some of the girls in this institution run away in the evenings to meet boyfriends, even though they may be subject to punishment for being caught is *“plucking grass”* or doing gardening.

A child in Serbia stated that she runs away from the institution because she would like to see her mother, whom she is forbidden from contacting. Another child in Serbia stated that she ran away after hearing that she would be taken to another institution, where in the past, she had not been allowed to watch television, and had been subject to tranquilization for *“unruly behaviour”*⁶⁵⁵. A child in Bulgaria stated: *“Those, who do not belong there, run away”*⁶⁵⁶ suggesting that only certain children should be institutionalized.

⁶⁵⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁵¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁵²Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁵³Montenegro - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, institutional child

⁶⁵⁴Montenegro - individual interview, a 14 years old girl, institutional child

⁶⁵⁵Serbia - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

⁶⁵⁶Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, trafficked child

It is also said that conditions may be so bad in the institution that they have little choice but to escape permanently, and regardless of the options, anything is better than remaining: *"The ones who can't put up with all that, they hit the ceiling. When you think about it, what could they lose anyway?"*⁶⁵⁷

A child in Kosovo who ran away from a shelter to find her parents returned to the shelter when she failed to do so. She stated that she ran away purposefully to fulfill a particular outcome: *"I was so ashamed; because I had decided to run away my self thinking that I would end up with a solution"*⁶⁵⁸.

This highlights the extent to which a strategy that fails to elicit the desired results has an effect upon children's sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

In their attempts to escape an adverse situation, many children weigh up the option of turning to another actor for advice and assistance. A later section will describe their perceptions of various state and non-state actors who they have had contact with, other than those already mentioned in the report (staff in institutions and teachers), in order to understand whether children perceive them to provide adequate support to complement the bravery and courage that they exhibit. Nevertheless, it is important to note that children's belief that victims of trafficking are able to escape, is reflected in their own experiences and attempts at escaping violence and exploitation. Their beliefs about trafficking are therefore mediated by their own experiences and interpersonal relationships. These children require support not only during the process of escape but also after they have escaped.

Escape from trafficking scenario

It will be argued that children's perceptions of how others escape from a trafficking scenario are derived from their own escape strategies in situations of violence and adversity. These escape strategies and perceptions are also influenced by a range of trafficking messages as was argued in a previous chapter. One of the reasons why children in Serbia and Bulgaria felt that escape is possible is because they had seen or read news broadcasts about girls who have been kidnapped but survived. A girl in Bulgaria highlighted the success story of a young victim of trafficking, which was shown on television: *"I know about a girl who was 15; I saw it on the TV. And despite all these she found will to escape"*⁶⁵⁹.

In terms of difficulties, the children highlighted the fact that those who are trafficked are taken to foreign countries, they are physically restrained or guarded closely. Some children felt that it is very difficult to escape in a foreign country because one would not know the language, not know where to go or who to turn to for support. Their choices in foreign environments are therefore constrained: *"It depends on each one's thinking; if you are abroad completely alone then you really don't have choices; you cannot go either left or right, forward or backwards. Their only choice is to run away because there is no other option; there is no one who can decide for them or a specialized institution they can apply to"*⁶⁶⁰.

An identified victim of trafficking in Bosnia stated that she had been trafficked to Croatia and that

⁶⁵⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁵⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁶⁵⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁶⁶⁰Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

she was initially too afraid to run away because “everyone was of other nationality”⁶⁶¹. As mentioned previously in relation to migration, having certain language skills which can be used in a foreign country are regarded as source of strength, as is possessing information about who to turn to for support in that country.

This is complicated by the fact that there is often more than one trafficker involved: “But it is not easy. In the movies, I know this from the movies it happens but it is difficult because it is not just one pimp but there is a network - they find you and there is no one to protect you abroad”⁶⁶². The children felt that it may be impossible for a child to escape if they are physically restrained. This is exacerbated by the physical strength of the traffickers, particularly if the victim is a girl: “Unfortunately for her, since they were men, they got out of the car faster and, of course, they caught her. Escaping from them is not that easy”⁶⁶³. Yet again, this idea that child victims of trafficking tend to be young children or girls is reiterated, on the basis of their relative physical weakness.

The children stated that it may be difficult for a child to escape even when they are not physically restrained, if they are closely watched. It is said that even when children are forced to work on the streets traffickers remain close by, and this restricts their movement and ability to run away: “Because when they work they keep a close eye on them, they stay 1 meter away from them so there is nothing they can do, they cannot go anywhere”⁶⁶⁴.

The traffickers may resort to violence if an escape plan fails: “Well, it’s not that easy, they have everything surrounded and they know what you’re doing all the time. And you can’t escape, because it’s not that easy, and if you want to escape they capture you and torture you. They pour hot water over your legs and things like that...”⁶⁶⁵. For this reason, and the possible negative consequence of running away, some children suggested that they would not even try to escape. For instance, a child in a Bulgarian institution stated: “If, for example, they watch her very closely and if they have told her that if she leaves they will murder her or something like that; I wouldn’t leave either, it’s out of the question”⁶⁶⁶.

Despite these challenges it is said that certain children are able to escape from a trafficker, but this requires the following:

- Character and skills: bravery, determination, observation, negotiation and reasoning skills. Remaining calm under pressure
- Acting with forethought: Planning in advance, weighing up various options and the possible consequences of one’s behaviour
- Opportunism: Seizing a moment, making on-the-spot decisions
- Escape alone, with others or with the support of others depending on the situation
- Rely on law enforcement authorities

As was argued above, a number of these characteristics appeared in their own descriptions of escape from violence and other forms of adversity.

The children suggested that fear or showing fear is likely to increase the risk of violence,

⁶⁶¹Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁶⁶²Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁶⁶³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶⁶⁴Albania - focus group interview, 15 years old girl

⁶⁶⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶⁶⁶Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

exploitation and trafficking. A child working on the streets of Bosnia-Herzegovina described her fear as follows: *“That means, I psychologically I don’t feel good. I’m very nervous and that makes me psychologically weaker... I simply can’t describe that, that is indescribable. I’m simply losing the feeling of safety. It took me some time to gain safety, to stand on solid ground, like a concrete and I’m mixed into it and I stand firmly, and now it’s like I’m on a sheet, there is no surface”*⁶⁶⁷. So fear may increase the chance of being trafficked, but it may also thwart the desire to escape a trafficking situation.

The respondents held that a victim of trafficking can only overcome barriers such as physical restraints, being guarded and threatened by exhibiting courage. It is said that some children are too afraid to run away especially if they have been subjected to physical violence at the hands of traffickers: they weigh up the options, and given the risk of further violence, they do not attempt to escape. The decision to escape is therefore highly constrained by the absence of alternative choices, a lack of information and an overarching sense of fear. As a girl in a Romanian institution explained, *“It is really difficult to get out from such a situation. I don’t know, I don’t think these girls can decide. Once they get there they have to do what these persons tell them to, that’s what I think. Or they can try to escape... Well, I think they are really scared, you go to another country, you don’t know anybody and you feel yourself bind hand and foot, well I think you must be horrified there. Maybe some of them are more courageous and they are not afraid but I think most of them are afraid. They already know, they can feel what is happening, if they are tied and beaten... I don’t know if they can decide when they have their hands and feet bound, I don’t think they can, once you have been caught, and if you want to run away but if you don’t know where to go and if that person also has a car comes after you and captures you again”*⁶⁶⁸.

In general, the children who felt that escape was possible stated that bravery and courage were necessary. Determination is also an important asset: *“It is a matter of not giving up”*⁶⁶⁹. In addition, it was felt that particular observation skills are necessary as well as the ability to act with forethought and plan one’s escape in advance. It was also said that remaining calm and possessing a degree of creativity could assist a child seeking to escape. For instance, a child in Bulgaria stated that someone had attempted to traffic her and after considering the options, instead of screaming or calling out for assistance, she decided to fabricate a story about an illness that would play on the trafficker’s pity and concern:

“It was late in the evening, it was dark. I started asking myself, What would happen to me now? but I didn’t panic. I was waiting for him to say something because I was afraid to say anything. At one point I asked: “Where will X wait for us, he won’t be long, right?” and he said: “If you want we can pull over here somewhere and wait for the time to pass.” I said... “No, there is no need, let’s get back to the town”. I started telling him about a made-up disease that I didn’t feel well, and I had seizures and if someone touched me I turned blue. I started complaining that I couldn’t go to a party like a normal person because I felt faint. And I sensed that he started worrying. And he was old. Well, not very old but elderly. He started comforting me. “Everything would be alright, you will be cured, you will see...” and he turned the car right away and we returned to the town. If I had started screaming, I don’t know what he might have done, he might have beaten me, or he might have raped me. So when a person is abroad and he falls into a difficult situation he should keep his head cool and think up of something”.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁷Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

⁶⁶⁸Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁶⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁶⁷⁰Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls -14-18 years old, school children

Negotiation and reasoning skills are therefore also important when attempting to escape.

Hence, it is held that before deciding to risk escape, children need to weigh up their options carefully. Some of the respondents stated that when compared to being trafficked and exploited, all other options will appear favourable and therefore escape is not only desirable but necessary.

This is echoed by two girls in an institution in Montenegro: *“I’d escape regardless of that, I’d find some way. Let them kill me if I don’t succeed, I couldn’t live if someone tortured me like that”*⁶⁷¹; *“Well, the only thing I could tell them would be, if they see some kind of escape from that awful situation, to use it, because there’s no way they can be worse off, at least that’s what I think”*⁶⁷². It is said that violence and exploitation will make such a decision unavoidable: *“Bad treatment can also make you want to escape. Insults, harassment, and you just can’t stand it any more”*⁶⁷³.

It is held that gaining a trafficker’s trust over time is an important strategy when planning to escape: *“They started to trust her and that’s how she found a way to escape”*⁶⁷⁴. An identified victim of trafficking in Bulgaria stated that she knew that this was an important strategy because she had been involved in a training workshop on trafficking before having been trafficked, and used this information to escape: *“I wanted to run away because he wanted me to sleep with others. I started to feel that he is not the man I thought him to be. Around two months after I ran away. [We stop the interview for a little break]... They must try to escape in some way... I also went to training about trafficking when I was in the home but I couldn’t recognize the situation. When I found out that this would happen I was aggressive and later I remembered that they told us not directly to oppose them but to win their trust and then to escape”*⁶⁷⁵.

Hence, having information about what to do when confronted by potential traffickers is important when planning an escape.

The respondents stated that even though it is important to act with forethought, it is also important to be opportunistic and wait for the right moment to escape. In other words, one needs to take advantage of the situation and the possibility that a trafficker has made a mistake, and seize the moment to escape. For instance, a child in Serbia stated that if they force a child to beg or to steal, there is an opportunity to run away because children cannot be guarded all the time: *“For instance, they let you mooch and you take stock of the situation, you know, and as soon as there is an opportunity you step on the gas”*⁶⁷⁶. When describing the escape strategy of a child, a girl in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that when she is exploited and forced to work on the streets, she should save some money for herself and use it to get a taxi when the opportunity arises⁶⁷⁷.

A girl working on the streets in Bosnia-Herzegovina revealed that someone had attempted to traffic her but when they stopped for petrol and telephone cards, she made an on the spot decision to runaway: *“There was a gas station across the road, X went to a store to buy phone cards while this one was by the door. My door was open because X sat next to me and that man was driving, they*

⁶⁷¹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁷²Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁷³Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁶⁷⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁶⁷⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, trafficked child

⁶⁷⁶Serbia - focus group interview, an 18 years old boy, street child

⁶⁷⁷Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 16 years old girl

*switched a lot. Without thinking I ran out and went to that gas station. I was so scared when I bumped in, I don't know what happened next. When I pulled myself together I was in a car, police car and went away. Yes, I didn't know for myself, how I got there"*⁶⁷⁸.

It is said that when deciding whether to escape, it is necessary to think carefully about whether one will do this alone or enlist the support of others. There seemed to be a mixed reaction to this, with some children stating that it is easier to escape alone as one can go undetected and one does not have to listen to others who may ruin the plan, but others argued that it is only by helping another child to escape, or by asking for the support of someone with more power, that an escape plan will succeed. However, asking for such support might require courage. This is evident in a quote from a boy in a Montenegrin institution, who compared some of the failed collective plans of children in this institution to the possible failure of a joint plan to escape: *"Yeah, right, that's a flop, it's like us in the Home: whenever we need to organize something, there's someone who ruins the idea. I think they consider any kind of escape on their own, I think that's easier for them. And safer... Well, if they work in the streets, some children like to talk to the people passing by, and some people may help them, so they muster the courage to tell them about the things they are suffering"*⁶⁷⁹.

