Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of Romanian women sexually exploited in the UK: Multiple voices and perspectives

By

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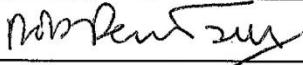   A copy of the confirmatory statement of acceptance from that service has been lodged with the Academic Registry.

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Abstract

Sex trafficking remains a significant form of exploitation worldwide and has long been regarded as a major human rights violation. In the last 4 years, Romania has often been in the top five countries of origin for sex trafficking in the UK according to Home Office figures. To date, there is a lack of knowledge of experiences of Romanian women being trafficked to the UK and their post-trafficking experiences, with this research focusing upon these gaps. Although there is great concern over the well-being of women who have experienced sex trafficking, gaps remain in the literature concerning their post-trafficking trajectories, the short- and long-term outcomes of the experience, and how sex trafficking impacts victims' and survivors' lives. While the focus remains on their vulnerability and possible re-victimisation, there is a limited exploration of agency and resilience in the narratives on sex trafficking.

Using a feminist research framework and semi-structured in-depth interviews, the voices of Romanian survivors of sex trafficking, alongside practitioner and key informant experiences of working in the anti-trafficking field, were captured and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Sex trafficking trajectories were identified and explored.

The analysis found similarities in survivors' stories but also unique and particular post-trafficking trajectories. Professional participants described trajectories in binary terms as 'good' or 'bad', evidencing preconceived perceptions and beliefs about sex work. Survivors encountered many challenges post-trafficking: psychological effects, trauma, anxiety, and struggled to achieve economic independence. Past vulnerabilities were exacerbated by the trafficking experience. Trust and lack of trust were perceived to contribute to or hinder recovery. Survivors who experienced supportive and authentic relationships with NGO staff, authorities and family members, reported positive impact on their well-being and recovery. Survivors conceptualised motherhood positively and it offered a source of hope for those living with their children. Migration before and after trafficking remains a complex element of survivors' experiences, with both strengths and risks identified.

The study provides recommendations for UK and Romanian policy on law enforcement, immigration and sex work. It also highlights good practices for professionals working with victims and survivors of trafficking in both countries.

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Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

ANITP – National Agency Against Trafficking in Human Being (Romania)

ILO – The International Labour Organisation

IOM – International Organization for Migration

NRM – National Referral Mechanism (UK)

PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder

OCG – Organised Crime Group

DGASPC – General Directorate for Social Work and Child Protection (Romania)

EU – European Union

UK – United Kingdom

NW – North-West

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Introduction

Background to the study

Human trafficking is a highly debated phenomenon in the UK (Craig et at., 2019). Under circumstances of economic prosperity, raised standards of living, demand for cheap labour, services, and goods, and the open context of migration (Craig et al., 2019; Musacchio, 2004; Lee, 2011), the UK has become a country of destination for human trafficking. Sexual exploitation is the second most prominent form of exploitation in the UK, accounting for 39% of all forms of exploitation officially identified (Home Office, 2018; 2019) and remains a major form of exploitation with victims being predominantly female (Home Office, 2023). Romania is one of the predominant countries of origin for cross-border trafficking in Europe (ANITP, 2019; 2022; TIP, 2022, see Chapter 1). Within the UK, Romania is found among the top five countries of origin for labour and sexual exploitation victims, with the number of cases remaining stable in recent years (Home Office, 2019; 2021; 2023; IOM, 2019). Whilst not all exploitation cases will be identified and entered into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the number of female Romanian victims of sex trafficking remains high according to stakeholders, NGOs and activists, especially among European countries of destination (APPG, 2018; Independent Antislavery Commissioner, 2020; Salvation Army, 2020; 2022). Establishing the actual number of sex trafficking cases is difficult due to the clandestine and illegal nature of sex trafficking (Aronowitz, 2013). Consequently, only a proportion of victims are identified and later recognised as victims.

Although research into trafficking started over three decades ago (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013; Tyldum, 2010; Weitzer, 2014), due to the complexity and dynamicity of the phenomenon, there are still areas that remain under researched. Researchers have identified knowledge gaps and a need for empirical and in-depth research on victims' post-trafficking needs and experiences, coping strategies and resilience, and for evaluations of interventions and services (Dell et al., 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2019). This knowledge is essential in order to capture the nuances of the phenomenon and develop effective interventions. As Hammond & McGlone (2014) highlight, at the core of the intervention, a perspective centred on the experience of the victim is essential. Due to its complex nature, sex trafficking requires a multidisciplinary perspective if it is to be researched and holistically understood. If research is to inform effective strategies for prevention, sex trafficking cannot be explained and studied separately from migration, issues of globalisation, law enforcement or human rights (Aronowitz, 2013; Lee, 2011;

Winterdyk et al., 2012). Kempadoo (2015, p. 11) analyses trafficking through the lens of capitalism and neo-liberalism, arguing that these factors sustain inequality and are responsible for the problem of trafficking. Her insights suggest that, where trafficking is combined with prostitution, '*abolition campaigns are moral rather than evidence-based'* and can negatively affect victims. Such arguments are strengthened by Cojocaru's (2015; 2016) account of her experiences as a trafficked and sexually exploited woman, and by other scholars (Baker, 2013; Fedina, 2015; Weitzer, 2007). It is important to acknowledge the variations in experiences and different stages a victim might experience, as these may affect the level of harm, distress or trauma and the support needed. Prior research indicates that whilst levels of exploitation are high, support for victims is sparse and difficult to access, with the health and welfare of victims and their families often neglected (Kelly, 2005; Tyldum, 2010). The trafficking experience can be highly traumatic (Hynes et al., 2019; Loomba, 2017; Zimmerman, 2007) and the needs of trafficking victims vary from fundamental physical health needs to complex psychological and social aspects (Cojocaru, 2016; Pascual-Leone et al., 2017; Stanley et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 2007). Due to such complexities, post-trafficking reality can be challenging, with victims often left to navigate complex decisions and emotions alone, with effective support hard to access. Moreover, the post-trafficking reality is difficult and not always straightforward since victims may be unable to access and accept support (Hammond & McGlone, 2014).

Vulnerability and victimisation are common and important themes within the literature around trafficking and are identified as triggers for exploitation and trafficking (Bodrogi, 2015; Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2017). However, while discussion of these factors supports theories of trafficking and the push-pull influences (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003), another area lacks exploration. This area involves the agency and autonomy of individuals in decision-making within the migration process, even when migration involves risks (Agustin, 2007). Women often express their agency throughout the experience of trafficking (De Angelis, 2016; Loomba, 2017). However, the main narratives around trafficking reinforce the notions of women's vulnerability and victimisation and perpetuate the risk of omitting the complexity of the phenomenon. This potential omission is important because these narratives influence policies and legislation which have been questioned regarding their impact and efficiency in victim care, support and protection (Craig, 2019).

In order to address these concerns, this research will build on the underlying discourses and practices that shape how trafficking is addressed, aiming to enhance knowledge about collaboration between the two states of Romania and UK and the approaches to victim care within these two countries. In doing so, the

project will develop knowledge of the post-trafficking experiences of female adult Romanian sex trafficking survivors (aged 18 and over) exploited in the UK, particularly regarding the context of their experiences, their needs and vulnerabilities, as well as examining their resources and agency. This could support anti-trafficking efforts and improve interventions. The analytic focus on agency, as opposed to solely addressing vulnerability and needs, provides another contribution to knowledge of post-trafficking trajectories within the context of the UK-Romania relationship.

Sex trafficking transcends the boundaries of public, private, and third-sector organisations, with stakeholders within these sectors having a role to play in ensuring a holistic approach to supporting survivors during their post-trafficking journeys. This includes contributing to policy development and promoting best practice approaches. Consequently, it represents a multi-faceted area that requires a multi-agency response, with agencies such as the police and health and social care being the best places to underpin such an approach. Thus, this study has relevance for policy and practice regarding support and care for sex trafficking survivors. A wide range of practitioners contribute to interventions for survivors highlighting once again the complexity of sex trafficking, particularly in relation to ensuring survivors receive appropriate support.

The post-trafficking journey and trajectories of women who have experienced trafficking remains under-researched. The proportion of trafficked women who decline assistance post-trafficking is unclear; thus, post-trafficking knowledge is limited to those women receiving assistance (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). Research is needed into what happens after support ends and into the longer-term journeys for women. For instance, *what are the future possibilities for women who have experienced trafficking? To what extent is there a risk of further exploitation? What increases their resilience?* This research will address these gaps by first exploring and comparing the post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of adult female Romanian survivors in the UK and Romania. Secondly, it will take a bottom-up approach to allow survivors' accounts and narratives to be included in the study alongside professionals' perspectives. Thirdly, the research will explore the dichotomy between victimisation/re-victimisation and agency.

Origin of the study

As a social work student in the Netherlands, I was often confronted by peers and academics with questions about the 'horrors' of trafficking and the susceptibility of Romanian women to this phenomenon. Being made aware of the circumstances surrounding Romanian immigrant women in the sex industry and sex trafficking in Amsterdam in 2011 sparked an interest in trying to comprehend the issues and factors associated with trafficking. Upon my return to Romania, I selected the subject of human trafficking as the focal point for my undergraduate dissertation. My motivation resulted from a profound sense of responsibility for others, especially those confronted with a traumatic experience such as sex trafficking. In a complex system where the challenges presented by the phenomenon appeared unsolvable, I could not reconcile myself with my research after completion. I decided to focus on different areas of social work afterwards, such as migration and refugee studies where I could notice more potential for recovery and intervention. Nevertheless, when I saw the call for this doctoral programme, the same questions arose: *'Why Romania and Romanian women? Where does it start? What does it take to be trafficked? How do you escape? How do you survive? How are you impacted? How do you recover?'* Moreover, once again, I felt the same need to address these questions and reconnect with what I had learnt about the phenomenon. Realising the damage, injustice, and adversity experienced by vulnerable individuals motivated me to seek solutions through empirical research, which could inform interventions and policies around trafficking.

This doctoral research project was funded by Marie Skłodowska-Curie PhD Fellowship programme through the DTA 3 (Doctoral Training Alliance) operated by University Alliance or DTA3/COFUND[1]. The programme provides training in health, energy, and social policy for early career researchers aiming to prepare them for employment across the globe. This project is part of the Social Policy stream. The project initially focused on sex trafficking supply and demand between the UK and Romania. It reflected the interest and experience of the original supervisory team and was informed by discussions with Lancashire Constabulary regarding Romanian sex trafficking in the North-West of England. My own interest in the topic and the possibilities for accessing data allowed me to take a different approach than initially envisioned. I wanted to understand better the experiences of immigrant Romanian women sexually exploited in the UK from an individual level, exploring the meanings behind the 'numbers of trafficking

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[1] https://unialliance.ac.uk/dta/

cases' and the personal stories and experiences post-trafficking. Moreover, my identity as a Romanian provided local knowledge and personal experiences that enriched the study (see the sections on reflexivity in Chapter 3). Although coming from a position of privilege, my experience as a migrant woman (for the last 12 years), originating from rural Romania, equipped me with a more profound understanding of the vulnerabilities encountered in migration and the agency, strengths, and courage required in the process. Leaving aside initial aspirations, I became aware of the power and determination of trafficked women, which goes beyond dramatic stories of trafficking and anti-trafficking activism. Thus, my approach organically developed into a more nuanced feminist understanding of trafficking, following Baker's (2013) suggestions that feminist approaches should focus on empowerment rather than being confined to rescue and protection.

Through such lenses, I established a framework to understand outcomes for female Romanian trafficking survivors supported in the UK and for those who may choose to return to their country of origin. I used a qualitative methodology to collect and analyse data to create an evidence base which could inform anti-trafficking practices and policies. Barriers to the research included the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted the research process in terms of research direction and affected data collection possibilities, with a shift to online data collection. Further, although it was hoped that UK police data could be used to highlight the context of the study, the data accessed through Lancashire Constabulary included very little information about Romanian sex trafficking victim/survivors and was not used in the research (see Chapter 3).

Research aim and questions

These research questions emerged from the established focus of the research studentship on sex trafficking between the UK and Romania, through the literature review presented in Chapters 1 and 2 and my own interest in the area of post-trafficking trajectories and women's experiences. Although the study was planned to cover all UK countries as well as Romania, I have only succeeded in engaging organisations from England and Wales in the study; limitations regarding coverage of UK countries is mentioned in Chapter 3. The study aims to contribute to the evidence on preventive and disruptive approaches to human trafficking by **examining both the post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of adult Romanian**

victims and survivors of sex trafficking in the UK and those of victims and survivors returned to Romania. By exploring trajectories and accounts of post-trafficking journeys, the research can enhance knowledge about how trafficked women can be effectively supported and protected from further exploitation. Although the study will explore the post-trafficking journey, elements from the pre-trafficking or trafficking period that inform post-trafficking are expected to be encountered in survivors' and professionals' accounts. The study will draw on the experiences and perspectives of survivors together with those of practitioners and other relevant key informants working in this field.

The research questions are:

- What are the particularities of adult female Romanian sex trafficking cases in the UK?
- What are the post-trafficking trajectories, journeys, and possibilities for adult Romanian women who are trafficked in the UK?
- What factors are perceived to increase the possible re-victimisation and resilience of adult Romanian trafficked women who are trafficked in the UK?
- How is the current wellbeing of survivors experienced in relation to the meanings given to their post-trafficking experiences?
- What is the nature of the collaboration between the UK and Romania that addresses sex trafficking?
- What are the differences and similarities regarding care and access to care post-trafficking in both countries?

The terminology is important because language shapes how we understand and approach a phenomenon. This is particularly significant in respect to human trafficking. The terminology concerning trafficked women can bring further victimisation and stigmatisation or trivialise their experience. '*The victim/survivor dichotomy'* (Kelly et al., 1996, p.77) is yet another element relevant to the study of different forms of sexual victimisation, as the choice of terminology highlights how women are perceived and what is expected of them (Dunn, 2005). In the context of trafficking, some argue that an individual cannot be considered a 'survivor' if they are still in a highly vulnerable situation. Instead, emotional and other kinds of stability (e.g., economic, livelihood) need to be restored to justify referring to someone as a survivor (Chu & Billings, 2020). On the contrary, the use of the term 'survivor', can indicate agency, strength and 'survivorhood' in sexual violence and domestic abuse (Dunn, 2005; Levy & Eckhaus, 2020).