Some children felt that it was necessary to devise joint escape plans so as to help each other. In Bulgaria, an identified victim of trafficking stated that she helped another girl escape: *"They brought a girl from Bulgaria, a very pretty girl, 18-19 years old from T. We became friends with her. I helped her to escape and we live together in Germany now..."*⁶⁸⁰. When asked how she managed to escape she stated that a person who was or pretended to be a client called the police to assist them. She describes him as a friend: *"He is a Turkish but lives in Germany. He has a daughter and he is separated with his wife. He was coming there and liked me. He wanted to be with me every time. They started to suspect something. They told him to get another one but he was telling them that he pays and he wants me and no one else. He told the police where we were and they found us"*⁶⁸¹. "Positive peer relationships" are therefore an important source of strength in this situation as was revealed in a previous chapter.

A child working on the streets in Romania stated that the only way in which children can escape is if they turn to others for assistance; this is a decision that children can make even when they are trafficked: *"They can escape; if they really don't want to do this thing, they can say so. I don't think there is anyone who can force them. They can fully decide. If you see your decision is not respected then you turn to other persons, situations that might help you..."*⁶⁸². This is echoed by a child in Bulgaria: *"Well if someone helps them they will try immediately to save themselves. But when there is no way to escape they just put up with it"*⁶⁸³. In other words, social supports are essential when seeking to survive a trafficking situation.

Many respondents stated that a child victim of trafficking will only escape successfully if they enlist the support of the police. This is a decision that they can make to exercise some control over their lives, as a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated: *"Can the children who are trafficking victims decide about their own destiny? I think they can't. They can only if they run away. If they can, they can*

⁶⁷⁸Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, street child

⁶⁷⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, a 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶⁸⁰Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, trafficked child

⁶⁸¹Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, trafficked child

⁶⁸²Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁶⁸³Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

when they escape and tell the police”⁶⁸⁴. This decision is also said to require bravery, as an identified victim of trafficking in Bulgaria stated: *“The girls must be brave to tell about it so such people can be caught”*⁶⁸⁵. Hence, bravery, self-efficacy and feeling in control of a situation and the ability to seek support are important resilience characteristics. They are not fixed but are relational in that they emerge in contact and in relationships with other actors such as the police.

A child in Kosovo expressed the concern that the police could not be trusted because they are working in cahoots with traffickers, and may therefore assist them in trafficking a child rather than assisting and protecting this child: *“And then, you know, they take this passport from you and you can not even go to the police, because the police cooperates with these people as well, for example the police can know when someone crosses the border with a passport that doesn’t belong to him. They, the traffickers, cooperate with the police, I even think they do it together even”*⁶⁸⁶. Yet again, this points to the importance children place in trust when determining who they can seek support from.

Some children felt that the police are able to find missing children; however, some were skeptical about the ability of the police to find these traffickers: *“If the police is informed, they would do something. But they don’t really know where the trafficker’s nests are”*⁶⁸⁷. It is held to be important to report the incidence to the police, however, it needs to be borne in mind that some children do not want to have to experience lengthy court processes or have to speak to people who may not be sensitive to their experiences, and on this basis decide not to inform the police.

It is evident that feeling understood is extremely important when seeking assistance from law enforcement authorities. This will enable children to express their concerns and reveal their experiences, which will not only be necessary for law enforcement purposes, but also in the process of coping with the effects of adversity and trafficking.

The effects of violence and trafficking

In this section it will be argued that children’s perceptions about trafficking, its causes and effects are often mediated by the meaning they attached to experiences of violence they have experienced in their daily lives. Many refer to the effects it has on their physical wellbeing and on their emotional and psychological well-being with specific references to shock, an unwillingness to share experiences, anger, low self-efficacy and a sense of social exclusion.

The effects of violence

The effect of witnessing and/or experiencing violence was said to have had an impact on the respondents’ physical well-being.

In order to process or come to terms with their experiences, children try to understand perpetrators’ motives. Some children suggested that their parents may have a mental illness because their behaviour is often so “deviant”, “abnormal” and “abhorrent” particularly when it involves

⁶⁸⁴Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 16 years old girl

⁶⁸⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, trafficked child

⁶⁸⁶Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁶⁸⁷Romania - individual interview, 18 years old girl

using violence against a child. For instance, a child in a shelter in Kosovo who was physically abused by her father stated: *"I think my dad is schizophrenic, if he was not he would not treat me otherwise like that"*⁶⁸⁸. This is echoed by another child in Serbia who witnesses other family members being physically hurt by their father: *"Because my father is mentally unwell. He gets drunk and I think he'll hurt my sister or my mother"*⁶⁸⁹. It is only by referring to psychopathology that some children can make sense of the fact that parents may hurt their own children. Interestingly, a similar explanation was provided for why some children are trafficked by their parents, as will be highlighted below. In other words, children's attempts to explain or understand trafficking are mediated by their own experiences, and the meaning they attach to them.

In terms of the effects of experiencing violence and maltreatment, many of the children referred to the same emotions and feelings ascribed to victims of trafficking. Some children did not want to talk about these experiences because they would bring back terrible memories that they were trying to forget. A child stated that just the act of asking her to talk about her past is painful because it stands as a reminder for what she has had to endure. She feels that her own unwillingness to discuss these feelings testifies to the fact that she has not fully dealt with them, which is in itself a painful realization. A child in Kosovo stated that despite the efforts of psychologists, her sister will not share her experiences of abuse, even with her. It was argued previously that children feel it is important to share their concerns and problems with others whom they trust, and this was perceived as a source of strength and resiliency in a range of situations. It is evident that children who experience violence are less likely to share these experiences and/or place trust in others; this might affect their resiliency in the long term. This might not be because they are not *able* to trust *per se*, but as trust is so relational and negotiated in the context of relationships, it might be because they believe that the other person is not listening to them, doesn't understand them, doesn't respect their decisions and does not trust them.

In relation to violent experiences at the hands of her father and boyfriend, a girl in Romania stated: *"I think that if you have the mind I have now, I wouldn't trust anyone else. Everybody trusts or has trust in someone but not really like I do"*⁶⁹⁰. So retrospectively she wishes that she had not trusted the boyfriend who abused her. Some children state that it will affect their ability to trust people in future. A child in Bulgaria suggested that her previous experiences of abuse have made it difficult for her to trust people and have adversely affected her performance at school.

The effects of trafficking

When trying to understand why some children are trafficked, a few respondents drew attention to mental illness as a factor behind why some people traffic children. Particular reference was made to parents in this regard. As a child in Montenegro stated, *"Well I guess the ones whose parent's aren't sane. Only insane people can do such a thing"*⁶⁹¹. A child in Montenegro also associated mental illness with alcohol abuse, when describing which children are at risk of being trafficked: *"Unfortunate children with a crazy father, because usually fathers do that, a mother is not likely to do that. Can he be normal, a father who sells his child just to be able to take some money for his own child and use it to buy drinks? At least that's what people say, that people who don't have*

⁶⁸⁸Kosovo - individual interview, an 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁶⁸⁹Serbia - focus group interview, 13 years old boy, shelter child

⁶⁹⁰Romania - individual interview, 16 years old girl

⁶⁹¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

*anything and are poor do that. So many people are poor, and they don't sell their children. So that means they are not just poor but sick, insane, and should be erased from the earth"*⁶⁹².

In other words, poverty is not an adequate explanation for child trafficking, but it is associated with a perpetrator's alcoholism and psychopathology. This is echoed in the children's attempts to make sense of or derive meaning from their own experiences of violence as was argued above. The idea that a parent can hurt a child is as incomprehensible as the idea of someone trafficking a child, someone who may be a parent.

It is said that children who are trafficked suffer in many ways, not simply physical but also emotional and psychological. It is said that such children would not be able to sleep and would not want to discuss their experiences with anyone. It is also said that this will have an effect upon their health and physical wellbeing: *"This child that I imagine would look exhausted, would have nightmares every night, would stutter due to the fear and would be restless"*⁶⁹³. A child in Montenegro illustrated it as follows: *"I painted everything black, as that's what it would probably look like to this child"*⁶⁹⁴.

It is said that they will find it difficult to trust anyone and their lives will be dominated by fear: *"After having a life like that, I think they don't hope for anything. And they fear everything. They are afraid if someone gives them a nasty look, after what they have probably been through"*⁶⁹⁵. As argued in a previous section fear is perceived to be a source of weakness for children seeking to develop various protection and survival strategies.

It is said that this affects their self-efficacy and in particular their ability to exercise control over their lives. It is also said that this increases their sense of anger and injustice, and might make them feel lonely and socially excluded: *"I also think that they hate the person who bought them, the one they have to do things for. And they are angry at everyone, they can't stand talking about anything. On the other hand, they feel rejected by everyone, because how can they go back anywhere? I think they think who would ever take them like that anywhere and how they would fit anywhere"*⁶⁹⁶. This sense of social exclusion has elsewhere been highlighted as a risk factor by children in institutions and children living on the streets. It is said to make them more vulnerable to peer pressure, to the compliments and small acts of kindness exhibited by strangers, who may then hurt, exploit or traffic them.

An identified victim of trafficking in Bulgaria stated that her psychologist was of great assistance in helping her deal with her experiences of sexual abuse and other forms of maltreatment: *"I hated myself even when this thing in my family happened but I remember that the psychologist from the home told me not to blame myself about this... A psychologist was coming to talk with me. I told her that I wanted to begin a new life and she offered me a choice to stay there, or to come to this shelter. I talk every day with my psychologist; she is great. But I rarely take advice. I know that she would help me but it is a long process"*⁶⁹⁷.

Children in Bulgaria discussed at length whether a child who has been trafficked will be accepted at home. Some respondents felt that if children are forced to leave and had little choice, they

⁶⁹²Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁶⁹³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶⁹⁴Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁹⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁶⁹⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁶⁹⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, trafficked child

will be accepted back by their parents. Other children stated that this acceptance will depend on the type of activities they are forced to do. In particular, it was felt *“if the girl was a prostitute there, the reception won't be very warm”*⁶⁹⁸. It was explained that this is related to the social stigma attached to this activity particularly in small towns where it is difficult to keep secrets: *“it will be embarrassing what they were doing there”*⁶⁹⁹.

This was reflected in a previous chapter which highlighted the importance attached to virginity in many communities, and the manner in which a child who is only thought to be sexually active is believed to bring shame upon herself and her whole family. Many girls are therefore blamed regardless of whether the sexual relations were consensual or not, although this does not occur in all contexts in the same way or to the same extent. Some children highlighted the fact that regardless of what girls say about what they are forced to do, they will not be believed and trusted. Instead, it will be assumed that they were involved in prostitution: *“It is worse with the girls because the first thing that the father would think about is that his daughter was selling her body for money and it will be hard to accept her”*⁷⁰⁰. In contrast, it will be assumed that boys are not involved in the sex industry and/or they are unlikely to reveal this information. These perceptions relate to the manner in which gender is constructed and the expectations surrounding the activities that boys and girls can or should engage in, as described above. It is also related to children's belief that they are not trusted and/or their concerns are not heard.

It has been argued that children's perceptions about trafficking are influenced by their own experiences in their daily lives. In particular, the manner in which they describe the effects of violence resonates in their accounts of victims of trafficking. The next chapter will describe how they perceive the institutional and organizational support that they receive and link this up with their recommendations on how to prevent trafficking.

Evidence-based policy: Institutional and organizational support

This section will describe the institutional and organizational support that the child respondents perceive to be available. In particular it will refer to their perceptions of the following actors:

- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Doctors
- The police
- State officials and politicians
- NGOs and INGOs

It will be argued that a number of themes appear throughout their comments, namely their desire to be heard, trusted, given information, freedom and decision-making power. Their experiences with the actors listed above are reflected in their general recommendations on how to prevent trafficking.

⁶⁹⁸Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, school child

⁶⁹⁹Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁷⁰⁰Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

Social workers:

Some children stated that it is important to turn to social workers for support. In an institution in Montenegro, many children felt that social workers could potentially help them find identity cards and employment after they leave. A child stated that if she encounters problems after she leaves she would return to the institution and talk to the social worker: *“Then maybe they would have some temporary solution, and they’d surely consult the director. I didn’t mean he’d remember me, but he would know what the problem was and perhaps he would call someone”*. She did however add that she has never seen anyone return to the institution seeking assistance⁷⁰¹.

A child in Serbia suggested that social workers are important when children on the streets do not have support from parents or the peer group: *“If they don’t have parents then there are friends. If there are no friends, then there are social work services, for instance. As the children have nowhere to go, they take them to a shelter”*⁷⁰². As mentioned in a previous section, although some children living in institutions were very critical of the staff, their treatment and care, children who were not living in institutions often felt that this was a preferable option to living on the streets because *“there is someone who takes care for them after all. They help them. If you live on the street who is going to help you”*⁷⁰³.

A child in Kosovo stated that she was removed from her home after she reported violence at the hands of her father. She was initially unhappy about being placed in a shelter, but stated that there she has received all the care and support she needs: *“When I first went there I was very afraid, I was thinking what is this place and how is it there. When I saw the door of steel that really freaked me out, that was until I went in, and then I saw that everything was just lovely inside, and I stayed for quite a long time there. I met three friends there and we would get along great. The staff in the shelter got me back to a normal life and I am forever grateful about that, and I do not know how will I be able to ever return the favours they did for me”*⁷⁰⁴.

Some of the children made negative comments about social workers that they had come into contact with. On this basis, they state that they are unlikely to share their problems and concerns with them. A child in Montenegro described social workers who came to her home in the IDP camp as intrusive: *“It happens to me, most often when some unknown people come to our house to talk to father and they want to ask me about something to see me and then tell what I am like. Precisely because I know why they are addressing me, I get confused, and not only that, I get terribly embarrassed, and I don’t like their behavior and the reason they speak to me, and that makes me angrier”*⁷⁰⁵.

A child working on the streets in Kosovo complained that when social workers visit her home, she is not consulted. Instead, priority is given to her father’s perspective despite the fact that he is the perpetrator of various forms of violence in her household. A similar sentiment was echoed by a child living in a shelter who suggested that social workers would like to take her home in spite the fact that she does not want to return home, where she is forced against her will to work. This girl’s perceptions are not being taken into account by those purporting to care for her: *“Social workers want to take me back home, and I do not even want to go back there again, as a matter of fact the*

⁷⁰¹ Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁰² Serbia - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁷⁰³ Bulgaria - individual interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁷⁰⁴ Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷⁰⁵ Montenegro - focus group interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

people here want to organize a trip to visit my house, which is deep in the forest and they will get to see where my house is, and I would spend the whole days there working”⁷⁰⁶.

Psychologists:

In a few instances, psychologists were described in a positive manner and their advice and comments are taken on board by children. A child in Montenegro stated: *“Some times I like to talk to our psychologist, so when she tells me something that seems OK, I accept that”*⁷⁰⁷. In Bulgaria, a child described her school counselor as “cool” and someone she always contacts in times of trouble. A child working on the streets in Kosovo stated that she often speaks to a counselor and recommends that more psychologists should be made available to children. However, psychologists were also described in a negative manner. It is held that they do not listen to children because they feel that *“they know everything”*: *“The psychologist is not interested; he knows all that stuff”*⁷⁰⁸. A child in Kosovo complained that she cannot turn to the psychologist at her school for support because of the stigma attached to it: *“If you go to see her then other children immediately think there is something wrong with you”*⁷⁰⁹.

Doctors:

Children sometimes described doctors in a positive light. Reference was often made to the way that they have treated a sick friend, sibling or parent. A child in Bulgaria said that doctors can be trusted, are very reliable and able to help children in times of trouble. Some children working on the streets of Kosovo complimented doctors because they were providing information to children – something which others have failed to do: *“no-one ever called us. Today here in our street in Mother Theresa hospital, X together with some doctors holds lessons about hygiene, women and girls’ health”*⁷¹⁰.

On the other hand, many children’s comments about doctors were critical because the care that they received was perceived to be inadequate. A child in Bulgaria complained that doctors fail to fulfill their duties with regards to their child patients: *“We went to the hospital once because something happened to one boy’s leg and it swelled. We waited for two hours for a doctor to climb the stairs from the second to the third floor... Here, in our town, if you need any kind of help or assistance, not only the doctors, they will first finish drinking their coffee, they will smoke a cigarette and then if they want to they will come and do their job. And if he doesn’t feel like doing it you can’t make him do anything”*⁷¹¹. It was held that doctors are simply concerned about their jobs and salaries and not about their children’s wellbeing. In addition, they do not believe children who claim to have health problems, once again highlighting children’s perception that adults do not trust them: *“Oh, come on, the doctor who’s just waiting for the salary. And never believes us... Fine, when someone has a real headache she says “You’re lying”, and when someone doesn’t have a headache she gives them injections”*⁷¹². When discussing a hypothetical story of someone who is kidnapped, a child in Romania suggested that doctors blamed the girl for being subject to physical violence, and failed to provide her with adequate care: *“The girl is disgusted with the attitude of those working in the hospital because they have treated her “as if it*

⁷⁰⁶Kosovo - individual interview, an 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷⁰⁷Montenegro - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁰⁸Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁷⁰⁹Kosovo - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, school child

⁷¹⁰Kosovo - focus group interview, 10 years old girl, street child

⁷¹¹Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls -14-18 years old, school children

⁷¹²Montenegro - focus group interview, a 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

was my fault I couldn't breathe anymore". They did not even give her medicine that night"⁷¹³.

Police:

Generally, children felt that those who are subject to trafficking should report it to the police. Yet the children themselves were unhappy with the support that they had received from the police in the past. A few small examples were provided by children who attested to their positive treatment at the hands of the police; however, these examples were about a few individuals who through their acts of kindness made a lasting impression on children. A child who lives and works on the streets stated that a police-man regularly buys him fruit juice or food from a bakery. Another child recalled that a policeman defended him against older boys who were harassing him because he is a Roma. A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina who was collected by the police stated that they even offered her money and food, which in her opinion means that some policemen can be trusted: *"There is some good police, I swear to God, they put us in a van, took us to the station, asked who wants one KM and I said I do. Then the other one told that the youngest one of us will get 5 KM, they bought pie, milk and everything to me. And cookies"*⁷¹⁴. Many of the children stated that *"it is their job to make us feel safe"*⁷¹⁵ so would turn to the police when facing violence. So for instance, a child who lives and works on the street in Serbia said: *"Well, they help. When someone bothers us we run over there across the road. There is a kiosk there with a policeman... We go there and tell him when someone bothers us, or when someone wants to beat us on the way out of a disco. We run to him and he comes out and tells them not to beat us and to leave us alone. So he talks nicely to them and they go away"*⁷¹⁶.

However, children working on the streets also complained about the police and said that they would not turn to them for support. A child in Serbia complained: *"They harass us, everyday"*⁷¹⁷. Another child explained that when they clean windshields *"the police come and tell us to go away. We ask them what else to do, and they say "Go and steal, but when I catch you'll be even worse off"*⁷¹⁸. A child in Kosovo (who lives at home) stated that when she is trying to work on the streets the police keep trying to take her away and return her to her parents. As a result, she tries to run away from them: *"Some police officers. Because this one time these cops took me as I was selling lighters in front of the shopping mall and then they took me and send me home, and then they spoke to my mom and dad. And then these cops told my sister you can not go to school because you are too old... This one time they wanted to take us away, but we ran away"*⁷¹⁹. By picking up children and returning them to their families, their work and daily income is interrupted. Despite the efforts of the police, the children continue to work on the streets to fulfill a number of needs, including their interpersonal responsibilities to family members as was argued in a previous section.

Children living at home also complained that the police failed to protect them and other family members from violence. For instance, a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that the police did not protect her mother and siblings from the violence they were subjected to at the hands of his father: *"They didn't really help us and they said that they would come to our house every two weeks and*

⁷¹³Romania - individual interview, 15 years old girl,

⁷¹⁴Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interview, 7 years old girl, street child

⁷¹⁵Kosovo - focus group interview, boys 12-18 years old, street children

⁷¹⁶Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁷¹⁷Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁷¹⁸Serbia - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁷¹⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 8 years old girl, street child

my mum replied that we can be dead 'till then"⁷²⁰. The following lengthy quote from a child in a shelter in Kosovo who reported her alcoholic, abusive father to the police, highlights the extent to which children are often not believed or trusted; children are not informed about the prosecution/ legal process; children are not offered any alternatives; and the alternatives that children are offered, are often not perceived to be viable:

"I went to the police several times, and they said we will contact you in two or three days, but they would never do that. I would tell them get my dad because he is very drunk, measure the alcohol in his body, and believe it or not they did not even know you can actually do that, until I explained it to them what that was... I did not know where to go, so I went to the police again, the police took straight away to the doctors and went and arrested my father and sent him to jail. I do not know what further happened with the court because I gave my statement and then I went back home and I stayed there... I went to the police and told them that I do not have anywhere to go anymore, because even my real family does not want me. They would tell me that ever since I went to them I ruined the calmness and harmony in the family. So I went to the police and told them about it, and they told me that the only option is to go to a shelter which is for the protection of women and children, but they also told me that it was temporary. I did not want to go there because they were not offering me a solution and I did not want to stay with women"⁷²¹.

A child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated that after reporting his father to the police for beating him and his sister with metal chains, he has had to take responsibility for his own life. The police are not offering him alternatives: *"Well, I reported him, and I said what happened and now he feels bad about that. That's it, and now it's over, I had enough of everything, I don't want to see him ever again, I don't know, I will fight for myself and we'll see what was God's plan for me*"⁷²².

A child in a shelter in Kosovo who had been raped complained that when she reported the incident to the police, they did not consider confidentiality issues and the sensitive nature of the experience she went through. Instead they released information to the media, which in turn revealed important information about her identity to the public. This added to the stigma that she faced and her sense of social exclusion, which made it more difficult for her to integrate into the community: *"Then I went to the police and gave a statement about being raped and then there was some procedure and the boys were sentenced 3 years, all three of them. I can say one thing about our police and our media, that they are not careful at all, because the next day when I reported the case to the police and TV and the Radio told about a 14 years old girl who was raped by three boys and they also gave my first letters of my name and surname, and the first letter of the village I came from and after a short while the entire village I live in understood that I was the one and there are only two of us with those first letters in our village and the other girl is 20, so they figured it out that it was me who was raped*"⁷²³.

It is said that macro, socio-political factors have also affected the effectiveness of the police in solving children's safety and security issues. A child in Kosovo complained that the police tend to assist children depending on their ethnicity: *"Sometimes some police officers pay more attention to Albanian children rather than Ashkali children*"⁷²⁴. Another child relayed the comment made by his father that prior to the war the Serbian police were more effective than the current police force: *"When I talk to my dad sometimes about this thing, he often cusses at the police. He says that the cops*

⁷²⁰Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 11 years old girl, street child

⁷²¹Kosovo - individual interview, an 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷²²Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, shelter child

⁷²³Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷²⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

before the war when there was only the Serbian police in force, they would do many foot patrols, walking up and down on their feet, and I would also agree with my father, because look at these policemen today, they are all High Gentlemen who don't leave the police-car car seats, and are too lazy to do some feet walking"⁷²⁵. This highlights yet again the extent to which children's perceptions are influenced by significant others around them.

Some children in Kosovo were concerned about police officers who carry weapons. They stated that this would prevent them from asking for assistance because they could not be trusted and were frightening: *"I would never ask for any help from people who are in places where there are guns, because they are not reliable"*⁷²⁶. This can be linked to concerns about the militarization of Kosovo society: *"Those are soldiers and helicopters. They seem like they can hurt us... they do look scary"*⁷²⁷.

State officials and politicians:

Children across the region expressed great dissatisfaction with the performance of state officials and politicians because they did not provide timely and effective support to communities, families and children themselves. A child in Montenegro stated that conditions in the camp depend on the will of politicians. As a result, *"it's going to be the way they decide it to be. So, there will be no big changes and we will all live as we always have"*⁷²⁸. It was argued that these politicians have only their own interests at heart and they constantly make promises which they do not fulfill. A child in Romania stated that the *"Mayoralty"* or local government can protect children *"but they don't do much"*⁷²⁹. Another child in Romania complained that state benefits or welfare support to poor families are often inadequate or irregular: *"Sometimes they pay it, sometimes they don't"*⁷³⁰. In Serbia a child stated that although money, food and clothing were sometimes provided by a state-run center it was not always available. It was explained that theft and other criminal activity was necessary to survive because *"the state cares only for money. They care only for money, to grab the money and put it in their pockets"*⁷³¹. It was believed that they do not care about children even though *"a child needs to see that someone is there to back them up"*⁷³².

In Bulgaria, children also complained about inadequate state support. For instance, a child attending school stated that the money they received from the state did not even cover the most basic school expenses: *"It is difficult because the government gives 18 levs for a child and you can't buy your textbooks or anything for 18 Levs. I can't buy the pens I need for 18 Levs"*⁷³³. Another child suggested that these benefits do not even meet the subsistence needs of poor families despite the promises of the government: *"I see many children and families here who can't make enough to spend the day. They don't have enough to eat. The government says they would help these people but it has never happened. The government has never helped. Almost never"*⁷³⁴.