At the same time, within the legal and law enforcement sphere, the terminology of 'victim' is highly prevalent, as the individual is a victim of a crime and exploitation (Hoyle et al., 2011; Van Dijk, 2009). While noticing the differences and intensities of the crimes inflicted on women, the connotations and possible reactions triggered by the terminology, this study will use the terms '*trafficked women'*, '*victim/survivor'* or '*survivor'* to maintain a balance between the actual experience of exploitation and the possibility of overcoming the negative impacts of their experiences. As Schneider (2000) emphasises, victimisation and agency cannot be separated owing to their nature, especially in the context of gender inequality, where both oppression and resistance are experienced; hence we need a balance when using the language of victim or survivor. Apart from this, references to '*women who have experienced sex trafficking'* or just '*women* 'will be used, as these terms implicitly refer the group in this study.

The term '*entering'* into sex work or trafficking is used in this study as a means of capturing the diversity of women's decisions and differing degrees of knowledge about sex work and the risks of possible exploitation and trafficking (Gerassi, 2015a). The term '*entering',* when used in relation to sex trafficking, acknowledges a degree of agency, regardless of vulnerabilities and context, as opposed to instances where the woman is a completely passive subject and is trafficked without her exercising any control, including cases of kidnap or women sold by families at early ages. Instances of the latter are commonly referred to in the literature, especially in abolitionist discourse, and remain prevalent in public perceptions (Doezema, 2001; 2010; Weitzer, 2007). Thus, in this research, 'entering' (trafficking) reflects a degree of agency as opposed to just 'being trafficked' or 'being tricked' (common terminology in trafficking discourses); language that emphasises passivity has the effect of disregarding choices women made along their journeys and their initial migration decisions.

Similarly, the usage of 'exit' and 'exiting' sex trafficking terminology was carefully considered for this project, in light of the debates and challenges around its connotations in regard to sex work. Several theories have been used to explore and explain leaving or exiting sex work and prostitution, which are relevant for understanding trafficking (Gerassi, 2015a), especially when the line between the two remains blurred. However, the term exiting has the advantage of acknowledging agency. As critiques suggest (Bowen & Lowman, 2021), the abolitionist discourse distinguishes sex workers from other professions and advocates 'liberating' them from their current 'lifestyle'. While acknowledging such perceptions and the risks of reemphasising such narratives on sex workers, I argue that in this research, I intend to use the term exiting with reference to 'exiting exploitation' or 'exiting the trafficking situation' with a sole focus

on sex trafficked victims and survivors. By using 'exiting', I acknowledge the complexity of such experiences and convey an expression of agency. Although other terms were considered, such as 'leaving the trafficking situation', these seemed to soften the intensity and consequences of the experience and did not do justice to women's accounts of 'exiting episodes' as reported in this research (see Chapter 4).

Finally, the term sex work was used mainly when conveying my own ideas and arguments; the term 'prostitution' is loaded with stigma and is better avoided (Thompson, 2012). However, this term is still currently used in the Romanian context and its legislation, for instance in the Romanian Criminal Code (2014) (see Chapter 1 for further discussion). Thus, the term 'prostitution' is used when it occurs in the literature (where necessary) and in reporting research participants' views and speech to ensure an accurate reflection of their accounts.

Thesis outline

The thesis has 10 Chapters. **Chapter 1** presents the general overview of the historical context of human trafficking and sex trafficking, the landscape in the UK and the Romanian context in which trafficking occurs. **Chapter 2** reports on the review of the literature, focusing on vulnerability and agency as concepts that support an exploration of the trafficking journey. It describes eco-system theory and its impact on understanding trafficking and post-trafficking, and finally discusses research on post-trafficking trajectories of sex trafficking survivors. **Chapter 3** outlines the feminist approach to research, its value for studying trafficking and arguments for the methods and ethical considerations employed in the research. It then introduces the research process; data collection and the approach used for data analysis and finally discusses reflexivity and limitations of the research. **Chapter 4** presents the findings and discussion from the interviews with Romanian trafficked women, and **Chapters 5** to **8** report the findings and discussion from professional participants in the UK and Romania. Finally, **Chapter 9** concludes with a discussion of the key findings in light of the literature on post-trafficking trajectories, focusing on vulnerabilities and agency, the context of the UK and Romania and provides recommendations for policy, practice and research.

Chapter 1. Literature Review Part I. Introducing human trafficking: History, definitions and context

Chapter aim

This first chapter of the literature review sets out the context for the research with a focus on the predominant narratives around sex trafficking. First, it introduces the topic of human trafficking and sex trafficking by providing an understanding of the historical background in which human trafficking emerged and its multidisciplinary character. Then, it discusses terminology in the global context with a focus on sex trafficking, examining how specific narratives impact anti-trafficking policy and practice. It argues that discourses that focus on narrow narratives of victimisation fail to capture the nuance and complexity of the phenomenon. Finally, it presents sex trafficking in the context of the UK and Romania, identifying key issues which contribute to trafficking.

Human trafficking: Emerging as a phenomenon

Guided by the research aims and questions, a narrative review of the literature on trafficking and post-trafficking experiences was conducted. The literature review is organised into two chapters. The first chapter addresses the literature contributing to the exploration of the phenomenon and what Bryman (2012, p. 110) refers to as 'generating understanding'. It then focuses on the conceptual framework, which considers aspects of vulnerability and victimisation in trafficking and the role of agency in building resilience and post-trafficking studies. Relevant evidence on post-trafficking experiences, care, reintegration, vulnerability, agency, and resilience was identified primarily within studies focused on Romania and Eastern Europe and these are discussed in Chapter 2. Narrative reviews are broad in scope and '*less explicit about the criteria of exclusion or inclusion of studies*' (Bryman, 2012, p. 110). Thus, I have searched and used a wide range of databases, online sources and academic journals (e.g., those on modern slavery, anti-trafficking, sex trafficking and sex work, violence against women and women's

studies, criminology and social work related), as well as 'grey' literature, reports and policy documents identified on NGOs' and governments' websites both in the UK and Romania. I used search terms such as "post-trafficking trajectories", "trafficked Romanian women", "sex trafficking Romania", "Romania-UK sex trafficking", "Romanian sex trafficking victims in UK", "post-trafficking vulnerabilities", "agency and trafficking" among others. These terms were re-arranged and further edited, and citation chaining (Cribbin, 2011) was used to support this process. Furthermore, the search criteria were revised towards the conclusion of the study to incorporate recent relevant studies and literature.

The approach used to discuss the emergence of human trafficking within this section highlights the distinction between the phenomenon itself and the discourses developed around the phenomenon. These discourses (e.g., activism, civil society, academia) are relevant for understanding and addressing human trafficking but are often taken for granted and are linked to certain ideologies and beliefs. Further, the historical context and the key chronological moments where human trafficking was first acknowledged and constructed are relevant and require analysis.

Human trafficking is currently a highly-debated global phenomenon which gained broader recognition in the last century; its origins are demonstrated by historical evidence from economics, business and social history going back as far as ancient times (Chibba, 2014; Jeffreys, 2008). Furthermore, the development of ideas, values and ideologies (Murphy, 2015) played an essential role in drawing attention to the violence, exploitation and abuse inflicted on different groups worldwide. This process started with the abolition of slavery, alongside growing concerns for human rights, individual freedom, and general well-being. The transition from disregarding what became known as 'human trafficking' to it becoming a fundamental global concern began with acknowledging its incidence and harm for individuals and society in the last century.

The emergence and recognition of the *'white slave trade'*, defined as '*the procurement by force, deceit, or drugs, of a white woman or girl against her will, for prostitution*' (Doezema, 1999, p.25), represented a starting point in the definition of the phenomenon of human trafficking. First mentioned in the USA and the UK around 1900, through stories about the horrific experiences of sexually-enslaved white women in these societies (Barnett, 2016; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015), the *'white slave trade'* gradually gained much attention as a political and social problem (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005; Lee, 2011). Although references to similar situations and practices of exploitation were noted at the same time in other contexts, such as warzones and South-East Asia (Lee, 2011), it was only with the emergence of the issue in the Global North

that concerns about trafficking were raised and attempts made to address the problem. As a result, the perspectives and voices of the Global North had the most influence in the early trafficking narratives, and according to scholars (Kempadoo, 2015; Lee, 2011; Weitzer, 2007), this was evident from its inception.

There are indicators of the complexity of human trafficking from the early attempts to define the phenomenon. Apart from capturing exploitation and harm caused to women individually and society generally, the term *'prostitution'* in the initial definition illustrates the predominant themes of the *'white slavery'* narratives (Bernstein, 2007; Doezema, 1999). Commentators argue that the *'moral panic'* and *'anxieties around sex work'* played an essential role in developing human trafficking discourses (Kempadoo, 2015; Weitzer, 2015). These debates are still ongoing and it is possible to identify two key positions in respect of sex work (although other arguments and positions have emerged): the abolitionist and the campaigners for sex workers' rights (Gerassi, 2015a).

Since then, themes of *'white slavery'* have been re-introduced and developed in today's trafficking narratives by abolitionist groups (Barnett, 2016). Feminist abolitionist groups, such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), and political, religious and other abolitionist groups, argue that prostitution could not be considered a form of employment. Instead, they have emphasised women's *'purity, innocence'* and vulnerability (Doezema, 1999; Meshkovska et al., 2015). In contrast, liberal feminist groups, notably the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW), similarly advocated for the criminalisation of exploitation and trafficking and for regulating sex work and freedom of sexual expression (Doezema, 1999). As a result, the abolitionist groups gained more attention and significantly influenced *'white slavery'* narratives and popular understanding of what is known today as sex trafficking. Therefore, from an early stage, the abolitionist movements shaped how trafficking was represented and understood, resulting in the concept lacking any recognition of women's agency and independence while focusing mainly on the victimisation and vulnerability of women.

Historians and academics have carefully investigated the claims and stories around *'white slavery'*, such as the extent of the phenomenon. However, little evidence has been available to support the concept (Doezema, 1999:26). In an in-depth analysis of the current discourses of sex slavery, Doezema (1999) argues that different agendas and groups were behind the dominant narrative of the *'white slave trade'* which was used as a tool for resisting the rapid changes in society at that time. Other academics support such claims, arguing that what was considered *'white slavery'* was mainly a social construct (Barnett, 2016; Kempadoo, 2015; Weitzer, 2007; 2015) induced by changes in society and an emerging *'moral panic'* about

sex work (Bernstein, 2007). Moreover, the *'white slave trade'* tended to reappear at times of significant social change (Bernstein, 2007; Doezema, 1999) or after events such as World Wars or the fall of the Eastern Block (Jahic & Finckeanauer, 2005). These changes and events were marked by the development of global industrialisation, border openings and prospects for economic migration and the more open expression of women's sexuality and emancipation, alongside a loosening of women's traditional roles and expectations, religious morals and social control (Doezema, 1999; Lee, 2011; Weitzer, 2007). Although changes in society brought uncertainty and novelty, in more recent years scholars find the narratives around *'white slavery'* controversial due to the lack of evidence to support the claims of those concerned about the threat of the *'white slave trade'* (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013; Sharma, 2005).

The *'white slave trade'* reveals preoccupations with the themes of gender in society, particularly with women's assigned roles and expectations. Doezema (1999) challenges the gendered nature of the *'white slave trade'* narratives and concludes that, to a certain extent, the *'white slave trade'* was a myth established to create and maintain control over women's sexuality, rapid emancipation and independence. Historically, the woman's body was considered a symbol of morality which, as FitzGerald (2018) highlights, enabled the state to exercise control over women's sexuality and reproduction. Furthermore, behind the intention of protecting women and concerns over their safety, there was also a fear of women's growing independence and the associated uncertainty over the prevalence of traditional family values (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005). Hence, preconceptions, biases and prescribed narratives contributed to the presumed severity of *'white slavery'* in the Western societies.

Female migration saw growth in Europe after the two World Wars and the collapse of the Eastern Block (Lee, 2011). Due to economic and industrial development, these events were directly linked with the emergence and re-emergence of 'white slavery' (Jahic & Finckeanauer, 2005). Major threats such as these increased the fear of migration, illegal migration and organised crime (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). In the face of fears about illegal immigration, states acted to protect their citizens and nations (Doezema, 1999; Jahic & Finckeanauer, 2005; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013), reinforcing border controls and developing restrictive migration policies. The perception of women's roles in the migration process has been problematic since cases of exploitation were first acknowledged, as women were viewed either in terms of vulnerability and naivety (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Meshkovska et al., 2015) or as immoral prostitutes from the East (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). Under these circumstances, as Doezema (1999) argues, there is no place to acknowledge women's agency in migration as opposed to men's agency. As a

result, commentators argue that female migration has been negatively perceived from its beginning (Andrijasevic, 2007a, 2007b; Sharma, 2005; Weitzer, 2015). The repeated reinforcement of this perception from the 'white slave trade' narratives through to the present has led to campaigns discouraging female migration (Jahic & Finckeanauer, 2005; Meshkovska et al., 2015). Researchers have criticised prevention campaigns on human trafficking for carrying such messages, particularly those directed at the migration from Eastern Europe and South-East Asia (Lee, 2011; O'Brien, 2013).

Migration is influenced by push and pull factors, such as unstable economies and differing rates of development in different contexts. As cases of trafficking started to be acknowledged in the developed world, migrant women were perceived through the lens of poverty and underdevelopment in line with 'white slave trade' narratives (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015). Scholars argue that stories of trafficking have now been replaced with images of poor and uneducated women from the Global South as victims in need of rescue and guidance from the developed nations (Doezema, 1999; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Sharma, 2005). Such arguments highlight the intersectionality in the women's roles (Twis & Preble, 2020; Whyte, 2013), whereby oppression and opportunities are impacted by wealth, positionality and other characteristics resulting in higher victimisation risks for some groups of women (e.g., Romanian women, Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003). In this light, the agency of non-western women is disregarded, reinforcing discourses of vulnerability and victimisation that are already predominant within the current trafficking narratives (Sharma, 2005; Weitzer, 2015). Furthermore, it feeds the so-called 'rescue industry', which has been criticised regarding its intentions, effects and actual positive impact on trafficked women's lives (Agustin, 2007; Brestein, 2010; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Cojocaru, 2015; 2016). Further, Doezema (1999, p.36) argues that the term 'poverty' is used for creating the space whereby women are '*sexually blameless in the eyes of the public and policymakers, as a result of being deceived and desperate innocents',* although simultaneously being perceived as victims of their own choices. Therefore, at the core of the trafficking discourse is located the vulnerability of the migrant women who engage in sex work in the Western world (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013; Sharma, 2005; Kemapdoo; 2015). This image of women from the Global South, or second world countries (Marinova & James, 2012) further evokes the morality and superiority of the developed nations (Kempadoo, 2015) but maintains the structural inequalities which lead to trafficking.