⁷²⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

⁷²⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁷²⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 9 years old girl, school child

⁷²⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, girls 13-16 years old, IDP camp

⁷²⁹Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy

⁷³⁰Romania - individual interview, 17 years old boy

⁷³¹Serbia - focus group interview, boys 15-17 years old, shelter children

⁷³²Serbia - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

⁷³³Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁷³⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

A child in Kosovo complained that the government education ministry is too inaccessible for her, and it is likely that they will not listen to her request to attend school: *“Concerning school, if I could somehow pass these 3 years and catch up with children of my age. I guess I can achieve that through the education ministry, but I can’t reach them to talk to them... because I am somehow, I don’t know what exactly, but I know they won’t accept to talk to me, so I never went there”*⁷³⁵. Another child in Kosovo complained that social assistance had stopped. With regards to children who work on the streets or are engaged in criminal activities, a child in a shelter in Kosovo placed blame firmly on the shoulders of politicians: *“But these children of course are not to blame, the politicians are to blame, the parliamentarians who spend our money and drive in fancy cars, go to expensive holidays. If they would each save 10 Euros they could even build houses for the children who do not have them”*⁷³⁶.

NGOs and INGOs

Children from the seven countries/entities mentioned various organisations which have provided positive support to them. Some children living and working on the streets commended some organisations for being accessible and supportive. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, children highlighted organisations that provide shelter to children who are subject to maltreatment and/or food parcels to poor families. In Kosovo, reference was made to organisations which provide courses and workshops to children (e.g. computer, cooking etc).

The children in the IDP camp were particularly vocal in their criticism of INGOs who have been administering the IDP camp since 1999. It is said that foreign INGO staff promised these displaced people material support, employment and return to Kosovo, and in so doing raised their expectations. They have failed to fulfill their promises, which has left parents and children feeling frustrated: *“I think it all depends on these foreigners. Why would those people come here and say “In two months’ time you will have a house and a job in Kosovo, like you used to have, it’s not your fault that you lost everything and your house was torn down and there was a war”. Some people came to ask us who wanted to return, and we said we did, and then what...? They have waited for years, and so have we”*⁷³⁷.

Children also complained that their needs in particular were not met, and their concerns discounted even when they speak to officials and INGO staff about their problems. For instance, a child complained about the fact that a bar was built on his playground, thereby effectively removing one of the few sources of recreation and entertainment at children’s disposal: *“The people from the Red Cross promised to remove it, but nothing happened. That’s why we have nothing in this camp just for us. Nobody wants to remove this bar, let him get the money and then he can build it somewhere else instead of here.”*⁷³⁸.

Children’s recommendations

Many of the children highlighted a disjunction between what childhood should be – as they perceive it – and what it means for them in reality. In these comments, reference is frequently made to the notion that childhood in the West is better. As argued previously, this has contributed to their desire to migrate abroad. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“Children aged for example 14 or 15 could be*

⁷³⁵Kosovo - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, street child

⁷³⁶Kosovo - individual interview, a 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷³⁷Montenegro – focus group interview, boys 14-17 years old, IDP camp

⁷³⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

doing things that fit them to do, for example in the developed countries they do certain things, but there they know exactly what kind of work a child can do and what he can not do, and of course this affects in the children's skills and abilities, but here where we live no one knows anything about things and how they go and how they are done, it is a mess..."⁷³⁹

A child in Albania complained that the notion of "childhood" means nothing in a context where there is little entertainment for children, high levels of poverty and high levels of discrimination: *"It depends so much on the age. There are a lot of children of my age who lack the economic and social conditions. They set apart of the friends. The children are discriminated by the society at home and abroad if they do not have money or if parents do not have a good position in society. I would say that the Albanian adolescents do not lead a happy life. Most of them are not happy with life in Albania. Being a child in Albania means nothing. Being a child does not mean to enjoy proper conditions for entertainment, a cinema, theater where the child can go without any problem since it is safe to go there"*⁷⁴⁰.

A child living on the streets of Serbia complained that although children need help *"many people turn their back on them"*⁷⁴¹. In Kosovo a child suggested that the absence of support is also related to the fact that few children are willing to discuss their problems and few people are willing to listen to them. This is related to the fact that few adults understand children's desires, hopes and dreams and as a result children make decisions alone: *"We want things and we hope for some things, so adults should understand that. And if we're stubborn enough we'll do what we want, even if everyone told us it was wrong"*⁷⁴².

Children's complaint that they are not given space to express their needs and wants, and that few adults understand, trust or listen to them, has appeared as a running theme throughout this report. It is also evident in the recommendations that children have provided in relation to improving their lives and those of children who run the risk of being trafficked. From these accounts it is evident that children would also like to take responsibility for these improvements, with the support of a range of other actors. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"Children should unite, all of them so we could create a better future for us. The grownups too should get educated and cooperate so the place would be made as safe as possible. Also the foreigners in organizations here, but also people from other communities"*⁷⁴³.

This section will describe the recommendations that child respondents made about the following:

- Children's rights
- Child rearing practices
- Recreation
- Education
- Employment
- Poverty
- Migration
- Marriage
- Institutions and shelters
- Social workers and psychologists

⁷³⁹Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, school child

⁷⁴⁰Albania - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, internal migrant

⁷⁴¹Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁷⁴²Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁴³Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

- Law enforcement
- NGOs
- Peer-to-peer counseling

Children's rights

Some children complained that they do not know what their rights are and that others should teach them about rights because *"we are young after all"*⁷⁴⁴. Those who pointed to their rights said that they had been informed about them by siblings or relatives. A child working on the streets of Kosovo stated: *"Well, us children also have rights, and I got this idea from my brother, he works with trolley, he told me "You have your rights", and he said should anything happen to me then I should go and tell the police immediately. And I heard on the TV that you can inform the police"*⁷⁴⁵. In other words, law enforcement bodies have a responsibility to protect children's rights.

Some children felt that rights are associated with a particular age. For instance, a child in Kosovo stated: *"I still don't have any rights yet to bring a decision"*⁷⁴⁶. Another child stated that one needs to be an adolescent to have rights: *"He has rights, because he who is 17 knows how to protect him self"*⁷⁴⁷. A child in Albania felt that one only gains rights when one turns 18 years old and stops living with one's parents: *"after that age the children are free to decide on their own because they have their own rights"*⁷⁴⁸. It is said that trafficking is more likely to occur to young people because they don't know their rights: *"This thing happens very often and mostly to young people. They don't know their rights. They don't know what to want"*⁷⁴⁹. On this basis it was recommended that children should be taught about their rights.

A child in Kosovo stated that some children have too many rights and this might lead them to make negative decisions such as smoking and drinking. It was suggested that children shouldn't have rights *"to do something that is very bad for them..."* and that efforts should be made to teach children to take the right path⁷⁵⁰. Instead of simple rules and restrictions, it is argued that children need to be explained why certain activities are restricted or prohibited.

A child in Kosovo stated that rights should be equally provided (and protected) for women and men, adults and children, and this should be used to prevent children from undertaking difficult work: *"My wish is that all should be equal, females and males, all. Here men are asked about everything more, but those who think that females and children should have no rights, then all their rights should be taken away. And not leave them with anything... I would want that all the children should have their rights, I do not know which, but I would say that children should not be doing hard jobs, not to cut wood, not open trenches, not to mow, because all these are very difficult things to do. I would hate it every time I had to do these things, and I would not want any child to do them, they are very bad things"*⁷⁵¹.

In Albania a child stated that some children's rights are violated because they cannot attend school and parental restrictions prevent children from making decisions or learning from their mistakes.

⁷⁴⁴Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls -14-18 years old, school children

⁷⁴⁵Kosovo - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, street child

⁷⁴⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁷⁴⁷Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁷⁴⁸Albania - focus group interview, 13 years old girl

⁷⁴⁹Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls -14-18 years old, school children

⁷⁵⁰Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, school child

⁷⁵¹Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, shelter child

She recommended that children should be given the right to make their own decisions.

The specific areas that these recommendations refer to will be explored in greater depth in this section, but it is evident that children make the following recommendations in relation to rights:

- Children need more information about their rights
- Rights should be applied equally to adults and children, boys and girls
- Certain actors should be responsible for protecting children's rights
- Children's right to decision-making should be protected
- Children should be informed why certain rights are restricted or protected

It is said that children who do not know about their rights or how to protect them are more at-risk of being trafficked. Rights-based education is therefore needed as a child trafficking prevention measure.

Parenting practices

Children were very critical about the manner in which they are criticized and punished, often through the use of violence. It is recommended that communication between parents and children should be improved, with particular attention paid to listening to children. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"If I was the president I would do many things differently. The parents would no way beat up his child, and if that happen, then he/she should be punished. Parents must communicate more with their children, not forbid things for them because what very is forbidden for you tend to do it more, explain to them what is good and what is not because children ask for explanations and explanations must be given to them. The parents must take into consideration the children's opinion"*⁷⁵².

It is held that listening to children will enable parents and caregivers to ascertain what children's needs are: *"I think it's important that your parents and someone who's close to you know what you need at a certain moment, instead of shouting at you all the time. That they have the patience to listen to you, then everything would be OK"*⁷⁵³. This is echoed by a child in Kosovo who stated that children should be encouraged to disclose their problems to parents and other adults: *"Whether it is parents or the teachers, they must approach the children and ask them if anything is bothering them, because children often are reluctant to talk, they are afraid, they close up within themselves"*⁷⁵⁴.

An identified victim of trafficking in Bulgaria highlighted communication as the key factor that would reduce the risk that a child would be trafficked: *"When there is communication between parents and their son or daughter, I think that it is more difficult the child to become a victim to trafficking"*⁷⁵⁵.

Hence, it is recommended that in order to prevent trafficking one of the initiatives to be undertaken is to enhance child rearing practices in the following areas:

- Forbid parental corporal punishment as a mode of discipline
- Apply rules and restrictions in a child participatory manner
- Explain restrictions to children
- Encourage children to express themselves
- Listen to children and take their opinion into account

⁷⁵²Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷⁵³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁵⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷⁵⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

Recreation

It is suggested that children's need and desire for recreation and entertainment should be met because *"children and teenagers want to have fun"*, *"they should be busy"* and because this is a way in which they can *"talk and socialize"*. On this basis children recommended the creation of sports centers, educational courses, workshops and activities throughout the year. It is said that this should be available to all children *"not only the good students"*⁷⁵⁶ and not only wealthy students. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated: *"If I'm interested in football, and I can't afford it, they should provide that to me regardless of everything, instead of me feeling bad about it"*⁷⁵⁷.

So in order to ensure that children are not *"tricked"* by the promises of entertainment, children made the following recommendation:

- All children regardless of age, gender, educational level, ethnicity and socio-economic background should be provided with structured and safe forms of recreation and entertainment.

Education

It is said that it is important to encourage high educational attendance and achievement for a number of reasons. A child in Bulgaria stated that it would prevent children from being involved in violent and/or criminal activities. It will help them learn about *"good and bad"*, *"make them think about their future"* and help them to *"progress"*⁷⁵⁸. It is said that various measures should be undertaken to ensure that children receive a quality education:

First, in order to encourage attendance it is said that parents should be provided employment so that children who work to support their families, can then attend school. A child working on the streets of Kosovo stated: *"First of all I would get these children back to school. I would get jobs for their parents so they won't have to make their children work or go out and beg. I would take the kids back to school, that's the most important thing. Because only with education something good can be achieved. I don't think that it can be done otherwise the problems will only continue"*⁷⁵⁹.

Second, children living and working on the streets should be removed from the streets to attend school and/or be provided with accommodation. As a child living on the streets in Serbia stated: *"Well, I would take to school all those who live on the street, for instance; I would give money to some, and house to some other, you know"*⁷⁶⁰. A child working on the streets in Kosovo echoed this sentiment: *"Children can go to school, get educated. Children shouldn't be wandering in the streets, not do bad things, like drugs and stealing"*⁷⁶¹. Another working child in Kosovo stated that children *"should be learning and not begging in the streets"*⁷⁶².

Third, parental involvement in school activities should be encouraged by teachers so that parents can assist their children with lessons, find out if their children are not attending school and/or not performing well. On this basis they can provide children with more support: *"The teachers should*

⁷⁵⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁷⁵⁷Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁷⁵⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, school child

⁷⁵⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁷⁶⁰Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁷⁶¹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁷⁶²Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old girl, school child

*put more efforts and contact children's parents about them not studying at school because it happens that there are those parents who don't come to school because their children don't tell them about parent's teachers meetings, and this happens because he has done something bad and is afraid from his parent"*⁷⁶³.

Fourth, teachers should not use corporal punishment to discipline children: *"Probably it can be done differently, like in the West for example; the children there are not beaten up but instead they are educated by talking to them"*⁷⁶⁴.

Fifth, in schools children should be trusted and allowed to express an opinion. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"Pupils should have the freedom of speech, and the teacher should not always be the one who is right. We do not even dare to complain because we are always found guilty..."*⁷⁶⁵.

Fifth, more resources should be invested by the state in school facilities. As a child in Kosovo stated, *"My wish is to complete the school building, in the old one there is nothing there, no sports halls, no cabinets no nothing and I think that we should complain in the municipality"*⁷⁶⁶.