Despite the conflicting agendas, human trafficking remains a significant concern due to its adverse effects on those directly impacted. Through its nature and intention, human trafficking is damaging and

oppressive, and it violates laws, such as human rights laws, migration laws and economic regulations. The adverse effects it has on its victims are severe, and a growing body of literature defines them as atrocities, lifetime traumas and irreversible harm (Bales & Trodd, 2008; Hughes, 2014; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). In addition, trafficking has physical, psychological and social impacts, which vary depending on the particular circumstances, the trafficking experience and with individuals (Cojocaru, 2016; Pascual-Leone et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2019). Though empirical studies confirm the negative consequences of trafficking, there are doubts about and criticism of the popular accounts of trafficking and estimates of its magnitude. Thus, there is a need to better understand the phenomenon by challenging the ways trafficking was framed in previous discourses (Cockbain & Kleemans, 2019; Meshkovska et al., 2015; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013).

In addition to popular stories of trafficking, numbers '*are powerful tools*' in categorising human trafficking as a growing global concern (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005, p. 27). There are various estimates of the number of trafficked individuals around the world. However, the actual numbers are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain, given the illegal, hidden and sensitive character of trafficking. Different actors, such as governmental agencies, stakeholders and organisations, have produced contrasting estimations of the extent and prevalence of trafficking. High numbers indicate that certain groups could benefit financially, such as political groups, NGOs and others, and estimates are based on the number of identified cases and other variables or characteristics which are mostly unclear and not publicly disclosed (Weitzer, 2007). Further, Weitzer (2015, p. 229) criticises estimates found in the Global Slavery Index as unreliable, as it uses numbers from a variety of '*unstandardised sources: media reports, population surveys in a few countries, and estimates from anonymous NGOs, so-called experts, and government agencies*'. Another example is the ILO (International Labour Organization) using the 'capture-recapture' method (Meshkovska et al., 2015), which similarly poses the methodological question regarding its efficiency and reliability. Police data also, although it poses several challenges with access, how data is collected and inconsistencies across police forces and locations, remains a valuable and underexplored resource for trafficking research (Cockbain et al., 2019).

Similarly, global estimates have varied over time from 20 to 40 million (e.g., ILO, The International Labour Organisation) with researchers noting that if the numbers are alarmingly high, human trafficking gains more recognition and activism (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005; Meshkovska et al., 2015; Weitzer, 2007), pushing global agendas which also impact immigration and sex work legislation (Fedina, 2015; Kempadoo,

2015). While numbers are necessary to identify the extent of the problem, if exaggerated and misinterpreted, they increase the risk of further damage to service provision and assistance to victims (Cockbain & Kleemans, 2019; Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005; Meshkovska et al., 2015). Undoubtedly, cases of sexual exploitation and trafficking, both in the past and present, cannot be neglected despite the difficulties of establishing accurate data on the incidence of trafficked individuals.

In order to deal with human trafficking at an international level, cooperation between states started to emerge through agreements on terminology and efforts to address the problem of trafficking jointly. In addition, the need for a common definition was acknowledged to decrease the confusion around the phenomenon's particularities and allow effective responses to human trafficking (Kruger & Oosthuizen, 2011). As a result, a significant step in globally addressing human trafficking occurred with the development of an agreed international definition of human trafficking.

Towards an international definition of human trafficking

Human trafficking emerges from complex issues, which have resulted in challenges for accurately defining it across borders. As trafficking was recognised as a global challenge, the need for a common understanding, a shared legal framework and cooperation between states was crucial. Governments worldwide reacted to the legal aspects and security concerns triggered by trafficking, such as organised crime and illegal and irregular or forced migration (Craig, 2019; Lee, 2011). This reaction highlights the phenomenon's complexities and adds to its capacity to mobilise international cooperation. Therefore, to fight transnational organised crime, eliminate criminals and protect victims (Anderson, 2007), the Palermo Protocol was drafted in the late 1990s; recognised as a milestone in addressing trafficking internationally (Kruger & Oosthuizen, 2011) and influencing the creation of a standard definition of human trafficking (Borg Jansson, 2015). The current definition of human trafficking, according to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (2004) set out in the Palermo protocol for the Prevention, Suppression and Punishing Trafficking in Persons adopted by the member states in 2000 is as follows:

'Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits, to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.'

Critics argue that it drew from '*white slave trade'* narratives and was based primarily on western perspectives, and therefore failed to attain the aim of a common understanding as it was influenced by abolitionist groups and ideologies (Borg Jansson, 2015; Sharma, 2005). According to Doezema (2010, pg. 28), we are able '*to track traces of narratives on trafficking*' and identify the debates around the difference between '*forced and voluntary prostitution, the neo-abolitionist and non-regulationist perspectives'* in the Protocol. In the same way, Jahic & Finckenauer (2005) question the extent to which trafficking is politicised and its definitions '*stretched'* to fit specific political agendas. Given the historical development of the notion of trafficking, scholars have raised concerns over the politicisation of the concept of trafficking as to whether human trafficking is used as an instrument for addressing other issues such as prostitution/sex work and illegal and irregular migration (Doezema, 1999; Kempadoo et al., 2012; Weitzer, 2015), thus challenging the question of victimisation as well the definition. The Protocol specifies the position of vulnerability, which can be very accurate and visible; however, on the other hand, the agency, complexity of the human vulnerability and needs or context in which this occurs is not acknowledged. How victims and women victims are portrayed indicates a narrow view of women's roles in their journeys altogether. Victimisation is simultaneously linked with the term 'prostitution' that is used in the definition, which again directs the focus towards victimhood. In this respect, sex positivists play a key role in demanding the recognition of women's agency and highlighting the degree to which anti-trafficking discourses are based on morality related conceptions of sex work and prostitution (Sanghera, 2012). Furthermore, critics contend that the Protocol's primary focus on safeguarding women and children[2] has resulted in deficiencies in addressing the protection and preventive needs of male and LGBTQI victims of trafficking

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[2] This definition was revised with respect to children, suggesting that act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving a child with the intention of exploiting them is defined as 'trafficking in persons', regardless of whether force or coercion was employed. This concept presupposes that minors, including older adolescents, lack the capacity to make independent decisions and provide informed consent (Goździak & Vogel, 2020).

(Shoaps, 2013 in Goździak & Vogel, 2020). Thus, suggesting a gendered perspective on trafficking, which lack of emphasis on labour for instance or other categories of individuals (e.g., males, LGBTQI individuals) (Goździak & Vogel, 2020).

The vagueness of the definition and the multidimensional character of human trafficking are responsible for inconsistent interpretations (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005; Meshkovska et al., 2015). For example, in a comparative study of the definition of human trafficking, Borg Jansson (2015) raises several issues regarding its terminology, particularly as it impacts implementation in different national contexts. These include the following: '*concern of border crossing, organised crime groups, the concept by means, the consent of the victims and the purpose of the perpetrator*' (p. 308).

All these elements are subject to interpretation and lead to inconsistencies when cross-border action occurs. Similarly, Weitzer (2015) argues that the Protocol is difficult to apply because important terms such as exploitation, abuse of power, vulnerability and control are undefined. In addition, Weitzer (2015) notes the overlap in the usage of these terms in human trafficking and people smuggling. The question, therefore, remains as to whether freedom of interpretation benefits the cause of addressing human trafficking or leads to limited usage of the terms. Moreover, regarding the content, some argue that the definition lacks a human rights perspective, and since it is highly centred on transnational crime, the definition is used as a law enforcement instrument, which reflects the main preoccupations of the states taking part in this process (Borg Jansson, 2015; Kempadoo, 2012; Weitzer, 2015).

Furthermore, by focusing solely on law enforcement, scholars argue that the definition does not capture the nuances of the crime (Borg Jansson, 2015; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). Though the role of law enforcement is important and it has capacity to deal with trafficking, other elements should not be underestimated. As Choi-Fitzpatrick (2015) argues, the criminal justice approach and law enforcement are primarily supported by international bodies and stakeholders and have become seen as the sole solution to trafficking. Additionally, Lee (2011) draws attention to the immigration control concerning trafficking and the challenges it brings to trafficked individuals and other migrants. Finally, she remarks on the lack of input from victims themselves when it comes to definition, whereby the definition is dominated by state officials and other influential groups rather than victims themselves and requires more input from those with lived experiences of trafficking.

Although these questions are still debated, there is still a need for a definition which address such a complex and yet universal phenomenon as trafficking (Kruger & Ooshuizen, 2011; Meshkovska et al., 2015). For example, Kruger & Oosthuizen (2011) argue that the current definition is comprehensive, homogeneous and consistent with previous attempts at creating a definition, as it incorporates various forms of trafficking and identifies a range of: individuals as potential victims; actions or steps leading to exploitation; and exploitation types. Some commentators remark on the challenges of creating a definition that is all-encompassing and multiculturally fitted, especially in a context of neo-liberalism, capitalism and the ongoing social structural inequalities (Kempadoo, 2015; Shama, 2015). For instance, Meshkovska et al. (2015) suggest that the terminology in the definition was deliberately created to offer flexibility in such a multidisciplinary field, arguing that focus should remain on clarifications around terminology, especially around vulnerability and exploitation, instead of changing the definition.

The definition and explanation of human trafficking are generally based on legal and law enforcement perspectives, especially when considering collaborations between countries, yet the phenomenon can be addressed and explained from multiple angles, such as human rights and globalisation perspectives or migration theories, among others (Lee, 2011). However, this study, takes a social work perspective as its starting point as this allows considerations of social, psychological and criminal justice practice and theory, which informs the broad understanding of the crime and the need for addressing it. Moreover, it adds a feminist perspective to studying trafficking which allows a more nuanced exploration of individual trafficking experiences, discussed in Chapter 3.

From Human Trafficking to Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking represents sexual exploitation under the human trafficking umbrella, referring to trafficking solely for sexual exploitation, and as Kempadoo (2015, pg. 8) argues, it emerged from the connection between human trafficking and prostitution, which is considered *'the most severe form of trafficking'*. This has become a recognised political and social issue and an area of interest for a wide range of individuals and groups globally, from governments and international bodies to church groups and charities, media, celebrities, and academia. Though trafficking takes many forms, there is a tendency in the global media

and policy debates to prioritise sex trafficking, as it is considered the most severe form of trafficking (Ardau, 2004; Meshkovska et al., 2015) despite labour trafficking and other forms of trafficking being much broader and more typical (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). Nevertheless, the focus on sex trafficking in the last two decades is highly associated with the prostitution/sex work connection and has been understood as driven by moral concerns (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005; Kempadoo, 2015; Weitzer, 2007). According to Cree (2008), the focus on sex trafficking, despite the prevalence of other types of trafficking, has been present since the late 19th and 20th centuries, when the issue developed as a matter of public concern. Thus, it can be argued that sex trafficking is exaggerated as an issue, due to poor statistics and a conflation of sex trafficking with sex work at the expense of other types of human trafficking and debates around prostitution and sex work (Doezema, 2010; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013), or characterised as a 'moral crusade' (Weitzer, 2007).

Several scholars consider the social construction of trafficking problematic (Bernstein & Schaffner, 2004; Doezema, 2010; Kempadoo et al., 2012) as it is underpinned by morality, ideologies and political agendas. Weitzer (2007, pg.1) argues that sex trafficking claims are '*problematic, unsubstantiated or demonstrably false'*. Additionally, the Global North shows more interest in trafficking and contributed to its definition and debates around the phenomenon, leading to what Sharma (2005, p. 102) refers to as - '*a new victim was produced: the third-world women migrant'.* Similarly, Kempadoo (2015) argues that the '*burden of the white man'* and the role of '*saviour'* impacted on how some places in the world are more preoccupied with this issue. In this equation, the women are caught in what is the 'right' and 'wrong' in terms of their roles in society, sex work and migration, as 'the other' in need for salvation. Thus, when discussing sex trafficking, an essential element worth noting is the conflation of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation with sex work and the blurred line between the two, due to the continuous development of sex work history alongside cultural, societal and religious believes and values (Doezema, 2010).

It is crucial to set the stage for this and ensure a clear distinction regardless of views and perspectives on women's choices regarding sex work, as previously mentioned in respect of the two feminist schools and their opposing agendas on sex work (Gerassi, 2015a). The arguments around sex trafficking and sex work are about freedom, consent, agency and women's options for sex work engagement. This is complicated by the possible exploitation which can occur during independent sex work and how sex work can become sex trafficking. In addition, the understanding of human trafficking can be founded on flawed methodologies and ambiguous criteria that failed to differentiate between sex trafficking and sex work

(Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). They further argue that, poorly researched topics led by the foremost abolitionist scholars became '*truths*' about trafficking and further perpetuated confusion and negative implication for those impacted by trafficking (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). Given this, trafficked women's roles in the process must be acknowledged in all their complexities and nuances.

Women's roles and decision-making regarding voluntary involvement in sex work (which could lead to exploitation and trafficking) are frequently disregarded and undermined (Agustin, 2007; Bernstein, 2012; Cojocaru, 2015; 2016). The debate around consent is important and creates a new space for introducing the question of agency in trafficking. An example is provided in the use of the term '*by means'* in the Palermo definition, which raises questions about perceptions of victims' level of agency and is criticised as promoting an ideal of coerced innocents (Borg Jansoon, 2015). This further excludes perceptions of agency by supporting preconceptions about the correct type of victim regardless of the exploitation. Meshkovska et al. (2015) discuss the issue of consent in sex trafficking, arguing that the definition of sex trafficking depends on where the international community stands regarding sex work. Sex work legislation differs globally, with countries adopting different models based on political, ideological and moral agendas (Valverde, 2014). Thus, a diverse picture exists, with some countries adopting full criminalisation (e.g., South Africa, Sri Lanka), partial criminalisation (e.g., India, UK – except Northern Ireland), criminalisation of the purchase of sex (e.g., Canada, France, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Norway, Sweden), regulatory models (e.g., some states in Australia, Germany, Mexico, The Netherlands, Senegal) or full decriminalisation (e.g., New Zealand) (Platt et al., 2018). Whilst the criminalisation of the sale of sex approach, commonly referred to as the 'Nordic model' in particular, has been hailed as best practice to shrink the industry and tackle sex trafficking, empirical data suggests that it had not this effect and also poses risk factors to sex workers (Amnesty International, 2017; Kingston & Thomas, 2018; Smith & Mac, 2018). For instance, sex workers face heightened vulnerability to violence and exploitation and experience negative impacts on mental wellbeing, factors that have been associated with the criminalisation of their profession (Platt et al., 2018).

Consent becomes the key topic in the debate between abolitionists and sex worker rights advocates on women's agency and choices concerning sex work. The consent issue becomes problematic, especially when women need to fit prescribed narratives or become the 'ideal victim' (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; Forringer-Beal, 2022). The concept of the 'ideal' or deserving victim is often encountered in trafficking narratives (Lee, 2011; O'Brien, 2013), whereby sex workers can be blamed for sexual violence against

them (Agustin, 2007; Doezema, 1999). Other studies support such claims, especially when women need to overemphasise some of their stories or exaggerate some of the facts in order to meet the definition of victimhood (FitzGerald, 2018). Thus, the link between sex work and sex trafficking remains complex, and the two influence and interconnect with one another. The whole picture, therefore, is informed by the discourses and debates around trafficking, and opposing feminist groups continue to debate the issue. In recent years, much research has been conducted on trafficking, bringing a sense of novelty across many fields, adding to understanding the importance of the context and the public opinions and national agendas in place (Craig, 2019; Limoncelli, 2008; Kempadoo et al., 2012). Thus, the places where sex trafficking starts and occurs impacts on the experiences of those involved and is influenced by policies, legal frameworks and the sociocultural complexities of the context. In light of this study, the following section focuses on sex trafficking in the context of the UK.

The UK context and sex trafficking considerations

The UK is one of the main countries of destination for trafficking victims in Europe (TIP, 2022). Historically, the UK contributed to the development and growth of the global slave trade and its economy benefited from it (Scanlan, 2020; Walvin, 2007). Later, it played a role in fighting slavery, not only by aiming to abolish transatlantic slavery through the 1807 Slave Trade Act but by aiming to end slavery altogether (Craig et al., 2019). Thus, its preoccupation with reducing exploitation persisted over years as exploitation gained new directions and reached new territories. The UK ratified the Palermo protocol in 2006, alongside other international regulations and directives (Craig et al., 2019). To improve and broaden strategies for tackling trafficking, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was introduced in England and Wales, setting the government legislative framework for addressing modern slavery in these countries. This includes prosecution, prevention, safeguarding, raising public awareness and international collaboration (Home Office, 2019). Apart from human trafficking, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 covers issues of slavery as well as, forced servitude, compulsory labour and exploitation. Similarly, in 2015, Scotland adopted the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 (Scottish Government) and Northern Ireland introduced the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (Police Service of Northen Ireland). Yet, the Modern Slavery Act, 2015, is the first

legislation across the UK that uses the term '*modern slavery'*, differentiating it from human trafficking or other related terms. However, as Broad &Turnbull (2019) argue, it was created by influential discourses on trafficking and slavery, not necessarily as an answer to an identified social problem.

Moreover, modern slavery emerges as a way of presenting the atrocities of sex trafficking, with the terminology being primarily used in awareness campaigns, governmental documents, and academia (Gerassi, 2015b). The terms 'modern slavery' or 'modern-day slavery' evoke high degrees of violence, abuse and coercion (Lee, 2011; Gerassi, 2015b) and the usage of new forms of coercion such as debt bondage (Bales & Trodd, 2008; Jeffreys, 2008). Sex trafficking is considered a new form of modern-day slavery (Bales, 2000; Burt, 2019), with the terminology describing the *'movement of individuals into enslavement (trafficking)'* (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; p. 495). However, this terminology has been criticised regarding the dangers of conflating trafficking with historical accounts of slavery which are markedly different from the current narrative (O'Connell Davidson, 2017; Gerassi, 2015b; Weitzer, 2015). As O'Connell Davidson (2017) remarks, the 'modern slavery' discourse employs both textual and visual parallels to emphasise the transatlantic slavery past into today's trafficking by suggesting the gravity and urgency for action. Nevertheless, such persuasive approaches *'show a lack of consideration for historical accuracy'* while promoting the notion of *'trafficking as new slavery'* (O'Connell Davidson, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, Van der Wilt (2014) argues that the term 'modern slavery' is ambiguous since it depicts the complex concept of trafficking superficially. He draws attention to the UN definition of trafficking, which implies that slavery is a subdivision of human trafficking – *'exploitation includes … slavery or similar to slavery',* yet this definition conflicts with that for severe forms of sexual exploitation which are presented as slavery in themselves (Van der Wilt, 2014, pg. 334). Finally, despite the two groups' arguments for the best terminology, some argue that the terminology is legally applicable and includes a variety of exploitation cases while additionally reflecting the continuity of anti-slavery activism for over two centuries (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015).

The demand side in the UK is considered a crucial issue as it contributes to exploitation by boosting the supply from countries with a lower economic profile, such as Eastern Europe (Lee, 2011; Mai, 2010; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013). In terms of sexual services, it has been difficult to prove and evidence accurate statistics on the numbers of clients (Wilcox et al., 2009), especially when referring to sex trafficking victims. Nevertheless, New (2015) suggests, the supply chains and the consumer have a responsibility as part of this equation to ensure trafficking is reduced and eliminated.

In the UK, the data on victims and potential victims of sex trafficking is collected through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM[3]; Turner, 2015). Some argue that due to the complexity of the phenomenon, other types of data are needed for creating a comprehensive and accurate picture of trafficking; policy building should not rely solely on these NRM statistics (Scullion, 2015). Upon identification, victims or possible victims, according to their immigration status, can opt to enter the NRM through which they can receive direct support and victim care via NGOs subcontracted by the UK Government (Brotherton, 2019). However, it is important to note that consent applies only to adults and not to minors, as children can be referred without their consent (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). Most organisations supporting trafficking victims in the UK claim to use a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach, assisting them according to their needs in terms of time and location (Murphy, 2018; Van Dyke & Barchou, 2021). However, as Craig (2017) suggests, many victims are still highly vulnerable if traffickers are free, and many do not access support - or the support they can access is restricted to a specific area in the UK. He refers to the Government's lack of strategic responses to coordinating victim care, describing the effectiveness of the support available through charities as a '*postcode lottery'* (pg. 24). Finally, barriers to referrals are several and among the most prominent, as Hynes (2022, p. 18) suggests, is that, in the last few decades, the UK has created a culture that constitutes '*a harsh and increasingly hostile environment'* for migrants and those affected by trafficking, exploitation, or modern slavery. In this setting, disclosure is discouraged by a lack of trust in authorities, with this contributing to the challenges of identifying those impacted by trafficking. Alongside the traffickers, recrimination by the state within the immigration context represents yet another barrier to victim engagement.

According to the latest UK census data (ONS, GOV, 2022), in England and Wales there has been a large increase (576%) in the numbers of people in the UK born in Romania over the last 10 years. Thus, Romania has become the fourth most common non-UK country of birth for UK residents, as a consequence of increased migration and lifted work restrictions after 2014 (ONS, GOV, 2022). In 2018, there were 6,985 potential victims of modern slavery referred through the NRM in the UK, representing an increase of 36% from the previous year (Home Office, 2018). The most recent data for the last quarter of 2022, shows that 4,585 potential victims of modern slavery were referred through the NRM – representing an increase for

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[3]'The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support (retrieved from www.gov.uk, 2022).

all nationalities on previous years,. Yet, there was a decrease in the proportion of Romanian cases that made up the total numbers referred through the NRM between 2020 and 2021 (GOV, 2022). Nevertheless, not all victims decide to go through the NRM process, follow a justice process or are formally repatriated to Romania; thus, the potential number of victims of Romanian nationality is thought to be higher. For instance, figures recorded by some UK NGO helplines suggest that Romania is the most prevalent nationality among potential victims of human trafficking (Justice and Care, 2021; Unseen, 2021; Salvation Army, 2020; 2021). Other factors such as Brexit and COVID-19 could have contributed to these fluctuating figures. Discrepancies and a lack of clarity are evident in the general picture of Romanian trafficking cases with limitations apparent across different data sources (e.g., NGO reports; official NRM data; police forces data). In addition, some regions of the UK encounter similar data issues, which pose challenges for policing human trafficking, especially in locations with a diverse sex work industry, such as North-West England (Cooper, 2016; Cooper et al., 2018).

Finally, since trafficking has an international dimension, effective collaboration between the UK and other countries regarding investigations, service provision and prevention is crucial (Skrivankova, 2019), as in the case of trafficking originating from Romania.

The Romanian context and sex trafficking considerations

Romania is considered a major source for victims of sex and labour trafficking in Europe (TIP, 2022). Among the perceived root causes of trafficking, UNODC (2018) mentions poverty, inequality, and a lack of resources to address trafficking, such as inadequately trained or corrupt law enforcing agencies. Although trafficking risks are varied and context related, studies on victimisation and vulnerability to trafficking of Romanian women by Lăzăroiu & Alexandru (2003), Bodrogi (2015), Jonsson (2019) and Roth & Laszlo (2023) support this analysis, together with wider literature on Romanian trafficking (Gavriluță & Gavriluță, 2013). Moreover, the political and system changes (e.g. from communism towards democracy) and the increased possibilities for migration highly impact trafficking too. Oprea & Popescu (2008) argue that after 1990, migration in Romania had several turning points, increasing the permanent migration post-communism, and thus migration became inevitable due to the transition to a capitalist market

economy (Wersching, 2008). The abrupt transition from communism to democracy in 1989 placed Romania in a state of social instability; a weak legal framework and wide-ranging problems created a fertile ground for sexual exploitation and criminality, such that Romania became a country of origin for trafficking (Fleşner, 2010). In addition, the transition left Romania in great economic instability with a significant loss of jobs and inflation (Alexandru, 2013). Temporary external movement that occurred after 1989, following the collapse of the communist system which had restricted emigration, surpassed internal migration in the 1970 – 1989 and migration issues in Romania were deemed alarming owing to its widespread worldwide impact immediately after 1989 (Mîndrican & Matei, 2023). Yet, this migration was specific to few groups (e.g., Hungarians, German, Jews) and widely, the migration started after 2007 (Mîndrican & Matei, 2023). The country's transition to a democratic society allowed for the free movement of people across borders, which coupled with economic hardships faced by Romanians, led to a growth in migration as a means to overcome financial difficulties (Aninoşanu et al., 2012). However, apart from the transition to democracy, which stimulated Romanians to overcome their economic challenges, as Aninoşanu et al., (2012) remark, in Romania, the emergence of human trafficking can be traced back to the early 1990s, facilitated by Romania's strategic geographical location, situated in close proximity to major human trafficking routes connecting Asia and Western Europe.

An essential point in Romanian migration was reached when visas were removed for Romanians travelling from Romania in the European Union (EU) Schengen area in 2002 (Mircea & Pristavu, 2008) and then by Romania joining the EU in 2007 (Alexandru, 2013). All these developments, together with ending of transnational restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian workers that were in place until 2013, increased access to employment abroad in all EU members states (European Commission, 2014), including the UK (Gower & Hawkins, 2013). Thus, in the context of Romania a common perception is that economic migration and the development of organised crime, both identified as correlating with human trafficking, have been reinforced by factors such as the opening of borders, slow economic development, and cultural and political cooperation with Western Europe (Dascălu, 2008). As Aninoşanu et al. (2012) argue, traffickers started to re-create their recruitment strategies, adapt their behaviours towards victims and take advantage of the legal ambiguities of sex work in destination countries. Moreover, corruption, complicity and weak legal agencies influence law enforcement on the issue of trafficking (Borg Jansson, 2015; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Jonsson, 2019; UNODC, 2018;). Such factors have been noticed in the case of Romania, too and identified as enablers of trafficking (Bodrogi, 2015; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003). Nevertheless, internal trafficking too, is considered to be on the rise in Romania (Van Der Heijden, 2018),

and according to Nicolae (2019), of the victims registered by ANITP between 2011 and 2016, 48% have been exploited in Romania, suggesting that Romania is the primary nation where internal exploitation occurs, including higher numbers of underaged victims.

Studies on Romanian trafficking highlight the intersecting vulnerabilities of potential victims or at-risk populations, including young age, lack of schooling, poverty, rural areas, ethnicity, and dysfunctional families (Alexandru, 2013; Aninoseanu et al., 2016; Bodrogi, 2015; Roth & Laszlo, 2023). In a mixed-methods study including surveys and interviews with victims of trafficking (2 females in Romania, both sex trafficking victims, and one male victim of labour exploitation in the UK) and 28 key experts in the field in Romania and the UK in places considered 'high risk for trafficking', Alexandru (2013), suggested that vulnerability to trafficking entailed lack of economic opportunities, rurality, poverty and lack of interest in education or lower levels of education. Similarly, findings from Aninoseanu et al.'s (2016) qualitative study drawing on the perceptions of trafficking survivors and professionals in three countries (Romania, Italy and Spain), identified the same range of vulnerabilities and risks of trafficking among Romanian women. Additionally, they suggested that age and gender in particular, or gendered, patriarchal and traditional attitudes are significant risk factors that should be used when analysing women's profiles in the Romanian context. Within the study, interviews with 21 adult Romanian female survivors of trafficking, 17 interviews with Romanian professionals, 18 interviews with Spanish professionals, and 15 interviews with Italian professionals in anti-trafficking and social services were conducted. Finally, Bodrogi's (2015) PhD study used a qualitative approach and triangulation to explore the vulnerability and victimisation of Romanian women in respect of trafficking in a study conducted in Romania. This included 45 interviews with anti-trafficking and social services professionals, 37 interviews with adult Romanian female victims of sex trafficking, and 6 interviews with relatives of victims. This study provides a useful account of the many economic and social vulnerabilities that represent risks for trafficking (see Chapter 2).