So children have made the following recommendations:

- Support poor families so that they can afford to send their children to school
- Ensure that those living on the streets attend school
- Restrict or limit children's employment practices as this may affect their school attendance
- Prohibit the use of corporal punishment in schools
- Teachers should trust and listen to children
- Invest resources in improving school facilities

Employment

Many children felt that children should not work on the streets. Comments such as children *"shouldn't be begging"*⁷⁶⁷ and *"children shouldn't go out to the streets and sell"*⁷⁶⁸, suggest that child labour is not normative in a range of contexts as was argued in a previous section. It was said that children who work are often more at risk of being trafficked: *"A car could hit me, some one could steal me. Children shouldn't go out to the street and their parents should look after them. Because they can be taken to other countries and it is the parent's duty to look after the children so they don't have to go out and sell... Because there are thieves who would steal you and stab you..."*⁷⁶⁹.

In terms of recommendations, a child in Montenegro suggested that the researcher should encourage parents in the IDP camp not to allow their children to work: *"Perhaps you could go and talk to the father of these children that work in the streets, maybe he'll listen to you, you could explain that it's not good for children to be working in the street and so on, you'd be able to tell them that well"*⁷⁷⁰.

Although this was not seen as a desirable activity for many children, some children stated that

⁷⁶³Kosovo - focus group interview, girls and boys 14-15 years old, school children

⁷⁶⁴Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁷⁶⁵Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old girl, school child

⁷⁶⁶Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁷⁶⁷Bosnia-Herzegovina - individual interview, 18 years old boy, street child

⁷⁶⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 8 years old girl, street child

⁷⁶⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 8 years old girl, street child

⁷⁷⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

they had to work to support themselves and or their families. As a child in Kosovo stated, “*children should not work, although there are a lot of children who work anyway*”⁷⁷¹.

Another child in Kosovo stated: “*Children are not supposed to work but here is that situation that children need to support their parents with incomes. Children need some stuff that their parents can't buy and they go work for them*”⁷⁷².

So although children should not work, many do to fulfill a certain need or want as was argued previously. Their recommendations therefore relate to improving their working conditions. A child in Montenegro stated that an organization should help children find more permanent employment “*so that I know I have work each day and I have to go to work. My life would change completely and I would be completely happy*”⁷⁷³.

A child who cleans windscreens in Serbia stated that children who work at traffic lights should be provided with employment in safer environments: “*If someone who already works at some construction site or somewhere like that would take some children with him, you know... Children shouldn't be working at the traffic lights. You argue with people every day...*”⁷⁷⁴

Another child asked for skills training and an apprenticeship system because he has no education and needs to work: “*I'd need a good man who has his own shop to take me as his apprentice, what else can I do, I have no school and can't do anything. How am I going to earn money for the house and all the other things I need for the house. No one will take you, I know*”⁷⁷⁵.

In institutions, children asked for practical training so that they can find employment: “*I don't know; only if they gave me a job in this place where I am to go for practical training, and if they showed me everything they know, so I can work as well as them later on and start my own shop*”⁷⁷⁶.

In Kosovo, it was suggested that children should speak to people who work in certain professions or be provided with information on the internet so that they can make better decisions on how to fulfill their hopes and dreams. A child in Bulgaria stated that state institutions such as the Labor Bureau should provide children with more information about vacancies and working conditions.

Hence, in order to ensure that children are not “*tricked*” by the promise of employment the following recommendations can be deduced from their comments:

- Children should not work
- If they have to work, they should receive various forms of assistance
- They should be provided with stable, permanent employment
- They should be working in safe environments
- Children should receive skills training and practical training to increase their employment options
- Children should be provided with information about what professions are available, what skills are needed and what steps should be undertaken to be employed
- Children should be informed about vacancies and working conditions

⁷⁷¹Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁷⁷²Kosovo - focus group interview, 17 years old boy, school child

⁷⁷³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁷⁷⁴Serbia - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, street child

⁷⁷⁵Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, IDP camp

⁷⁷⁶Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

Migration

Recommendations around migration focused on different areas: preventing migration, improving the process of migration and improving conditions in destination countries. In terms of prevention, children stated that efforts need to be made to ensure that children are not seeking to escape poverty and violence, and are not seeking to find a “better life”. As a child in Bulgaria stated, “They should have better conditions and life, they don’t want anything else”⁷⁷⁷.

In other words, conditions (socio-economic, violence etc.) in origin countries need to be improved. For this to be undertaken, children’s wants should be considered in order to understand why they want to migrate abroad, what are they seeking to escape and what improvements in their lives are desirable. Among other things, in order to understand children it is necessary to communicate with them.

It is said that in order to improve the process of migration, children should be provided with information about how to travel abroad: “Some organizations that could prepare us, instruct us and help us find our way”⁷⁷⁸. It is said that children should be provided with practical information about accommodation, work and institutional supports in destination countries: “Well, we must know where the embassy is; the police, the hospital, the polyclinic, a hotel. We need to know the location of a hotel although if we have gone to work there the accommodation should be provided for”⁷⁷⁹.

It was also said that children have “more rights” when working in a foreign country if they are provided with contracts and are informed about who to contact if this contract is violated: “You have more rights. You can go to the embassy and say this firm made the arrangements for me, here is the contract, the conditions should be these but they are violated”⁷⁸⁰.

So in order to prevent children from being “tricked” with promises abroad, the following recommendations follow:

- Initiatives should focus on improving children’s living conditions in origin countries
- Children’s wants should be considered through communication
- They should be provided with information about the process, legal requirements, travel, etc
- They should receive practical information about living in destination countries
- They should be aware of their rights in foreign countries
- They should be provided with work contracts in destination countries
- They should know who to contact if these contracts are broken
- They should receive embassy support in destination countries to guard against exploitation

Poverty

Children in all research communities suggested that resources be invested in improving the socio-economic environment in which children live. For instance, a child in the IDP camp in Montenegro stated: “What could be done? That’s easy, any child could tell you that you get money and build people some houses, give them work, some factories or crafts etc. All women and all men get employed and children go to school, and there’s a nice and healthy environment, with no trash, with hospitals, children

⁷⁷⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁷⁷⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁷⁹Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls -14-18 years old, school children

⁷⁸⁰Bulgaria - focus group interview, boys and girls -14-18 years old, school children

sleeping in clean beds and eating clean food. That's what needs to be done, and it takes will and money and the ones who are in charge and make decisions to make such a decision".⁷⁸¹ In other words, state authorities should invest in the socio-economic uplifting of poor communities in relation to education, housing, health, education and the environment.

Another child suggested that the researcher should publish information about the dire poverty that they face in this IDP camp in newspapers and broadcast it on television so that Montenegrins can learn more about their daily struggles - empathize with them and assist them.

A child in this camp recommended that the government enhance the social welfare system so that he won't have to work to help his family. He was however skeptical that this recommendation would be carried out because of the discrimination that Roma face: *"Well, the Government of Montenegro could help me, provide a pension and welfare to my old and sick parents. Then I could study and not worry whether they would remain hungry. That's how. You know that's impossible and they don't care that we suffer. As if we weren't people, we are just Gypsies. What the government throws away as trash is enough for us"*⁷⁸². A child stated that this will require collaborative efforts involving the government, non-governmental organisations and the inhabitants of the camp, although was also skeptical that they would come to such an agreement: *"If everyone gathered and agreed, it would be possible to change everything if they wanted to, but they don't"*⁷⁸³.

Children in Romania also recommended that the poor should receive state support in the form of housing, water and food: *"First of all, they should give us houses. When the winter comes I don't know how we will be able to live in here. Don't you see how it is? On every hole the wind blows in and it is cold. And still, our house is one of the best"*⁷⁸⁴. The children themselves expressed a desire to assist poor people, who have shared their same problems: *"I would like to help the persons who are as poor as we have been, to help them get a house, their home, to get food, warm water and everything they needed"*⁷⁸⁵.

In Kosovo children also suggested a range of socio-economic reforms to assist poor families. It is said that creating employment opportunities for people would prevent them from *"staying in the streets all the time and cause problems"*⁷⁸⁶. As mentioned these *"problems"* relate to violence, drug-taking and alcoholism. The creation of shelters for poor families, provision of housing and improvement of health care services were all recommended. The government was blamed for corruption and it was suggested that instead of spending money on themselves, politicians should invest resources to assist the poor. Children in Serbia also placed responsibility in the hands of the government for providing social services, health care services and financial support. It is said that this is necessary because *"a child needs to see that someone is there to back them up"*⁷⁸⁷.

So in order to ensure that children are not *"tricked"* by the offer of material goods and employment abroad children's comments support the following recommendations:

- Invest resources in enhancing the socio-economic status of poor families
- Financial and social resources should be allocated to social welfare schemes, pensions, housing,

⁷⁸¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 13 years old girl, IDP camp

⁷⁸²Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

⁷⁸³Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, IDP camp

⁷⁸⁴Romania - individual interview, 14 years old girl

⁷⁸⁵Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁸⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁷⁸⁷Serbia - individual interview, 17 years old girl, street child

education, employment creation and improving the natural environment

- The media should be used to rally support for the poor
- The state, NGOs and poor people themselves should collaborate in finding joint solutions
- Children should participate in this process and be used to assist other poor children
- More efforts should be made to curb government corruption and limit socio-economic inequalities
- The government should make a clear commitment to supporting children, their families and communities who live in situations of chronic and endemic poverty

Gender

Some children stated that to prevent trafficking, girls should conform to the norms and behaviour expected of them; for instance, dress in a particular manner, obey certain rules and restrictions: *“Girls should be smart they shouldn’t be deceived easily. They should be advised by their parents”*⁷⁸⁸. On the other hand, some children recommended that girls should start questioning these restrictions. In relation to freedom of movement, some children stated that people should not be so judgmental of girls who move around independently. The manner in which they are labeled is unjustified: *“Well, I don’t think they should say bad things about her just because she goes for walks or does something she shouldn’t”*⁷⁸⁹.

It is said that girls’ rights and power of decision-making should be respected even if they flout social norms and conventions: *“I think she’s doing nothing wrong when she’s walking around the town, and if a boy beats her up she should go to the police and the police would help her. And if she changes boys and behaves badly, she has the right to do as she pleases if that’s her decision, because she knows as well as we do what is expected of us girls. So if she decides not to observe that, she must have considered the risks that involves”*⁷⁹⁰. Similarly, in terms of their intimate relationships it is said that their own decision to have a boyfriend should be respected, and their parents, peers and members of the community should not interfere: *“I think it’s stupid that someone should forbid me to have a boyfriend, when I’m 17. It’s my business only whether I want to sleep with him or not”*⁷⁹¹. Some of the girls in this study stated that early and arranged marriages should be forbidden. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“I would never allow that my child gets married so early, I will send them to school, and they should finish school”*⁷⁹². It was suggested that girls should be entitled to equal access to education.

In terms of safety and security issues, some children recommended that girls should not wander around on their own in the evenings as they could be subject to attack from men: *“Well, a girl should not be wandering around a lot, especially not when it’s dark... Well, because she may get attacked, and she can hardly defend herself the way a man could”*⁷⁹³. On the other hand, many girls complained that more efforts should be made to protect them from men, or to prevent men from harassing or hurting them. Boys also complained that they should not be pressured to fight and they should not be the only ones taking responsibility for income-generation. The difficulties that boys face should also be recognized and dealt with: *“It’s more difficult for men, in everything. When we work we can get beaten up, we don’t get as much money”*⁷⁹⁴.

⁷⁸⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, street child

⁷⁸⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁷⁹⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, girls 13-16 years old, IDP camp

⁷⁹¹Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁷⁹²Kosovo - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, street child

⁷⁹³Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁷⁹⁴Serbia - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

On this basis, the children recommended the following:

- Girls need to consider social norms when deciding how to act
- Some girls should question these norms by making their own decisions in relation to their movement and relationships
- Parents, peers and the community should respect their decision-making and stop criticizing, judging and labeling their behaviour
- Girls' school attendance should be encouraged
- Girls should take all the necessary precautions to avoid violence
- Girls should be protected from violence
- Men's behaviour in relation to violence needs to be changed or improved
- Constructions of masculinity in relation to violence and work responsibilities need to be considered
- Boys should not be pressured by their peers into fighting and using violence
- Boys should not face so much pressure to support their families
- Boys should also receive protection from violence and exploitation

Ethnic discrimination

A number of the children's recommendations related to the manner in which children from Roma communities are discriminated against, harassed and subject to various forms of violence. It was suggested that children from Roma communities should have greater access to education. For instance in Bulgaria a child stated: *"Even our boys, the ones that gather in the neighborhood we do nothing and we don't do the things we want. They want this, they want to learn to write, to have some education, to know to speak Bulgarian when they start work. There are our boys who don't speak Bulgarian properly, they speak very little but they should learn how to speak that's why we gather there, they want to study, that's what it is for"*⁷⁹⁵. In a previous chapter, the extent to which children are discriminated against by their teachers and peers was highlighted. These children suggested that all children should be treated equally in this environment in order to ensure that they are not tricked by offers to leave school.

In terms of language, it was suggested in Kosovo that the media and education system should be geared to suit their language needs: *"Well, perhaps the Roma community should have more radio programs and TV programs in our language, the school in our language. Well, it would make it possible that our voice be heard more if they were in Roma language"*⁷⁹⁶. Not only would this enable Roma children to express themselves more, but will enable them to understand anti-trafficking messages delivered by the media.

Many children requested that they be treated equally and not as *"less important people"*⁷⁹⁷ who are looked down upon. They suggested that more efforts should be made to show people that they are *"normal ordinary people such as themselves"*⁷⁹⁸. In other words, they want equal rights in a society that discriminates against them. In addition to social assistance in the form of social welfare payments, employment and sanitary facilities, they want empathy. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated that people avoid sitting close to him on the bus because he is a Roma and because he is dirty and smells. He stated that he wishes that people would understand that he is not always dirty and does not like being in this state, but because of poor conditions in the IDP

⁷⁹⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

⁷⁹⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 13 years old girl, school child

⁷⁹⁷Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁷⁹⁸Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

camp he often has no choice: *“There, for example, if I am riding on a bus, nobody wants to take my place, they avoid being near me and touching me, I guess that’s because I’m not very clean, I can see I’m dirty myself, but I’m not always dirty and I don’t like it that I’m dirty”*⁷⁹⁹. So he suggested that the public start learning about the conditions that Roma live in and empathise with them.

This is echoed by another child who stated that the Roma are criticized for being lazy but few people understand that apart from begging they have few other employment options, which will help them to survive: *“I hear things about the town, when I ask someone for 10 cents, they sometimes tell me: “Go and do some work, you Gypsies just beg but you don’t want to sweat and work”, “You just want things to fall into your lap”, and when we show up in cafés and the market and the shops... And us Gypsies have to live on something and that’s why I don’t feel ashamed to beg and someone else does”*⁸⁰⁰. So the children suggested that more efforts should be made to dispel stereotypes about the Roma by recognizing and understanding their plight and the choices that they have to make.

It was also recommended that steps be undertaken to curb the bullying that Roma children face. As mentioned, children suffer this on the streets and in schools. They are called *“dirty, ugly Gypsy”*, are teased and bullied. One of the steps that Roma children themselves can take is to become proud of their ethnicity. As a child in Kosovo stated, *“These threats don’t affect my life that much. I am proud to be Roma, but I hope that other children would also feel OK one day”*⁸⁰¹.

It is also recommended that initiatives should be undertaken to break the myth that only the Roma engage in criminal activities. For instance, a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated: *“The worst thing is when these Bosnians think for every poor family they steal and use drugs. It’s not only Roma. Their people can be like that. I have them in the street”*⁸⁰². The same argument was made about the idea that Roma parents *“sell”* their children with many children suggesting that this notion is simply gossip and an example of discrimination, because *“no father or mother would do that, no matter how poor they may be”*⁸⁰³.

Hence, the children made the following recommendations:

- Roma children’s access to education should be improved
- They should be treated fairly by teachers and peers
- Their human rights should be respected and they should not be discriminated against simply because they are Roma
- They should receive social assistance, employment opportunities and social services
- The public should be made more aware of the low socio-economic status of the Roma
- The public should start empathizing and understanding the choices that Roma have to make in the face of poverty and discrimination
- Children who are teased and bullied for being Roma should be assisted
- Roma children should stand up for themselves and be proud of their ethnic affiliation
- Myths and stereotypes surrounding the Roma (e.g. begging is in their blood, they are lazy, they steal and use drugs) should be dispelled
- The belief that they *“sell”* their children should be challenged

⁷⁹⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

⁸⁰⁰Montenegro - individual interview, 11 years old boy, IDP camp

⁸⁰¹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁸⁰²Bosnia-Herzegovina - focus group interview, 14 years old boy

⁸⁰³Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, IDP camp

Institutions

Some children recommended that those living in institutions should be allowed to return home to their families, and that these families should receive support. A child in Romania stated: *"They should be helped to go home. Family should be helped to be able to keep them home and not to come here"*⁸⁰⁴.

It was also said that support in the form of shelters and institutions should be provided to poor families, and not just to children: *"If I was some important person in this country, then I would not let these children go out in the streets, but instead I would create a society or a big house to shelter these children and their families, and help them with food, clothing and education"*⁸⁰⁵.

A child in Serbia stated that more efforts should be made to obtain parental consent before removing a child from their care and placing them in an institution: *"They didn't have the right to place me here, without my father's and my mother's permission; they didn't have the right to do it. Yes, even if I'd said so, they should've asked. Although I said that I was going, you know, to stay here one month, and then to go to a foster family. But still, they should ask and a man should give his permission for his child to be there. They didn't have the right"*⁸⁰⁶. Many children recommended that children should be allowed more contact with their parents. For instance, a child in Romania complained: *"I would like to go home sometimes, because I've left home a long time ago, 3 years ago and I didn't go to visit"*⁸⁰⁷.

On the other hand, some children felt that if parents cannot look after their children they should be brought to an institution: *"I think they don't feel good, because maybe others tell them that they are poor. And then, they start begging. But, no, it is not right to beg. Their parents should bring them to the center. Because in here, we have conditions and after that they should take them home during holidays... I would talk to their parents. I would go to their place and see how they are treating their children. If they treat them badly I would take children away from them and place them in centers or apartments"*⁸⁰⁸. In Montenegro a child stated that children living on the streets should be placed in an institution where their material needs can be met: *"Well, to my mind, some children would be a hundred times better off if they went to these homes for children rather than walk the streets all day and get beaten on top, even if they beat them, it's a pity that children should work in the streets like that. They would have something to eat in the home, and a bed to sleep in"*⁸⁰⁹.

A child in Bulgaria stated that the length of time that a child spends in an institution should be monitored closely, as they will be subject to negative peer pressure within the influence, be teased and humiliated outside the school. They may find it difficult to be placed in a foster family and will be moved from institution to institution. It is said that this will have an effect on their self-confidence and sense of well-being: *"at this stage of their lives they have already become conscious of the situation somehow and I think that then they will start having self destructive thoughts "what did I do to be abandoned, what bad thing did I do?" because if you have done something nice this bad thing won't happen to you"*⁸¹⁰.

⁸⁰⁴Romania - individual interview, 4 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁸⁰⁵Kosovo - focus group interview, boys and girls 14-16 years old, school children

⁸⁰⁶Serbia - individual interview, 13 years old boy, street child

⁸⁰⁷Romania - individual interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁰⁸Romania - individual interview, 10 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁰⁹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old boy, IDP camp

⁸¹⁰Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

In order to improve conditions in the home, children in Montenegro recommended the creation of workshops and activities involving children. It is said that children should be able to express their needs and wants, and this should be considered when decisions are made in institutions: *“I think it would be of great help to me if we often discussed our hopes and shared that with someone who makes decisions related to us. Not like this, we can talk till we drop among ourselves without getting anything changed, we just feel better”*⁸¹¹.

It is said that the people who work in institutions should know how to *“deal with children”* and *“understand our problems”*⁸¹². It is said that these people should not criticize or judge children when they express their feelings so that *“they may talk freely without being judged, without people saying they are brazen for saying those things”*⁸¹³. One recommendation was a counseling system in institutions which children could voluntarily use if they have a problem: *“I would open a counseling service in the Home, where each child could go whenever they wanted and get some advice. But I would have these older residents work there, like me for example, I could devote some time every day and help them in their studies, if there’s something they can’t grasp, because there are many poor students, or do some workshop on how to study and so on...”*⁸¹⁴. It is said that children themselves should become counselors (see peer-to-peer counseling), and it was also suggested that corporal punishment should be forbidden. Staff should show sincere care towards children and provide them with individualized attention.

Children in institutions also stated that they would like information about how to survive after they leave the institution. This information should relate to employment and accommodation, including: *“What kind of a job I’d get, where I would live and how big my salary would be, what would happen if I did this thing or that, how I could make a fine living”*⁸¹⁵. They also recommended that people who work in the professions that they are interested in should visit them. For instance, girls requested that models or singers explain to them how they achieved their hopes and dreams. Many of the children recommended that former residents of institutions return and discuss how they managed to cope and survive after they left (See peer-to-peer counseling).

Children also recommended that the state be actively involved in monitoring conditions in children’s institutions and should take responsibility for improving conditions for these children. A child in Bulgaria stated: *“The President, the people at the higher positions can do something... Yes, the ones who have the authority... I would help, I would go to each home to see what the situation there is, how the children live there. I would build a new home and I would transfer them in another home, a much better one, where they would have everything they want, and they would go to school”*⁸¹⁶.

In order to ensure that all children have access to this support, it was recommended that money be invested in opening more shelters and institutions and improving conditions within them. As a child in Bulgaria stated, *“they can’t do very much except to give money, i.e. To give some resources for the creation of these centers. From then on there should be people familiar with these problems and who work in these centers. These centers should be made popular”*⁸¹⁷.

⁸¹¹Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸¹²Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸¹³Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸¹⁴Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁸¹⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 18 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸¹⁶Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸¹⁷Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

Given the stigma attached to institutionalized living, it was also suggested that the public be informed about the lives of children in institutions and be taught how to interact with them: *"I also think it's important that all people know how to act when they see such a child"*⁸¹⁸.

Hence, in order to ensure that children living in institutions are not *"tricked"* by attention and compliments, children suggested that conditions in institutions be improved by doing the following:

- Efforts should be made to reunite children with their families
- Poor families should be provided with state support and shelter
- Children's contact with their families should be facilitated
- Permission from children and their families should be obtained prior to removal
- The particular situation of child and family needs to be considered before deciding that placement in an institution is in the child's best interests
- Children living on the streets should be placed in an institution and provided with material support, although conditions in institution should be improved
- Children should be provided with more structured activities – recreation and entertainment – in institutions
- Children should be provided with opportunities and mechanisms by which they can express themselves
- Children should not be criticized and judged
- Staff should take their opinions into account when making decisions
- Corporal punishment should be forbidden
- Staff should provide children with individualized attention and sincere care
- Children's stay in an institution should be monitored. They should not be moved from institution to institution and alternatives (e.g. foster care) should be found as early as possible
- Children should be adequately prepared to leave the institution
- Children who have left institutions should be actively involved in peer-to-peer counseling sessions around how they have managed to cope and survive
- Children should receive skills training and career guidance from knowledgeable and skilled persons
- The state should be actively involved in monitoring conditions within institutions, building new institutions and improving others
- The public should be educated and informed on how to treat children in institutions

Social workers and psychologists

In Montenegro children suggested that social workers should be paid to make more visits to children to find out *"Where they are, what they do, how they live"*. They should use the approach adopted by the researcher: *"like you have just asked us this question, like that time I talked to you"*⁸¹⁹. Another child in this institution recommended that social workers should closely monitor parents, their treatment of children and their plans for children: *"That's right, you can keep track from the moment a child is born; when we are born, they know about us and can ask the parents about their situation and what their plans are regarding the way this child is going to live. And then the parents have to report about the child"*⁸²⁰.

⁸¹⁸Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁸¹⁹Montenegro - focus group interview, 16 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸²⁰Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

It is recommended by a child in Serbia that social workers should give children living on the streets more attention and assistance. They should place them in a safe environment and provide them with education: *“I’ll tell you now: social workers. They should decide, they personally should decide, to give assistance; to make it a rule that all street children and children who used to be on the street should receive some assistance... To place some of them in a home. But not in a home where they’ll be mistreated, but where they’ll have everything, as if they were at home. That and to send them to school. To finish school, so that tomorrow they have something to rely on”*⁸²¹.

It is said that psychologists should also be made available to children. It is recommended that children be informed of their existence and that they should be present in schools in case a child would like to speak to them about their problems⁸²².

Hence, children made the following recommendations:

- Social workers should provide the space for children to express their needs and concerns
- They should listen to them and take their opinion into account
- They should monitor parenting practices
- They should assist particular children (e.g. street children) who might be at risk and provide them with accommodation and education depending on their needs
- Psychologists should be accessible to children
- They should listen to children’s concerns
- Children should be given the choice to see a psychologist or not

Advice to children

Many of the respondents recommended that children should not place their trust in anybody, particularly if they are strangers: *“So one shouldn’t take anything from strangers”*⁸²³. They should also know who to turn to for support in times of trouble: *“They should not talk to just anybody, they should not follow those who promise them I don’t know what. Otherwise how can you protect yourself? If you are smart, it cannot happen to you. You must not trust everybody. And you must know who to turn to when you are in trouble. Because there are plenty of people who can help you”*⁸²⁴.