Belonging to minorities is considered an issue, too, since it increases social exclusion and thus poses more vulnerabilities (Rădescu, 2012), as in the case of the Roma Romanians. The intersectionality of such elements makes certain groups more vulnerable than others. Additionally, some areas in Romania are very much more developed than others, creating social stratification, inequalities, and poverty differentials between rural and urban areas, the capital or different regions in the country (Bunea, 2012; Mateoc-Sîrb et al., 2014). Alongside contextual factors, trafficking is highly influenced by individual vulnerabilities, circumstances, and experiences. In a study on the trafficking and exploitation of Romanian

women, Aninoșeanu et al.'s (2016) study discussed the gendered aspects underpinning trafficking, such as violence against women, perceptions of sexuality and traditional, patriarchal, and gendered values. They argue that such views increase both demand and supply for trafficking within the context of Romania. Trafficked women can also be also recruited from their communities by family, acquaintances, or friends, which poses difficulties for trafficking prevention, especially when there are strong ties between traffickers and victims (Alexandru, 2013). For instance, data on sex trafficking cases involving Romanian women accessed through ANITP datasets[4] highlight the prevalence of in-person recruitment, including methods and terminology such as 'loverboy'[5], women being in a relationship with the recruiter (partner/husband) or via friends/acquaintances or pimps; thus suggesting the connections and relationships between victims and traffickers.

Regardless of the issues encountered, Romania has tried through its institutions, legislations and policies to tackle trafficking. This has involved adhering and abiding by international regulation and cooperating with member states: Romania signed the Palermo protocol in 2000, followed by the National Law 678/2001 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings in 2006, and signed the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings and created ANITP in the same year (Nicolae, 2019)[6]. After several legal changes over the last decades, Romania modified its Criminal Code in 2014, and according to EU suggestions is encouraged to move towards a standardisation of the Swedish model or Nordic model[7] (Vlase & Grasso, 2021). Currently, under the new Criminal Code, individuals engaging in sex work are subject to an administrative fine (offence) or required to perform community service, while those who facilitate sex work, commonly referred to as pimps, are subject to criminal charges (Romania Criminal Code, 2014; Vlase & Grasso, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2023). The ambiguities of this

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[4] Data sets accessed in February 2023 from: https://data.gov.ro/dataset

[5] 'Loverboy' is the technique of recruiting young people by human trafficking networks, through "falling in love" (https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/prietenul-tau-poate-fi-un-loverboy/). The term is used in other locations around Europe, with a similar connotation, for example in the Netherlands, the term *"'loverboys' describes pimps who use their seductive skills to exploit young girls as prostitutes"* (Bovenkerk & van San, 2011, p. 185).

[6] ANITP is the national agency for monitoring, coordinating and implementing anti-trafficking policies, victim protection and assistance, under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/).

[7] The Nordic Model refers to the criminal offence of purchasing sexual services, which criminalises the buyer and decriminalises the seller (Kingston & Thomas, 2019).

approach raise questions around women's position and vulnerability in sex work, and possible exploitation.

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report of the US Government (TIP)[8] assessment, Romania is considered to maintain its position on Tier 2[9] in the last years. Romania was also on the watch list Tier 2 between 2019 to 2021 (TIP, 2022), which indicates that the Government of Romania fell short of meeting the minimal requirements for the eradication of human trafficking but was making substantial efforts to do so. Despite the efforts to prevent and combat trafficking through current national legislation, Romania still faces challenges when it comes to implementation, mainly due to a lack of funding and political attention (Grădinaru, 2015). Ideally, once victims are identified (in Romania or internationally), they are recorded through the transnational referral mechanism[10] and are repatriated to Romania (ANITP, 2022; Grădinaru, 2015). The International Organisation for Migration has devised the concept of transnational referral mechanism, funded by the EU, to support the repatriation of survivors, which entails supporting their departure from the nation where they were identified as migrants and their return to their country of origin (Lannier, 2023). Yet, as noticed, authorities in destination countries prefer informal methods of identification and referral, finding them to be cheaper and faster, and rejecting more formal processes which are considered to add layers of bureaucracy, and thus delay (Lannier, 2023). In the case of adults, victim/survivors' choices may also be influential (Lannier, 2023). When it comes to the UK context, critiques argue that repatriations in light of '*protecting vulnerable women in trafficking*', go hand in hand with agendas aimed at border control and '*protecting the UK from unwanted 'Others'* FitzGerald (2012, p. 227).

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[8] U.S. Government's primary diplomatic instrument for engaging foreign governments on the issue of human trafficking. The Department places each country in this Report onto one of four tiers, as mandated by the TVPA. This placement is based not on the size of a country's problem but on the extent of government efforts to meet the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking, which are generally consistent with the Palermo Protocol (TIP, 2022, pg. 52,)

[9] Tire 2 countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards (TIP, 2022, pg. 58).

[10] The Transnational Referral Mechanism (TRM) refers to the cooperation and agreement "*for the cross-border comprehensive assistance and/or transfer of identified or potential trafficked persons, through which state actors of different countries fulfill their obligations to promote and protect the human rights of trafficked persons*". https://www.iomfrance.org/tact/about-trm.html

On the other hand, internal trafficking is addressed within the jurisdiction of Romania through the national identification and referral mechanism, once a victim is identified, ANITP refers them to social services, anti-trafficking NGOs and shelters for support, depending on the region of the country, in a process similar to that for those repatriated from abroad (Grădinaru, 2015). Nevertheless, as research shows, not all victims accept this support or are monitored upon return and those who return to the same communities are thought to be at risk of re-exploitation, especially in areas with few opportunities and lack of development (Aninoseanu et al., 2016; Bogodi, 2015). Although Romania has worked extensively on prevention, the numbers of trafficked individuals remain high (TIP, 2022). Moreover, there are clear connections regarding demand and supply between Romania and the UK as outlined in the introduction which need to be further addressed.

Chapter Summary

The chapter has mapped the sex trafficking landscape from its origins, development and current understandings of it, and has argued that sex trafficking and sex work discourses inform anti-trafficking debates, policy and practice. These discourses maintain a focus on narratives of victimisation and fail to capture all nuances and complexities of sex trafficking. The voices of women who were trafficked for sexual exploitation are limited in informing the current understanding of the phenomenon. Yet, much of the activism and sex trafficking concerns occur in close relation to sex work debates which are often influenced by wider agendas on migration, women's roles in society and moral panics, that ultimately focus on narrow narratives of victimisation and fail to capture the nuance and complexity of the phenomenon. Finally, it presented the contextual challenges and key issues within the UK and Romania, together with the connection between the two states that needs to be considered when addressing trafficking as it informs potential challenges for post-trafficking trajectories. The following chapter explores the literature on post-trafficking trajectories of sex trafficked women.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Part II. Vulnerability and agency in sex trafficking and post-trafficking trajectories

Chapter aim

This second chapter explores research on the trafficking and post-trafficking trajectories of sexually exploited women, drawing in particular on empirical post-trafficking studies. Firstly, it discusses vulnerability and agency in trafficking. Secondly, it introduces eco-system theory to support the exploration of trafficking and post-trafficking experiences. Finally, guided by the research questions, a review of the literature on post-trafficking experiences was conducted, primarily focusing on studies representing the trajectories of Romanian and Eastern European trafficked women and their experiences post-trafficking, covering the area of needs and vulnerabilities post-trafficking, as well as agency and supportive factors which increase resilience and reduce possible re-victimisation.

The role of vulnerability and agency in post-trafficking trajectories

A range of theories has emerged in the attempt to define, describe and explain human trafficking, sexual exploitation and sex work. Many factors and systems contribute to a particular experience of trafficking, and micro, meso, and macro systems interconnect (Barner et al., 2017). This study draws from, and explores women's vulnerability and agency, especially around exiting trafficking while acknowledging the feminist debates between prohibitionist perspectives and sex worker rights advocates (Gerassi, 2015a). The focus on vulnerability and agency provides a nuanced framework for analysing trafficking. It aims to inform interventions that increase the resilience of women who have been trafficked and decrease their vulnerability and the risk of re-trafficking and further exploitation. By clearly focusing on these two elements, we can ensure that supportive factors are acknowledged and developed. Elements of vulnerability and agency are encountered at all stages of life (De Angelis, 2016; Syed, 2016); they coexist (Carse, 2006) and are influenced by the emotional impact of particular life episodes and personal characteristics (Friborg et al., 2015). Studies have demonstrated that increased agency develops higher

resilience, which can be noticed in adverse situations similar to human trafficking. For instance, a qualitative study by Haffejee & Theron (2019, p. 702) describes how adolescent girls who experienced sexual exploitation were able to increase their resilience with the support of external systems (eco-systems), and concluded that despite great adversity, *'individual agentic expressions were more important to enabling resilience process'*. Thus, similar approaches to explore the expression of agency before and after trafficking could reconcile the need to '*admit that agency can be expressed in a variety of ways'* (Agustin, 2007, p.194), and could assist understanding of trafficked women's experiences in their complexity.

The stages of trafficking, the accompanying pre-trafficking circumstances, the entry into a trafficking situation, the trafficking and exploitation period, the exit and the post-trafficking trajectory are all critical. Therefore, they must be approached holistically to understand the nuances of trafficking experiences (Hammond & McGlone, 2014) as they illustrate different possibilities and paths for trafficked women. It is important to note where agency and vulnerability are present within these phases to understand their interconnectivity and manifestation at each stage. However, commentators have noted that the current narratives tend to narrow the discussion and emphasise women's vulnerability and victimisation at all stages (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; Doezema, 1999; Lee, 2011; Kemoadoo, 2015), and such examples are particularly evident in abolitionist studies and reports (Bales & Trodd, 2008; Hughes, 2000; Kara, 2009). In this frame, women are represented as mainly passive, hopeless and naïve (Doezema, 1999; see Chapter 1). However, lived experience, observation, and empirical data show contradicting arguments. Cojocaru (2015; 2016), using an 'intimate ethnography' that draws on her personal life experience of what she called a 'semi-voluntary sex work' in Japan for eight years, criticises the general responses to human trafficking by pointing to the tendency towards victimisation and a lack of agency in discourses. Stories of suffering and exploitation can be utilised to support narrow victimhood representations, ignoring the complexities of the human experience behind victimhood (Cojocaru, 2015, p. 139). Cojocaru explains that the trafficked women and sex workers she had observed and worked with avoided the victim label because of its conventional connotations. Even in the most coercive and violent situations, they experienced a degree of agency and autonomy, ensuring survival and self-preservation.

Vulnerability refers to the level of risk related to the physical, social, and economic components and consequences of a system's capacity to handle adversity (Marino & Faas, 2020; Proag, 2014). Although a common term used widely across sectors and social sciences when referring to individuals, Brown (2011,

p. 313) argues that vulnerability holds varying interpretations for individuals, and the significance of our understanding of it is crucial and dependent to the context:

> *The concept of vulnerability informs how we manage and classify people, justify state intervention in citizens' lives, allocate resources in society and define our social obligations; it has important implications for ethics, social welfare and, ultimately, everyday life.*

Similarly, vulnerability plays a significant role in trafficking scholarship. Research conducted on victimisation in the context of trafficking addressing specific areas of vulnerability or risk factors for trafficking is common in anti-trafficking scholarship, providing insights into understanding some specific aspects of trafficking (Bodrogi, 2015; Chu & Billings, 2000; Contreras, 2018; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; Hynes et al., 2019; Hodges et al., 2023). The spectrum of vulnerabilities is complex and encountered in the individual, family, community and macro systems. The intersections of these vulnerabilities and the push-pull factors within specific contexts increase the risks of trafficking. For example, international studies have identified risk factors such as dysfunctional families, a history of abuse and mental health issues (Pascoal, 2016; 2018; Stoklosa et al, 2017). At a meso level, other vulnerabilities relate to development, opportunities, and certain practices which could be damaging, such as child marriage or overly patriarchal societies whereby gender and inequality play a crucial role in determining vulnerability (Pascoal, 2016; Pop, 2016). At a macro level, the economic development and poverty of a country such as Romania, where the rural situation is highly affected by a lack of education, economic possibilities and further development (see Chapter 1) are relevant. Wider studies on Eastern Europe (Corrin, 2005; Surtees, 2005; Vocks & Nijboer, 2000) and Romania (Aninoşanu et al, 2012; Bodrogi, 2015; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; Pascoal, 2020), provide important insight into the vulnerabilities and risks of trafficking (as presented in Chapter 1, Romanian context). Bodrogi (2015) concluded that vulnerability to trafficking at a contextual and societal level for Romania falls back into economic factors (e.g., poverty, lack of opportunities/employment, schooling), legal factors (e.g., poor legal frameworks and protection of victims) and finally values, traditions and attitudes (e.g., discrimination, gender issues, normalising buying and selling sexual services). Pascoal (2020) using a participatory research on motherhood among sex workers and trafficking women - involving participatory observations for up to four hours per week, for a period of two years with Romanian and Nigerian street sex workers in Italy and 30 semi-structured interviews with anti-trafficking key informants - discussed the vulnerabilities of Romanian women in this

context, highlighting similar concerns regarding contextual vulnerabilities leading to sex work and sex trafficking, such as poverty, lack of resources and gender inequality among others.

In a study investigating the risks of victimisation to trafficking concerning Romanian women, Bodrogi (2015) observed that most women were at risk of trafficking due to the intersection of multiple risks as mentioned above, which could lead to their re-victimisation. Similarly, Pascual (2020) looking at sex workers and trafficked Romanian women in Italy, noticed the multiple faceted vulnerabilities characterising these groups of women. Finally, a recent study undertaken by Hynes et al (2019) used the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) vulnerability framework to examine vulnerabilities during migration, following the predominant cases of human trafficking in UK, from four major countries of origin for trafficking: Albania, Vietnam, Nigeria and UK. The study used a qualitative framework, starting with shared learning events in each country to achieve a solid base on context and create the data collection tools, following with in-depth semi-structured interviews held in each country with key informants and 68 adults who experienced trafficking. They concluded that vulnerability was highly prevalent among these groups of migrants. Although Hynes et al.'s (2019) study focused on vulnerability, it included some consideration of resilience and agency and most importantly, managed to engage with a high number of people with lived experiences of trafficking. Other studies acknowledge the variation of vulnerability in trafficking, suggesting an unexplored area of strengths, resources, motivations, and agency of trafficked women that inter-connects with vulnerability (Agustin, 2007; De Angelis, 2016). Moreover, as Schneider (2000) emphasises, victimisation and agency cannot be separated due to their nature and the gender inequality within which both oppression and resistance are experienced. Although trafficking tends to focus on vulnerability and victimisation, as Pascual-Leone et al (2017) argue, regardless of their experience post-trafficking, victims remain their own agents in the recovery process. Thus, this study explores vulnerability and agency in trafficking, positioning trafficked women as experts, highlighting self-expression, empowerment and promoting human dignity.

Agency can be described as an 'effective self-determination and self-control', yet in close relationship with vulnerability (Carse, 2006, p.36). The concept of agency refers to a person's capacity to affect a particular state of affairs or circumstances (Giddens, 1984 in Kondrat, 2002), implying a sense of active position whereby the person can independently act (Haffejee & Theron, 2019). In other words, agency can be regarded as individuals' internal and external capacity for making decisions and acting. Moreover, in trafficking, agency is important because it is linked with consent in a broader sense and with the resources

and strengths women possess (Agustin, 2007). Resources and inner capacity can be noticed in the characteristics of individuals as mental or psychological factors, creativity, logic, physical strength or even social capital and are exteriorised through individual agency (Cimino, 2019; De Angelis, 2016; Preble & Black, 2020). Agency can also be determined by external factors such as the cultural norms of a place and the constraints of the environment individuals experience (Haffejee & Theron, 2019). This invokes the person-in-environment theory (Barner et al, 2017) with its added elements of influence.

Scholarly research on the topic of exiting trafficking and sex work, as well as post-trafficking, has emphasised the correlation between vulnerability and agency, as evidenced by the works of De Angelis (2016), Cimino (2019), and Cojocaru (2015), among others. Additionally, trafficked people strive to survive even if escaping trafficking or exiting is impossible; although limited, some commentators argue that agency can be achieved and present through the survival and coping mechanisms women have or how they adapt to their situations (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; De Angelis, 2016). The concept of agency tends to be disregarded or marginalised in academic research on sex trafficking, although it is debated in studies on sex work, especially in respect of consent and women's choices (see Chapter 1). Since the human trafficking field tends to concentrate on victimisation, the domains of agency and resilience remain insufficiently investigated (Knight et al., 2022). Nevertheless, acknowledging agency and providing opportunities for its exercise can be viewed as a fundamental human right, whereby greater autonomy enables women to exercise agency in deciding whether to adopt or reject cultural norms, exercise rights traditionally associated with men, and either resist or embrace globalisation (Howard-Hassmann, 2011). However, there are also moments when other parties may need to intervene if the individual is unable to decide on something due to mental health needs or intellectual disabilities. Studies on this category of trafficked women refer to such instances and the difficulties in ensuring that victims and survivors of trafficking could regain their agency and independence and reduce the risks of re-victimisation (Reid, 2018). Nevertheless, Jagoe et al. (2022) argue that victims of trafficking with disabilities base their decisions on socioeconomic factors, healthcare, and opportunities, demonstrating agency functioning in unfavourable social contexts.

Although not fully recognised, agency can be visible throughout the early stages of trafficking or recruitment. Women's desires to migrate for work and, in some cases, independent sex work, suggest the expression of agency in the initial stages of trafficking (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; 2016). The lack of information regarding the risks of trafficking, the push-pull factors and the recruitment strategies

employed by traffickers are considered to facilitate recruitment (Nicolae, 2019; Surtees, 2008; Pascoal, 2020). Currently, in the context of trafficking, the root cause or 'push' factors are described as including '*poverty, unemployment, a lack of social security and education, gender inequalities, conflict and violence*' while the pull factors are considered *'deceptive promises of better living conditions and demand for cheap unskilled labour and sexual services'* (Pripic, 2023, p. 6). Within the context of Romania, entry into trafficking may vary from an independent decision to migrate for work or sex work (Hanks, 2021; Mai, 2010), to those complex cases where coercion and illegal methods are employed in recruitment (e.g., sold/coerced by family members), to grooming strategies (e.g., 'loverboy approach') (Aninoseanu et al., 2012; Pascoal, 2020). Thus, different levels of agency may be exercised. In trafficking, given variations in the trafficked situation and the level of exploitation, it is difficult to assess the level of agency exercised, although as Cojocaru (2015) suggests, women in the sex work industry – even those exploited – at times were able to recognise their own strength and agency in 'surviving'. Nevertheless, such examples are limited in the literature.

Agency can be expressed in the moment of the escape (Bodrogi, 2015; Cimino, 2019; Lockyer & Wingrad, 2020). As the literature suggests, cases of exiting trafficking are supported by the police or others, which once again highlights the challenges of exiting independently (Ferrari, 2021; Hodge, 2014). Yet, such instances fail to acknowledge the complexity of exiting and the individual agency at play. For instance, a study exploring the geographies of labour exploitation of EU nationals in the UK by Cockbain and colleagues (2022) highlights the unrecognised agency of individuals who independently migrate for work and also leave the exploitation, challenging the rescue narrative that overwhelmingly position victims of trafficking in a passive state. Nevertheless, the post-trafficking journeys of women are complex, and knowledge of their experiences highlights the resources women have, among which is their agency. Lockyer & Wingard (2020) explore the way in which agency is reconstructed in the moment of escape and realisation of freedom. They argue that, although in trafficking women are fully controlled, there is a moment where agency is visible through the realisation of their situation and the motivation for escape. Similarly, in a study on trafficked women's representation in German courts, FitzGerald (2018) highlighted victims' capacity for resilience and agency through their personal representation and experiences that demonstrated these elements. She noticed that victims had to defend themselves in order to fit with what was required of them or act upon prescribed narratives including accounts of what could be described as alluring behaviour to defend their position, especially around the degree of consent: *'When Marku mentioned prostitution to me I was not happy about it but I felt trapped … I never did this before and never*

thought about it, declared Mary, Romania (FitzGerald, 2018, p. 7)'. The failure to meet the court's requirements had significant implications for some women participating in Fitzgerald's study, yet women managed to assess their capabilities and escape their circumstances, demonstrating strength and agency. Such instance can also downplay one's agency, especially when women are constrained to the 'ideal victim role' or 'deserving victim' is expected from them (O'Connell Davidson, 2006; O'Brien, 2013). Such arguments are strengthened by De Angelis (2016, p. 4), who argues that maintaining a focus on agency in the context of victimisation enables women to express their own autonomy, resourcefulness and actions in overcoming trauma and rebuilding their lives post-trafficking. Alongside vulnerability, there are resources, strengths and agency. Individuals cannot be accounted for in a vacuum or through just one way of thinking; therefore, the balance between the vulnerability and strengths of individuals reflected through their agency is crucial in this context and creates a complete picture of individuals and their experiences.

Although the study advocates for a bottom-up approach that prioritises women's experiences as the focal point of the research, it acknowledges that a multifaceted system influences the construction of their identities and experiences. Awareness of these complexities can ensure that interventions are sufficient and advantageous for trafficked women. This, therefore, requires acknowledging the macro and meso systems that influence an individual's agency and vulnerability. At the same time, using eco-system theory allows us to explore agency in different contexts and how different systems enable (or do not) the expression of agency. The following section discusses the eco-system theory and its use for exploring the post-trafficking trajectory of sex-trafficked women.

An ecological approach to sex trafficking. Understanding complex individuals in context

Sex trafficking is a complex phenomenon which requires complex ways of addressing it (Lee, 2011). In order to understand the multiple settings where human trafficking occurs and how it impacts the individual, an ecological framework for exploring trafficking is helpful (Barner et al., 2017). This study proposes a bottom-up approach by placing women's experiences at the research centre while recognising

that their identities and experiences are constructed within a complex system, and their interaction with these systems influences their experiences. As Barner et al. (2017) argue, in terms of trafficking, the usage of an ecological perspective can inform the exploration of the interplay between these systems (micro, meso and macro).

The ecological approach has been used since 1970 in social work and other social sciences (Pardeck, 1988; Ungar, 2002). Ecological system theory (or, eco-system theory, ecological approach) draws from system theory, with the addition of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model with its emphasis on '*understanding the person in environment'* (Kondrat, 2013). As part of understanding Bronfenbrenner's theory, the ecology of human development focuses on how a person adapts to the changing properties of the immediate environment in which they live while acknowledging the impact of the relationship between the setting and the larger context in which the settings are places (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, in Ungar, 2002). The framework includes five systems of influence: microsystem (individual setting, parents), mesosystem (family, group of friends), exosystem (community, social services, media), macrosystem (culture, values, global community), and chronosystem (historical context, time) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The framework has been adapted and changed over time, especially in relation to the discipline in which the framework has been used. While the literature has acknowledged that people may impact their settings, it has traditionally emphasised the effect of the environment on individual behaviour and opportunity (Kondrat, 2002). The '*person-in-environment'* perspective acknowledges the interconnectedness of phenomena in influencing, transforming, and sustaining human existence and accounts for the complexity within which social and human life occurs and operates on several '*levels'* — *micro, meso, and macro* (Green & McDermott, 2010). Barner et al. (2017) argue that using an ecological perspective in human trafficking allows a more holistic approach to understanding individual interactions with the environment. Thus, gaining insight into risk and resources through the interactions and the environmental factors leading to trafficking could inform both post-trafficking interventions and prevention of re-trafficking.

The many settings humans interact with are intended to provide light on how different environments—such as family, locality, culture, national environment, and global environment—interact with one another and affect individuals (Barner et al., 2017). Moreover, the approach acknowledges the individual input and the '*transactional'* process between individuals and their environments. As concepts matured, the ecological theory began to relate particularly to transactional processes, as opposed to the separate components of the person or the environment within a system (Woodrow, 1983 in Ungar, 2002). In including the concept of the transaction, the ecological approach varies significantly from the

conventional person-in-environment paradigm (Pardeck, 1988); the ecological model highlights the mutual relationship between the individual and the environment as both are impacted by the other but, also argues that individuals manage to create unique environments. As a result, reciprocity is found across all the system.

In terms of strengths, the theory is seen as revolutionary in understanding human complexity when dealing with social problems, especially since it addresses how service users[11] interact with their environment and the overlapping systems unique to each individual (Pardeck, 1988). However, in terms of limitations of its usage in practice for example, social work, there are complex questions regarding its utilisation and applicability to language, with concerns about over-generalisation or *'overstating the importance of parts of the system'* (Ungar, 2002, pg. 484). Additionally, Green & McDermott (2010) discussed the theory's inconsistencies with practice values and acknowledge the 'power issues' raised by social workers in the field in relation to the theory. Nevertheless, the ecological perspective provides a better understanding of the context of service users (Ungar, 2002). Thus, it is relevant for the study of sex trafficking, especially when examining individual experiences and how they are shaped by the systems interacting with the individual. For this study, it is evident that all systems ultimately impact the post-trafficking trajectory, and we need to understand how each of these elements can create additional risks or resources for the well-being of individuals.

Studies on sex trafficking which use system theory (or complex system theory) have focused on individuals, victims and perpetrators in their contexts and how global prevention and intervention programs have drawn on such models highlighting the complexities of anti-trafficking and post-trafficking realities (van der Watt, 2020). Researchers have argued that in order to provide adequate rehabilitation services for survivors, organisations must adapt to the context and take account of the systems (exo-, macro-, meso-, micro-) as opposed to *'one size fits all'* (Barner et al., 2017). Additionally, other studies addressing the care and reintegration of victims have referred to and combined system theory with other theories, in an attempt to explore best practices for victim care (Davy, 2015; Loomba, 2017; Sanchez & Pacquiao, 2018). The connection of system theory with feminist views of life and feminist theories is relevant in this context as it draws attention to the role of women both in their communities and society

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[11]An individual who is the recipient of social work and/or social services, sometimes referred to as a service user or beneficiary (Harris & White, 2013).

and overall individual experiences. Thus, the intersectionality of roles and their underpinning from a feminist world viewpoint is relevant in the context of trafficking especially when discussing hierarchy and power within women's systems and how they affect trafficking and post-trafficking.

At the same time, the ecological model can explain notions around agency and vulnerability, both of which are shaped by individual interaction with the eco-systems (Walker, 2012). Moreover, in human trafficking studies, resilience too is identified as arising from the interplay between the survivor and their environment (Knight et al., 2022). Finally, the ecological approach provides an adequate setting for exploring the trafficking and post-trafficking experience in its complexity, thus, allowing a nuanced understanding of trafficked women and planning holistic interventions, '*the ecological approach provides a balance between the person and environment*' (Pardeck, 1988, pg. 140). These systems are sophisticated, adaptive, self-regulating and developing towards higher complexity, and we must acknowledge both interdependence and dependence between them (Green & McDermott, 2010). Thus, the ecological approach looks for ways to solve and prevent problems at all levels of intervention, including the individual, the family, the group, the organisation, the institution, and the society and more than one part of a problem that a client system is facing can be dealt with at the same time (Pardeck, 1988). Consequently, the approach is highly relevant for the study of sex trafficking and the post-trafficking trajectories of survivors.

Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences. From theory to practice

Post-trafficking experiences and trajectories are made up of a succession of events which survivors of sex trafficking live through once the episode of exploitation ends. Depending on the method by which trafficking is exited, the pathways differ from context to context and from individual to individual. Apart from police raids where victims are 'rescued', individual choices are relevant for specific path-ways survivors takes (Doezema, 1999), especially in respect of independent escapes or slow transition to different roles. For example, in some cases, trafficked women become part of the trafficking group, with roles of recruiters or controllers (Mai, 2010; Wijkman & Kleemans, 2019). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the variations and different stages a trafficked women might experience as these may affect the level of harm, distress or trauma and the support needed. Prior research suggests that levels of

exploitation are high, assistance for victims is sparse and difficult to access, and the consequences are negative for the health and welfare of the victim and their family (Kelly, 2005; Tyldum, 2010). Trafficking has a complex impact on individuals, affecting their basic physical and health needs as well as their psychological and social well-being (Contreras et al., 2018; Cojocaru, 2016; Hodged et al., 2023; Pascual-Leon et al., 2017; Stanley et al., 2016). Moreover, despite the considerable psychological distress, trauma and PTSD (Hynes et al., 2019; Loomba, 2017; Zimmerman, 2007) and reintegration challenges encountered post-trafficking (Bodrogi, 2015; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2013; Pascoal, 2020), trafficked women encounter several challenges in accepting and accessing support (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Hammond & McGlone, 2014). Similarly, mental health issues might be increased by acts of violence prior to and during the process of trafficking, as well as by inadequate social support and unfulfilled needs post-trafficking (Oram et al., 2016). Yet, in a systematic review on the prevalence of risks of violence and health problems (physical, mental and sexual) associated with trafficking, Oram et al. (2012) highlight the limited knowledge on post-trafficking experiences. They note that insights on post-trafficking are confined to those obtained from research that recruited trafficked individuals from post-trafficking support programmes, although the majority of trafficked individuals are unlikely to seek or receive help. They conclude that these limitations may contribute to either underestimating or overestimating the degrees of harm endured in trafficking, the possible effects and may consequently impact on anti-trafficking policy and practice:

> *'If trafficked persons who receive NGO support represent more extreme cases of abuse, studies may overestimate the health risks and consequences of trafficking. Conversely, if they represent individuals who are less damaged and more able to contact and use services, findings may underestimate risk. Similarly, studies based on sex worker samples may under-sample women who are currently trafficked and, as women in particularly confined circumstances are unlikely to be able to participate in research, may primarily—or only—reach those in less restrictive trafficking situations.'* (Oram, et al., 2012. p. 10)

So far, little is known about experiences post-trafficking and most knowledge gathered on the issue comes from service providers and academics, leaving limited expression of victims' voices and accounts. The picture of a trafficked women's experience can be distorted. Cojocaru (2015) and Hoefinger (2016) discuss fabricated sex work and trafficking stories[12] which later become understood as the true realties of

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[12] Somaly Mam's story of slavery, sex trafficking, rescue and becoming an anti-trafficking figure in Cambodia and globally (Cojocaru, 2015; Hoefinger, 2016).

trafficking in media, movies and the anti-trafficking movement. Exaggerating victim narratives can perpetuate a culture of victim-blaming, scepticism and denial about sexual violence, undermining the credibility of genuine survivors of abuse and limiting their access to justice (Hoefinger, 2016). Nevertheless, in sex trafficking, the level of exploitation plays an important role in how the victim's journey unfolds, this includes: the level of exploitation endured; its duration, the role of the victim in the relationship with the trafficker and internal and external resources (Bodrogi, 2015; Surtees & Brunovski, 2008). Thus, there are varying levels of knowledge regarding those victims who want support and who reject support – those who go through the process of NRM or not; and how it affects their trajectory with limited knowledge regarding those who are not in touch with NGOs and authorities.

The mental health, health and other needs of trafficked people have been researched, with findings suggesting that high levels of trauma, PTSD, depression and anxiety were found to be the most disabling mental health issues, hindering individuals from returning to normality or recovering from the trafficking experience (Cary et al., 2016; Chu & Billings, 2020; Levine, 2017; Robjant et al., 2017). Additionally, in terms of social relationships and community reactions post-trafficking, studies have identified high levels of stigma, victim-blame and rejection that trafficked victims encounter upon return to their country of origin (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2013; Schwartz & Schwartz, 2017). This may be exacerbated when women become mothers during trafficking with additional challenges both for mothers and those children born as a result of trafficking (Pascoal, 2020; Surtees, 2018). Thus, the short and long-term effects of the trafficking experience are also determined by women's relationships with their environment and systems post-trafficking determine their likelihood of recovery or re-victimisation.

Victims of human trafficking are susceptible to being re-trafficked and re-victimised (Aronowitz, 2013). Risks of re-trafficking for sexual exploitation are thought to be mediated by the geographical region, type of trafficking, type of family/community support and reintegration (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; IOM, 2010); estimations of the proportion of victims re-trafficked can be as high as 50% (Loomba, 2017). Particularly when support is not accessed, or their circumstances do not improve, the risks of re-exploitation remain regardless of the context. As Schloendardt and Bowcock (2015. p 602) argue, *'many victims have to live with the trauma of exploitation for years to come, often continuing to be exposed to deceit and coercion, and are at risk of being re-trafficked'*.

Although trafficking has been the subject of research for over three decades (Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013; Tyldum, 2010; Weitzer, 2014), some aspects of this phenomenon are under-researched, possibly

due to its complex and hidden nature. Scholars in the academic community have acknowledged the presence of gaps regarding the post-trafficking needs and experiences of victims, along with their methods of coping, resilience, and assessments of interventions and services (Dell et al, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2019), emphasising the necessity for comprehensive and evidence-based research. This knowledge is required in order to capture the nuances of the phenomenon and develop effective interventions and, as Hammond & McGlone (2014) highlight, at the core of the intervention, a perspective centred on the experience of the victim is essential.

The context of care, services and professional practices is crucial. In the literature, the term care is used to refer to 'rehabilitation', 'recovery', 'restoration' or 'reintegration' (Begum, 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Hodge, 2014; Pandey et al., 2018; Viergever et al, 2019). The last of these meanings is most often used and it implies that victims will return back to their families and communities and will be 'reintegrated' within their original environments. Such terminology might affect how practitioners address victims and survivors and may shape what could be considered 'good practices', which ultimately should act to reduce re-victimisation and re-trafficking, decrease vulnerabilities to trafficking and increase resilience and recovery. Women's needs may not conform to the understandings of reintegration or rehabilitation held by some support services. For example, what is considered successful intervention and proposed solutions for trafficked women within anti-trafficking activism, might not resonate with women's needs and experience as the following extract suggests:

> *'I do not want to go to your shelter and learn to sew so you can get me work in a factory. This is not what I want. If I tell you that, you will call me a prostitute. But those words are easy for you because you have easy solutions to difficult problems you do not understand, and you do not understand because you do not listen'* (Bales & Trodd, 2008, p. 106).

Therefore, listening to women's voices and allowing narratives of agency to be identified, would potentially shift the focus towards a more nuanced understating of trafficking realities while distancing ourselves from the salvation, moralistic and patronising attitudes encountered in the anti-trafficking 'fight' (Agustin, 2007; Kempadoo, 2015; Mai et al., 2021). On the other hand, identifying internal and external resources and strengths within women's ecosystem and utilising them in the support process might ensure more chances for recovery and positive outcomes after trafficking (Barner et al., 2017).

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the literature on post-trafficking trajectories with a focus on the vulnerability and agency of trafficked women as well as how they are perceived by the anti-trafficking sector. Agency and vulnerability co-exist and are present in most trafficking episodes as studies show. Eco-system theory allows a complex exploration of the multiple systems women are part of which influence their vulnerability and agency. Finally, post-trafficking trajectories are complex and diverse. Trafficked women experience a wide range of trajectories, increased understanding of their internal and external resources could inform initiatives aimed at promoting their recovery. This research offers an opportunity to understand Romanian women's experiences post-trafficking with emphasis on their vulnerability, agency and resources and how they resonate with the views and approaches of professionals working in this field.

Chapter 3: Methodology: A feminist approach to researching sex trafficking, data collection overview and research journey

Chapter aim

This chapter describes the theoretical framework and design underpinning the research – the feminist approach. It then presents the data collection procedures and explains the rationale behind the selection of participants, followed by a discussion of ethics in feminist research and into sensitive topics. It then presents the first steps of the data collection process and the approach to analysis. Finally, the chapter ends by considering reflexivity, the research journey, and the impact of COVID-19 on the research and general study limitations.

Theoretical framework: Feminist approach to research

Feminism and sex trafficking. Positionality and research topic

Feminist theories have had a considerable influence on understanding violence against and sexual exploitation of women, including knowledge of sex trafficking and sex work and their implications for policy and social knowledge (Creswell, 2012; Gerassi, 2015a; Kitzinger, 2018). My research topic resonates with feminist approaches as it focuses on the exploitation of and sexual violence against women (see Chapter 1). Additionally, it is aligned with my positionality and interest in the topic. Thus, it seems appropriate to define my approach as *a feminist-influenced standpoint* in researching the post-trafficking experiences of Romanian women.

Feminist approaches to research, like all research, are rooted in the production of knowledge, while also emphasising the researcher's experience in the process (Bryman, 2012; Oakley, 1990). Positionality and reflexivity are critical components of the research process. A feminist approach to research is considered flexible and organic; hence, it is difficult to classify as a methodology on its own account (Stanley, 1990),

as there are no straightforward models that define all research under the feminist umbrella. As Olesen (2005) argues, changes in the world bring about both innovation and new challenges to what was and is considered feminist research. In terms of trafficking, new methods and approaches to research are required which respond to changes in the experiences of trafficking (Brennan, 2005; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Cockbain & Kleemans, 2019). There is a wide range of feminist research into trafficking, which varies from autoethnography (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016) to feminist exploration of trafficking experiences (De Angelis, 2016). Among the many issues raised within feminist research, the question of positionality remains crucial as it stresses the need for knowledge to be formed according to specific contexts, experiences and the researchers (Bryman, 2012; Kitzinger, 2018).

Acknowledging my own positionality regarding similarities and differences between me as the researcher and the participants, especially trafficked women, constituted an early step in the research process and fuelled my motivation along the way. My personal experiences and demographics influenced how I engaged with survivors, practitioners and key informants and the data analysis process. As a Romanian woman, a mother, migrant, originating from a rural part of Romania and brought up in a similar sociocultural environment to many trafficked women, I found myself able to notice some of the unique aspects of women's experiences and greatly empathised with some of their circumstances. In contrast, my family and educational background, adult life experiences, sexual experiences and current work differentiate me from other demographics and characteristics of trafficking survivors. Hence, my positionality with trafficked women is double-sided, trying to reconcile what Argyrou (2015, p. 352) referred to as '*the recognition and appreciation of the otherness of the other*'. I am building knowledge both from inside and outside my role, to enable factors which create segregation, stigma and marginalisation (Romero-Rodriguez et al., 2021; Todres, 2009) to be addressed. I was able to experience '*otherness'* from my position as an insider in the Romanian context and the position of an outsider regarding the UK context within the macro system and, at a personal level, in my interviews with the trafficked women. Bringing my persona and positionality to the research represented a major advantage alongside the challenges discussed below.

My understanding and position on the spectrum of feminist perspectives changed during the research due to an in-depth exploration of the topic, reflection on my work and my personal experience as a researcher, a woman and a migrant. The complex intersectionality of my positioning was crucial in influencing how my understanding shifted throughout the research process. I developed a more detached

and reflexive approach to the topic and the data while experiencing greater self-awareness and a more self-critical stance regarding my own emotional responses and engagement. Furthermore, the debates around sex trafficking and sex work discussed previously gave me increased awareness of the impact of these narratives on social responses and policy. Hence, my own conceptualisation of these issues and my position became more liberal with regard to sex work generally and this coloured my perceptions of victimisation in sex trafficking. In the course of this study, my understanding has developed regarding the need for the decriminalisation of sex work, the blurred lines between sex work and sex trafficking and the need to include sex worker and survivor led-groups in exploring issues addressing their needs and experiences.

These shifts in my views were also prompted by the stories and accounts of trafficked women, which did not necessarily fit the *'ideal victim narrative'* which dominates mainstream narratives. Scholars (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; Kempadoo, 2015; Weitzer, 2007) have argued that knowledge around sex trafficking is primarily created through the lens of victimisation with limited exploration of the complexity of the actual human experience of those involved. Critiques of the predominant narratives in this field suggest that the voices of trafficked women should be central to the research process (Cojocaru, 2016), and such an approach has the advantage of empowering participants by emphasising their voices and strengths (Crotty, 1998; Kitzinger, 2018), which aligns with the aim of this research. To capture external views and perceptions of post-trafficking trajectories and given restrictions on access to trafficked women (discussed in the following sections), it was necessary to include other groups of participants who worked closely with trafficked women at different levels (i.e. practitioners and key informants).

Research aim through feminist lenses

The aim and vision of feminist research align with the continuing struggle for equity and liberation, and with what Crotty (1998) calls a constant battle to diminish, if not abolish, the injustices and unfreedoms that woman face, regardless of their intensity and extent. This study aims to elevate women's voices and provide a thorough picture of how they perceive their post-trafficking trajectories and how they are viewed by those who work with and assist them in the UK and Romania. Due to difficulties in recruiting a substantial number of trafficked women, their accounts are supported and complemented by those of anti-trafficking professionals. This approach was adopted to explore a wide range of perceptions and

observations regarding survivors' post-trafficking experiences and minimise the possible risks of re-traumatisation involved in recalling abusive experiences posed by survivors' participation. According to Fook (2002), including practitioners and other professionals avoids restrictions in researching the environment in which a specific experience occurs whilst enabling the examination of a broad range of views, using different methods by which these experiences are obtained from a variety of angles. I considered that practice and policy aimed at assisting survivors is essential and needs to be captured as it ultimately impacts their post-trafficking experiences.

The process of knowledge production is complex, and data, theory and method are constantly interconnected and facilitate exploration and knowledge formation (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). Theory is essential in research and cannot be detached from the overall research process. Drawing on theoretical resources that best support the understanding of post-trafficking trajectories, I considered the eco-system theory (or person-in-environment), the concepts of agency, vulnerability and victimisation to trafficking as appropriate for this research as discussed in Chapter 2. Within a radical feminist paradigm, trafficked women and those engaging in sex work are presented as mainly vulnerable, while other aspects of their experience are untheorized (Easton & Matthews, 2015, p.13). Eco-system theory allows an exploration of those circumstances outside of a woman's power, which can influence her vulnerability and her agency, while highlighting the systems the woman is part of and their effects on the post-trafficking experience and possible re-victimisation. Within radical feminism, re-victimisation refers to the risk of re-trafficking and re-exploitation, which reinforces the victimhood narrative while not acknowledging signs of determination and agency women may possess. Separating these narratives is crucial as it enables a more complex and holistic approach to examining trafficking and post-trafficking experiences.

Strengths and weakness of a feminist approach in studying sex trafficking

The value and critique of a feminist approach lie in its comprehensiveness on the one hand, and its reliability and validity, on the other (Bryman, 2012; Crotty, 1998). As Gerassi (2015a) suggests, feminist voices in the field have had a substantial resonance that allows them to create a complex field of perspectives around sex trafficking. Critics of the feminist approach to research pose questions about its development, highlighting the lack of theoretical clarity and precision (Olesen, 2005; Stanley, 1990). In contrast, some feminists challenge knowledge formation, questioning the intentions (Olesen, 2000). Some

researchers support this argument in relation to human and sex trafficking because such research can include unacknowledged agendas that prioritise some voices while disregarding others (Doezema, 1999; Kempadoo, 2015; Weitzer; 2007). Thus, a feminist approach is particularly relevant when addressing the agency and vulnerability of women involved in sex work and victims of sex trafficking (Stewart, 1994, in Creswell, 2012).