It is said that children should fight back and if the situation appears unmanageable they should turn to the police for support: *“To the children who are a bit older I would say to get by and fight for themselves, and if things are very bad for them or someone beats them, they should find a way to escape or contact the police in that place. The police will help them”*⁸²⁵.

Hence, children recommended the following:

- Children should be wary of trusting strangers
- Children must have information about who to turn to for assistance
- Children should exhibit courage and fight back against a perpetrator
- Children should share their problems and concerns with others
- Children should trust the police who will assist them

⁸²¹Serbia - individual interview, a 16 years old girl; street child

⁸²²Kosovo - individual interview, 18 years old girl, shelter child

⁸²³Montenegro - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸²⁴Romania - individual interview, 18 years old girl

⁸²⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 17 years old boy, IDP camp

Law enforcement

The children made a number of recommendations related to law enforcement. In order to prevent trafficking, a child in Montenegro stated that people should face harsher prison sentences: *“It’s easy to forbid all the things that should not be taking place if you just punish people severely and put them in prison for years. When other people see that, then no one would do the things that are forbidden any more. That’s what I think”*⁸²⁶.

Other children suggested that police should be present on the streets and in areas that they do not feel safe in: *“The police should walk around in the streets more and catch those who snatch children more”*⁸²⁷. It is said that by being on the ground they can observe all suspicious activities: *“If I was a president I would make police work harder... I swear I would make them walk the whole day on their feet, because they won’t notice things otherwise”*⁸²⁸. It is said that the police should develop investigate the activities of potential traffickers.

They should also dedicate more time to protecting children, particularly if they are not living at home: *“I would say that the children should be well watched over. Not each of them, but there should be more police. That there should be more cars checked when passing on the street. Children who leave home should be looked for”*⁸²⁹.

It is said that if the police improve their performance, children should ask for help and report their experiences to the police to prevent them from becoming involved in criminal and trafficking experiences at a later stage: *“If they ask for it, people will help them. But they are afraid to tell anyone and then that is how they grow up. And they become traffickers, too. It is better if they told on them and then stayed a while with the police to be protected and after that they can come out clean”*⁸³⁰.

Not only should children report their experiences to the police, but a child in Montenegro stated that members of the community should report suspicious activities to the police: *“I think it would be important if the people from the camp told or reported to the police when they saw something wrong or dangerous happening in some home. If everyone did that all the time, then those people who sell children would have to hide more, and would not be able to do that, and would get arrested. People here prefer to stay quiet and pretend not to know anything, they don’t want to meddle in other peoples’ lives. They say it’s better that way, because that man could be angry and dangerous, so it’s better to mind one’s own home. I guess no one wants to have more problems”*⁸³¹. This will require a shift in community norms so as to break a culture of silence and non-interference in “private” matters.

So in terms of law enforcement, the respondents made the following suggestions:

- Create a legal framework that allows for the incarceration of traffickers
- Punish traffickers to curb like-minded behaviour in others
- The police should be more efficient, work harder and be more visible
- They should patrol the areas that children fear the most
- They should investigate the activities of suspected traffickers

⁸²⁶Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

⁸²⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old boy, street child

⁸²⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

⁸²⁹Romania - individual interview, 15 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁸³⁰Romania - individual interview, 14 years old boy

⁸³¹Montenegro - individual interview, 15 years old girl, IDP camp

- They should prioritise children's protection, particularly if they are not living at home
- Children should report their concerns and experiences to the police (if they show a sincere concern for children's wellbeing)
- Community norms around non-interference should be broken and the community should report suspicious cases of child maltreatment and child trafficking to the police

Awareness-raising

The children suggested that the media should be involved in awareness-raising. It was said that the television was a particularly useful way of broadcasting information because *"most children watch TV"*⁸³². This information should contain practical information about what to do and who to turn to when faced with violence, exploitation and trafficking. Awareness-raising should therefore not be aimed simply at children who might be at risk of being trafficked but also at the general public who can provide support to children in this situation. In addition, the media should be used to discourage people from becoming traffickers by explaining to them *"that children are not there to be kidnapped"*⁸³³. It was stated that this information should be broadcast widely in rural villages and in the cities. It was, however, emphasised that the media should keep children's identity anonymous when broadcasting stories about victims of trafficking because this will make them too afraid to come forward and report their experiences: *"they must be anonymous, because they shouldn't be afraid"*⁸³⁴. It will also enhance the stigma that these children face.

The internet was also highlighted as an important means of awareness-raising. As mentioned in a previous section, children across the region highlighted the internet as one of their few forms of entertainment. It is said that the internet is accessible to everyone and can contain important information about trafficking: *"Another very important thing is the Internet. Many people use it, almost everyone has access to the Internet and it is a very good means of information. Even if you don't have such a thing in your town, it is good for example, because in the Internet there is the whole information published by some other district center where they have this thing and they can look for information there. The society has to be alerted for the problem because most of the people think: "this can't happen to me, it is so scary that it can't happen to me." Well, it is not true, it can, it can happen to every one of us"*⁸³⁵. It was also suggested that posters should be placed in schools and on the streets *"to inform people and the children that there are such things in the world"*⁸³⁶.

It is said that certain people by virtue of the fact that they spend so much time with children, should take responsibility for raising their awareness about trafficking risks: *"Teachers and parents, since they are in everyday contact with the children"*⁸³⁷. A child suggested that policemen should visit schools to provide lectures on the risks. This advice should not simply revolve around instilling fear in children, but in teaching them about the causes and consequences of this problem. These lessons should *"inform the children a lot on how to behave and where to go. In general I would inform them about the consequences"*⁸³⁸. Workshops with various entertaining activities can be used to provide these lessons to children.

⁸³²Montenegro - focus group interview, 15 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸³³Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁸³⁴Bulgaria - individual interview, 16 years old girl, school child

⁸³⁵Bulgaria - individual interview, 17 years old boy, institutionalized child

⁸³⁶Kosovo - individual interview, 17 years old boy, street child

⁸³⁷Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁸³⁸Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old girl, street child

Hence, in terms of awareness raising and reducing the “naivety” of children, the following was suggested:

- Use the print and televised media to inform children about the risks associated with trafficking
- Use the media to inform the public about what to do to support trafficked victims
- Use the media to change the behaviour of potential traffickers
- The media should target rural and urban communities
- The media should be used in a responsible, sensitive and child-friendly way, and in a manner that respects the rights and confidentiality of victims
- The internet should be used to provide information to children
- Visual methods such as posters placed in areas where children spend time, such as schools and streets, also raise awareness
- Individuals such as parents and teachers who spend time with children should communicate various lessons about trafficking prevention to children
- These lessons should focus on causes, the process, effects and practical means of escaping a situation of vulnerability
- These lessons should be combined with activities to ensure that they are fun and stimulating for children

Peer-to-peer counseling

Children across the region emphasised the importance of being taught “lessons” about trafficking by their peers, who have faced similar experiences, problems and concerns.

It is said that a forum is needed where children can receive advice and can communicate with other children. A child in Kosovo described these as “assistance offices which would be there only for children”⁸³⁹. Another child suggested that these forums should be run on the same lines as the focus groups conducted by the field researchers: “Well, if there would be some place where we could meet at least once a week and talk about things, like for example today, that would have been so cool”⁸⁴⁰. It is said that these “forums” may be associated with state departments that would employ young people whom children could approach freely with a problem.

These children need to come from a similar background or have faced a similar experience: “I would ask someone who has been through similar things”⁸⁴¹. It is said that these children will be able to understand the needs and wants of other children, and will be best positioned to advise them. For instance, a child in Montenegro stated with reference to a hypothetical story of a boy who had been trafficked: “I think only someone who had gone through the same experience would have understood him, then he would have realized that it had happened to someone else also”⁸⁴². In an institution in Montenegro the children suggested that other children, who have left the institution, return and inform children how they have coped and managed to find employment, accommodation etc.

Similarly, it was felt that children who come from the institution should be responsible for raising the trafficking awareness of other children in this institution. For this, training will be needed: “I think some children from the school or the Home should get some training in that, and then talk to other children about it. I feel everything is more interesting when my peers do it. We feel free somehow to talk

⁸³⁹Kosovo - individual interview, 15 years old girl, school child

⁸⁴⁰Kosovo - focus group interview, 14 years old girl, school child

⁸⁴¹Kosovo - individual interview, 16 years old boy, school child

⁸⁴²Montenegro - focus group interview, 14 years old boy, institutionalized child

*more openly with them than with adults. And we should be able to turn to them if we suspect anything*⁸⁴³.

Not only is the peer group best positioned to give advice to children because they understand them, it is also said that they are less judgmental and critical, and would be more likely to trust and believe what they have to say. Once again the issue of trust is significant: *“I think it’s important that they talk to some children to whom the same thing happened, because that’s how we like to talk to former residents and we trust them most”*⁸⁴⁴.

In Serbia, children highlighted the importance of youth volunteers who can help children with their concerns. In Kosovo, an identified victim of trafficking stated that she would like to volunteer with the police to teach other children about the risks of trafficking, but she has been forbidden from doing so even though, in her opinion, it is very important that children receive messages from others in their same age and gender cohort. Similarly, it is held that children, who are slightly older and have progressed in the education system, should raise the awareness of younger children in schools because they are more likely to trust them.

So in some contexts the age of the peer counselor is not as important as the experiences that they have been through, which is in line with the argument made previously, that for some children, knowledge and maturity is not related to age-based or developmentally oriented capacities, but to levels of experience.

It is said that children should also appear in other awareness-raising campaigns as their peers are more likely to identify with them and will be less likely to fear them: *“those children could also appear on TV, anything that’s presented by adults feels serious to me and even when they say I can feel free to contact them any time, I feel a bit afraid”*⁸⁴⁵.

So in order to raise children’s awareness and provide them with advice, the following recommendations were made:

- Forums or centers should be provided to children to meet and communicate with their peers
- Children should be employed by the state to provide support to other children
- Children who have had similar experiences should be encouraged to raise awareness and advise other children
- Children from institutions should be encouraged to return and provide information to other children about how to find employment, accommodation etc.
- Youth should be encouraged to volunteer in shelters
- Children who have been trafficked should provide information about the risks to other children from their same age or gender cohort
- Children who attend school should lecture other school-attending children
- Children should be involved in media awareness-raising campaigns
- Children should be trained as peer counselors
- The extent to which children trust and listen to their peers, and turn to them for support needs to be recognised

⁸⁴³Montenegro - focus group interview, 17 years old girl, institutionalized child

⁸⁴⁴Montenegro - individual interview, a 15 years old girl, institutional child

⁸⁴⁵Montenegro - individual interview, 16 years old boy, institutionalized child

Conclusions

A review of the literature on child trafficking revealed some of the methodological and conceptual weaknesses in our understanding of why some children are more likely to be trafficked than others. In order to build on our existing knowledge, overcome the weaknesses and fill in the gaps in our understanding of this phenomenon, this research has sought to understand how children perceive risk and resiliency in their lives generally, and in relation to trafficking and exploitation more specifically.

The children involved in this study have been identified as “at risk” in the existing literature and in key informant interviews (see national reports) because they are living and or working on the streets, living in institutions or shelters, are in conflict with the law and/or living in socially marginalized and poverty-stricken communities. Many of these categories of children are over-represented among identified victims of trafficking. Respondents were selected in this manner in order to ascertain whether trafficking was perceived as a threat in their lives, and to understand how they evaluated their own strengths and vulnerabilities, and that of their families and communities. Children’s perceptions have been prioritized in the participatory research methodology, and analysis and report-writing process so that children can exercise ownership over this research project and subsequent interventions. In the findings a number of themes emerged related to risk and resiliency, decision-making and power, safety and security, social supports, hopes and dreams and evidence-based policy. This conclusion will provide a general summary of these findings.

Trafficking messages: Children’s perceptions of trafficking are influenced by the perceptions and experiences of significant people around them including their parents, siblings, relatives and peers. They are also influenced by more institutionalized actors such as teachers, social workers, psychologists and policemen. The mass media (TV and print) and the internet have also had a significant impact on their fears in relation to safety and security, and their hopes and dreams in relation to migration, education and employment. From their accounts of trafficking it is evident that many children have not had direct experience with trafficking and yet can provide vivid stories and graphic details about the trafficking process. This reveals the extent to which the influence of other actors at the level of the interpersonal has had an impact upon their perceptions, as well as their decision-making. On the other hand, children’s interpretation of these messages cannot be ignored. It has been argued that this interpretation depends upon the manner in which these messages are conveyed, their relationship with the “messenger”, and children’s own needs and wants in a particular situation. Children do not simply accept or automatically believe the messages that they receive but evaluate them in light of their own experiences, belief and value systems. Hence, trafficking messages contain different meanings for different children living in different communities.

Mechanisms and processes: Children clearly distinguished between various mechanisms and processes in relation to trafficking. While coercion featured strongly in their accounts, so too did the notion of “deception” or what they describe as being “tricked” or “cheated”. They did not describe children as being passive in this process, but described children as decision-makers, with wants and needs that they seek to fulfill. They described some children as more naive and easily tricked because they are young, inexperienced or lack education, but suggested that others are

tricked because they want or need something that may be tangible or intangible. Traffickers in their accounts are described as having an in-depth understanding of children's wants and needs and are seen as capable of manipulating these wants and needs to suit their own interests.

So on this basis children argued that traffickers offer some children attention, recreation, entertainment, material goods, employment, migration opportunities, marriage, education (or a chance to leave school), friendship, compliments and care. It is said that these traffickers target specific children who desire these items or activities. For instance, children who are not listened to or trusted are "tricked" when a trafficker asks them for assistance or advice. Children who are bored and have few recreational facilities are "tricked" by the offer of entertainment and recreation abroad. Children who are poor and feel responsible for supporting their families and/or assisting a sick parent may believe an offer of material goods or employment. Boys in particular are said to feel pressure to provide income for the family. Children seeking to escape poverty, violence and conflict in order to achieve a better life may be "tricked" by the opportunity to travel abroad. Girls who feel social pressure to get married may believe promises of marriage, or offers of marriage brokerage. Alternatively, they may seek to escape from pre-arranged marriages. Children who would like to attend school may be "tricked" by the offer of free education abroad. Others may be cheated by the possibility that they can leave school to escape bullying, harassment and discrimination in this context. Children who are lonely, living in institutions or on the streets may believe compliments and promises of care and friendship. Hence, it is said that traffickers make certain promises which particular children are more likely to believe.

Children stated that traffickers do not provide them with all the information that they need to make an informed decision, so they make a decision to go with a person (who turns out to be a trafficker) on the basis of the options that they perceive to be available. A range of unintended and negative consequences may occur in the form of violence, exploitation and trafficking. Although they are aware of these risks, children still make this decision because they either perceive themselves to have few or no other options when seeking to fulfill their needs and wants, and achieve their hopes and dreams. So on the one hand, children are decision-makers but on the other hand, their decisions are constrained by a dearth of information, and a shortage of options. Trafficking mechanisms and processes can therefore not be seen apart from this constrained agency and the manner in which children's needs and wants are influenced by factors such as poverty, violence and discrimination.

Risk and resiliency: Children's accounts of their daily lives reveal a complex relationship between risk and resiliency. It is evident that some children exhibit resiliency in a number of situations. They seek to survive and cope with various adverse situations by developing complex strategies; for instance, they may run away from a home where they are subject to violence and they may turn to other actors (adults and children) for support.

They place great importance in feeling in control and exercising power in a given situation, exhibiting courage and bravery, acting with forethought and/or taking advantage of an opportunity to cope, survive and/or escape. However, these examples of resiliency and the actions that accompany them often have a range of unintended, negative consequences that may place children more at risk of being trafficked. For instance, girls rebelling against constraints on their behaviour and freedom of movement may date strangers in unfamiliar areas where they will not be recognized by relatives and other community members; this might leave them vulnerable to abuse with few places to go to for assistance. Girls seeking to escape an arranged marriage may

believe a strangers' promise of marriage abroad. Children who runaway from violence in the home or in an institution may find freedom from rules and restrictions on the streets, but they may also face greater safety and security threats in an economic, physical and social sense.

A range of examples, suggest that it is therefore difficult to identify specific risk and resiliency factors which are highly individual, situational and contextual. A resiliency factor may prove to be risky for the same child in another situation, or a resiliency factor may prove to be risky for another child living in a similar situation. In addition, risk and resiliency factors at macro, interpersonal and individual levels interact in complex ways, making it difficult to predict what is risky or not for a particular child. These factors are all affected by time and the effect of socio-economic, political and cultural processes. It is therefore difficult to make causal claims about risk and resiliency in relation to trafficking because of the cumulative effect of a number of different factors.

On the other hand, some general risk and resiliency factors can be identified that apply to children across the research countries/entities. At the level of the individual, children identified the following risk factors: physical weakness and a low sense of self-efficacy or power in relation to others. They also highlighted a dearth of knowledge, experience and/or information as a risk factor, which affects children's perception of the options available. While some children associated this knowledge with having access to education, some children felt that this was affected more by the type of experiences that one has faced, and the skills and understanding that one develops through this experience.

In contrast, those children who were described as resilient were those who were physically strong, were brave and courageous, were able to recognise and weigh up various options, were able to plan and act with forethought particularly in contexts that may be adverse and even dangerous. All of these individual risk and resiliency factors are fluid and dynamic as they are not fixed to a particular physical characteristic such as age or sex. For instance, the relationship between age, knowledge and cognitive abilities was mediated by children's access to information and their social experiences; such that a child who was better able to make decisions was one who was not necessarily older, but had more experience in this regard. Children who were young or female were not necessarily perceived as physically weaker, if they had peers or parents to defend and protect them. Girls living on the streets dressed like boys as a form of protection. Some children tried to make themselves appear younger to earn more money when begging. There were other reports of children pretending to be disabled for the same reasons. So in this sense youth and disabilities were seen as resiliency factors in these contexts because they enabled children to survive economically, even though they were concerned that children may be trafficked because they appear young and disabled. Hence, risk and resiliency depends upon the context. Children who work may believe themselves to be more independent, in control of their lives and may have a high self-esteem because they are able to fulfill their interpersonal responsibilities; however, working on the streets might enhance the risk of exploitation and might make them more accessible for traffickers.

In general, it is evident that these individual factors are relational in that they are defined by children in terms of how they see themselves in relation to - or in comparison with - others. Thus, individual and interpersonal levels of risk and resiliency cannot be disengaged. At the level of the interpersonal, trust emerged as particularly significant for children. It is said that trust forms the basis of social supports or having others to turn to for advice, assistance and protection in times of

trouble. However, children suggested that trust needs to be reciprocated – they often find it difficult to trust or share their concerns with people who do not trust them because they run the risk of being judged or blamed for their problems. Furthermore, they do not turn to others for support if they feel that they are not listened to. It is evident, that many children felt that adults (parents, relatives, teachers, social workers etc.) were not listening to them, and often neglected and abused them. As a strategy, they sought alternative sources of support. This research has revealed the extent to which children turn to their peers for support in a range of contexts, to protect and advise them. On the other hand, some children complained about bullying, teasing and even exploitative practices at the hands of their peers.

Children who felt that they had few supports stated that they often need to rely on strangers for assistance and advice, even though this was widely recognised by children to be a risky strategy. It is risky because trust is earned over time and children are often not aware of the true intentions of these strangers; so it is difficult to make an informed decision when deciding to go with a stranger. Generally, strangers were identified as those who were more likely to hurt, exploit and traffic children, despite examples of violence, exploitation and trafficking at the hands of relatives and peers. So on the one hand, having the courage to turn to others for support is a resiliency factor, but it may turn out to be a risk factor if these people take advantage of this trust and use it to “trick” children.

These individual and interpersonal factors are all influenced by macro factors, with children emphasizing the effect that poverty, armed conflict and social dislocation has had on their parents’ and caregivers’ decision-making in relation to violence, employment, migration and parenting practices. For instance, alcohol abuse was described by children as one means by which their parents cope with poverty and unemployment, but it was also associated with intimate partner violence and child maltreatment.

Parenting practices are influenced by constructions of gender and childhood, which once again reveals the complex nature of risk and resiliency in a range of settings. For instance, parents may feel that restricting their daughters’ movement, sexuality and access to education is a means of protecting them from “shame”, sexual advances from men, violence and even trafficking. And yet, girls described these as constraints that many sought to rebel against. Children’s freedom may be restricted for the same reason, but they may feel that this affects their desire for play, recreation and entertainment, which might enhance the likelihood that they will be “tricked” by a trafficker. So parents’ perceptions of resiliency and protection may differ from those of children. As parents, caregivers and other adults frequently do not explain why certain rules and restrictions are imposed on children in the name of protection, many children choose to do otherwise because they feel misunderstood and constrained; thereby placing them in potentially risky situations where they feel that they cannot turn to their parents and other adults for support.

At the macro-level discrimination or “social exclusion” emerged as significant in terms of children’s perception of risk. Not only do children from many poverty-stricken Roma communities feel under greater pressure to earn income and on this basis feel that they might be “cheated” by an offer of employment, but the daily discrimination, harassment and abuse that they face in the classroom, school ground and on the streets was described as a risk in that it affected their own sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, and removed valuable interpersonal and institutional supports. Children living in institutions described a similar sense of social exclusion manifested in loneliness and a sense of not belonging, which children argue may be manipulated by a trafficker.

It has been argued that anti-trafficking messages are interpreted differently by children who attach different meanings to them depending on their own experiences, needs, beliefs and value-systems. For instance, children's perceptions of the physical and psycho-social effects of trafficking are mediated by their own experiences of violence, and how they have sought to cope with its effects. Throughout the report emphasis was placed on children as decision-makers, but they are also emotional, as is evident in their countless descriptions of happiness, joy, sadness, anger and resentment. These emotions all have an impact upon their decision-making as is evident in contexts which children described as being particularly painful; for instance, the temporary or permanent absence of a parent who may have died, abandoned a child, or migrated for the purpose of work was associated with these feelings of loss, pain and often anger. Children who witnessed intimate partner violence or were subject to violence that they perceived to be illegitimate emphasised that this treatment is unjust and unfair, and a source of anger and resentment. Children attributed these same feelings to the actions of traffickers who unjustly coerce, hurt and abuse other children for a range of purposes.

Although children do not describe their own experiences as exploitative, the report revealed the extent to which children's perceptions about the type of exploitation that children face are closely related to their own fears and daily experiences, with boys and girls concerned about labour and sexual exploitation respectively. Children's perceptions about the effects of trafficking were also mediated by their own experiences with violence in their daily lives. They revealed the manner in which they withdraw from people, prefer not to discuss their problems, are haunted by terrible memories and have difficulty sleeping and coping with daily life. These experiences appeared in their accounts of trafficking victims. Many children who faced maltreatment at the hands of their parents were only able to understand or explain this behaviour by referring to an abuser's inner pathology, illness or disease that rendered it impossible for him/her to do otherwise. They attributed the same explanation to traffickers as one way of understanding their incomprehensible behaviour.

Similarly children's descriptions of how they have confronted an abuser and escaped from a violent situation resonate in their accounts of trafficked victims' survival strategies. Their belief that trafficked victims will find it difficult to be accepted back into the community are related to their own fears of labeling, gossip and ostracism if/when they break certain norms and rules. So on the one hand, their perceptions are influenced by the media and significant people around them, but they are also influenced by the meaning that they attribute to trafficking messages. As argued, this meaning is influenced by their emotions, experiences, beliefs and value-systems.

Evidence-based policy and practice: Children's contact with state institutions, INGOs and NGOs has varied across the region. It has been either direct or indirect, and often mediated by their parents and caregivers' experiences. Some children described this contact in a positive light in that support and assistance was received in a timely manner, while others described the manner in which they are ignored and their views discounted by these state and non-state actors in a range of settings.

In order to improve their lives and those of children who might be at risk of being trafficked children made a number of recommendations, which have been summarized below:

- Children should have equal rights regardless of their age, gender and ethnicity
- Children should be respected as decision-making actors
- Children should be listened to and trusted

- Children should have more say over how they are treated by other actors
- Children should have more options and choices in relation to recreation, education, employment and institutionalized living
- Children should have accessible forums where they can turn to adults and children (state and non-state actors, peers with similar experiences) for support, advice and protection
- Children should be provided with practical information and skills in relation to migration and employment
- Children should be provided with the material and social resources to fulfill their hopes and dreams
- Children's awareness should be raised in relation to trafficking mechanisms and processes, consequences, escape and sources of protection
- Children's protection should be prioritized by all state and non-state actors

Although the findings of this study are not generic or representative, they reveal the extent to which the involvement of children in the research process provides an in-depth understanding of children's lives. This study has provided valuable information about how to structure or change future policies and practices on the basis of children's perceptions. As a general conclusion, it is evident that instead of focusing only on scaring children, anti-trafficking messages and accompanying interventions should be based on children's perceptions, enhance children's strengths, develop their decision-making skills and thereby help them to develop survival strategies in situations that might increase the risk of trafficking. Consultations should happen at all stages of anti-child trafficking interventions, including design, implementation and monitoring phases. More efforts should also be taken by state and other key actors to increase children's capacity to face and deal with risks, while also increasing children's access to adults who can help them reduce and avoid such risks.

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Children Speak Out

Trafficking Risk and Resilience in Southeast Europe

Regional report

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