The female voice is a critical component of feminist research as it highlights both the need for their inclusion and the complexity of how and where these voices are expressed or, indeed, silenced (Crotty, 1998; Roberts, 1990). As part of the struggle against the exploitation of women, research which allows woman's voices to be heard as part of a reciprocal research relationship avoids objectification and supports women's emancipatory realisation (Bryman, 2012). This represents a way of doing research which is considered different from other research approaches traditionally used, and feminist research is associated with a more qualitative inclination (Bryman, 2012, Tracy, 2010). In this research, I aimed to provide a safe space for trafficked women to share their stories and balance the perceptions others had of them whilst also attempting what Tracy (2010) calls multivocality. Tracy (2010) argues that, as well as focusing on the woman's voice and acknowledging their uniqueness, multivocality attempts to draw from different viewpoints that could differ from the mainstream, including the researcher's own. Kitzinger (2018) suggests that listening to a woman's voice and validating their experiences is critical as they are unique, and researchers should avoid over-generalisation.

Reflexivity is characterised by the criticality that occurs throughout the research, with consequences for both the researcher and the study itself (Roberts, 1990). Multivocality refers to a researcher's awareness of the cultural differences between herself and the research participants in terms of identity and characteristics (Tracy, 2010), with these different voices bring diverse meanings and more credibility. The attention to emotions as a component of research expands reflexivity and transforms it into a new perception of reality which then becomes knowledge (Fown & Cook, 1991 & Jaggar, 1989 in Crotty, 1998). According to Lorber (1997), when women produce knowledge, it is far more tied to the everyday, concrete world and human connection. As Oakley (1990) argues, feminist research also focuses on the reciprocal relationship between the research process and the results. Therefore, reflexivity is essential in all the research phases, and researchers need to be aware of their own positionality, reactions and awareness of self as part of the study (Berger, 2015).

The debates on what methods fit better for feminist research go back to the question of objectification and ultimately to the issues of oppression and possible exploitation (of participants) that are considered prevalent in quantitative research (Mies, 1993, in Bryman, 2012). As Crotty (1998) remarks, there is a unique difference around the feminist methodologies regarding the feminist vision, values and spirit, which convert the traditional and standard methodologies. Therefore, what is essential is the way we use research or the research practice rather than simply the formal methodologies themselves, and that makes them feminist in nature and scope (Bryman, 2012). The matter of ethics represents another essential element and is further addressed in the following sections of this chapter. Issues here include what Tracy (2010) calls relational ethics and incorporates values, self-consciousness, connection and the overall relationship with the participants while doing the research, which should highlight the feminist ethics of care and anti-oppressive practice.

Epistemology, Ontology and Theoretical Perspectives in feminist research

Crotty (1998, p. 173) suggests that feminist epistemology does not rest on the claim that women *'know in a way fundamentally different'* to men but on how women *'theorise the act of knowing'. 'In 'doing' epistemology',* she claims, women *'express concerns, raise issues and gain insights that are not generally expressed, raised or gained by male epistemologists'.* Similarly, Stanley (1990, p. 26) draws attention to the bridge between epistemology and ontology from a feminist standpoint and '*what the relationship should be between knowing and being*'. Feminist ontology rests on the premise that reality is knowable but not separable from human subjectivity (Dela Porta & Keating, 2008). The feminist stance draws on the researcher's subjectivity to make sense of a participant's reality (Crotty, 1990; Stanley, 1990). As such, feminist research tends to adopt interpretivist theoretical perspectives, which explore people's experiences and views or their perspectives on these experiences together with their context and cultural implications (Creswell, 2012; Gray, 2018; Silverman, 2017). Doing so from a feminist standpoint adds an extra layer of depth since the values which guide feminist research attain a more subjective interpretive outcome and are aligned with the researcher's background and any similarities with the group being studied. As Fook (2002) argues, experiences occur in a context, and they partially influence the experience and make it impossible for an individual to cover all aspects of the context at any given time. Moreover, my understanding of the context in which the data is being collected and my experiences as a researcher, a migrant and a woman add interpretive depth to the topic. As Jackson & Mazeei (2013) argue, data

analysis and interpretation require a profound analysis, using critique and engaging with the data on multiple levels instead of solely using mechanic coding and simplistic approaches to analysis. The context for the experiences explored is significant and here the emphasis is on Romanian cases of sex trafficking in the UK, and an inductive approach enables a holistic focus (Dela Porta & Keating, 2008). A focus on context can amplify and identify cultural differences and particularities and this is achieved through feminist lenses.

In conclusion, feminist research is embedded in values and principles such as reflexivity, care, ethics, awareness of power dynamics and imbalances, empowerment and social improvement of women and woman's subjectivity (Olesen, 2005; Watts, 2006). These values underpinned the design and conduct of the research. In particular, the study's focus on the agency of trafficked women reflects feminist research's commitment to women's empowerment.

Data collection processes

Doing research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online semi-structured in-depth interviews

Early in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic was declared around the world. As a result of the restrictions imposed on movement and on research, I was not able to conduct face-to-face interviews and had to switch to online interviewing, which represented the most feasible method for data collection during that period. The pandemic also reduced access to survivors and interviewing them online presented additional difficulties, both in terms of technical aspects around online interviewing and the emotional intensity of the interviews which raised concerns around adequate responses to distressful situations.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the primary data collection tool since they allowed me to engage in conversation with respondents, providing balance and flexibility to the process (Bryman, 2012; May, 2001). This approach provided a degree of structure that enabled the exploration of specific topics relevant to the research while using open questions and follow-up questions where necessary (Bryman, 2012; Kvale, 2007). The interview guides were constructed in line with the aim and research questions. The questions were structured under topics and sub-topics while leaving space for a deeper reflection and

exploration in that specific area. To capture different experiences and observations, I used slightly different interview guides as appropriate for each group of participants (discussed in the following section). All interviews started by introducing the participant, requesting demographic information, educational and work experience, and then following three separate lines of questioning according to the participant category. This introduction helped build up the '*right atmosphere'*, as Scanlan (2020) calls it, which allows for establishing conversations within a trusting and comfortable space. The sequence of questions allowed familiarisation with the topics to be established and, as Galletta (2021) recommends, ensured the creation of space for continuity of structure so that topics will not be addressed superficially.

The researcher plays a crucial role in the interviewing process, alongside the preparation and the actual interviewing process, regarding the skills acquired and their experience (Bryman, 2012; Johnson, 2002; Kavale, 2007). Being a good listener, flexible and non-judgemental are only a few of the qualities and values the researcher needs to possess and cultivate to ensure the quality of the interview (Bryman, 2012; Kavale, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As Minikel-Lacocque (2019) argues, the space created while using an in-depth interviewing approach is similar to a therapeutic space; therefore, the researcher requires skills and understanding to navigate that space properly. Hence, the question of ethics and responsibility arises regardless of the study group (Brinkmann; 2013; Johnson, 2002).

Emphasising self-reflection and self-awareness, both for the researcher themselves and in the interaction with the participants, helps build trust, create collaboration, and reduce bias (Ellis & Berger, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Due to the online nature of the interviews, I had to include other strategies for achieving a good level of rapport with the participants. Mann and Stewart (2002) argue that, while conducting in-depth research online presents a challenge in achieving the desired level of depth and exploration, the solution lies in the researcher's ability to share information about themselves reciprocally to foster a sense of security for the participant. To achieve this, I introduced myself by phone and emails, shared information about my background and motivations for conducting this research before starting the interview. Furthermore, in a few interviews, participants inquired about my personal viewpoint on specific subjects. While I was aware of the value of engaging in open discussion, I was also conscious of its impact and influence on the interview as will be further discussed in the reflexivity section below.

Lancashire Constabulary Data

In light of Lancashire Constabulary's interest in sex trafficking between Romania and the UK and the origins of the study, I sought support from the Constabulary to access available data on Romanian trafficking cases to establish a picture of Romanian sex trafficking cases in the region. After a long approval process (nearly two years), Lancashire Constabulary granted access to an anonymised dataset comprising police records on investigations of human trafficking and related offences (e.g., trafficking, modern-day slavery, sexual exploitation) in Lancashire between November 2018 and March 2021. Within this timeframe, 335 records of people involved in trafficking offences were identified. These included some information on nationalities of victims and offenders and other demographic information such as age, ethnicity and gender. There were five cases of female Romanian victims linked to crimes of modern slavery and human trafficking. Disappointingly, analysis of the police dataset did not produce the detailed information I had anticipated and therefore it has not been included here. While Lancashire police data had originally been seen as an opportunity to contextualise the interview data within the larger sample of trafficking cases, the small number of cases relevant for this study, the lack of detail and the absence of any information on post-trafficking trajectories meant that this dataset did not contribute any added value to the study.

Study population and Sampling

The study population has at its core, adult Romanian female sex trafficking victims and survivors. This data is supported by that collected from practitioners working with trafficked Romanian women and key informants (categories of participants are described below in the following sections). The ideal for this research was achieving a robust sample of victims and survivors. Yet this represented a major challenge which led me to focus on alternative participants – the closest observers of the survivors' experiences are the practitioners who provide support and advocacy from the point at which women are identified as victims of trafficking. In terms of identifying participants, as Roulston (2010, in Brinkmann, 2013) suggests, it is necessary to distinguish between selection and sampling – selection refers solely to the group to be studied, while sampling represents the process of identifying a subset of the population identified as relevant.

I used a purposive sampling approach for this study, specifically focusing on female adult (over 18 years old) Romanian victims and survivors of sex trafficking who were exploited in the UK and where at least one year had passed since they exited trafficking. The decision to wait a year post-trafficking before engaging with survivors was based on consultations with practitioners and ethical considerations. I wanted to allow sufficient time to study the post-trafficking period and practitioners recommended waiting at least a year as they were concerned about mental health risks if interviews were too close to the experience of trafficking. Moreover, they noted significant improvements in survivors' mental health after a year, especially if they had received support, which they considered made interviews potentially less distressing. Finally, including those practitioners working with adult female Romanian victims and survivors of sex trafficking and key informants with expertise in law enforcement, policymaking and prevention in relation to the UK and Romanian contexts. Purposeful sampling encourages researchers to make informed sampling decisions (Emmel, 2013) with participants selected on the basis of their compatibility with the study aim; they are asked to provide information based on their expertise and experience (Coyne, 1997; Etikan et al., 2016). This approach is widely used in qualitative research, and as Bryman (2012) suggests, purposive sampling focuses on the target group for the research and possibilities for identifying participants. Emeel (2013) indicates that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to plan for a number of participants; however, this process is flexible, and the numbers can change as the research continues and new insights into the topic are acquired. Additionally, participants were able to introduce me to other participants, creating a 'snowball effect', discussed in the following sections. When using purposive sampling, saturation requires the researcher to search for participants until a point is reached where no different or additional information is obtained (Bryman, 2012; Etikan et al., 2016). While saturation was achieved in the case of professional participants, it seems unlikely that this was achieved in the case of trafficking survivors due to several access restrictions, highlighted in the following sections. Hence, the final sample included five survivors, 24 practitioners and 14 key informants from both countries, as presented in Table 1. The numbers of professionals were initially envisioned as between 12 and 14 practitioners in each country and between 7 and 9 key informants in each country, to allow inclusion of the full range of professions and expertise. When the number of professional participants recruited achieved a robust sample and data saturation was noticed, the recruitment process ended. Difficulties encountered in recruiting survivors were especially evident in the UK with Romanian authorities and NGOs being more supportive of recruitment. While the original plan had been to recruit similar numbers of survivors in both countries (approximately 5 in each) more

participant survivors were recruited in Romania than in the UK. The sample is described together with the process in the following sections.

Table 1. Interviews conducted in Romania and the UK

First Stage – Romania		Second Stage – The UK	
Survivors – SU	4	Survivors – SU	1
Practitioners – PR	12	Practitioners – PR	12
Key Informants – KI	7	Key Informants – KI	7
Total: 23		Total: 20	
Total: 43			

Sex trafficking survivors, practitioners and key informants

Sex trafficking survivors: The target group for data collection comprised female adult Romanian sex trafficking survivors in the UK and those who had returned to Romania. As noted above, I aimed to ensure that at least one year had passed since they had left the trafficking situation. The survivors were recruited with the support of two Romanian NGOs, the anti-trafficking agency and a police force in Romania.

Practitioners: Practitioners were recruited on the basis that they had worked directly with adult sex trafficking survivors, especially those of Romanian nationality. The selection of organisations (including Government organisations) and NGOs (see Appendix 1) working in anti-trafficking in the UK and Romania aimed to allow an exploration of the landscape in which support is provided alongside a range of services with their embedded values, challenges and their roles in the anti-trafficking sphere (Hounmenou, 2020; Motseki & Mofokeng, 2020). Practitioners are important in this research due to their expertise. Closely investigated, their observations on the experiences of survivors - formed through their own experiences of working in this field – offer valuable data (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Hounmenou, 2020). I aimed to recruit practitioners who had worked in the past five years with adult Romanian women trafficked to the UK. Practitioners' roles, and designations vary depending on the particular organisations and this diversity assists in building a broader picture of the post-trafficking experience and is aligned with the

purposive sampling strategy. Practitioners were also identified as important gatekeepers who could introduce me to survivors, and their role in respect of this function became equally important.

Key informants: I use the term 'key informants' to describe experts who are not necessarily engaged in providing services directly to victims and survivors but who do have their own expertise in trafficking, especially regarding the relationship between the UK and Romania. Some of these key informants would have had interactions with survivors (e.g., senior police officers, activists and policymakers). Hounmenou (2020) highlights the need to include this group in human trafficking research as they may help to increase the validity and relevance of the results, especially around dissemination and policy influence. While key informants have expertise they may have little contact with trafficked women, hence questions of how their knowledge is formed, on what basis and what makes up their situated perspectives were considered. Moreover, their contribution illuminates policy in this field as well as raising the issue of the role which victims and survivors of trafficking play in devising policy.

Ethical considerations: 'The ethics of care'

Ethical principles and practice

Ethics in the social sciences protect individuals, communities and the environment and '*offers the potential to increase the sum of good in the world'* (Israel & Hay, 2009, p. 2). However, when dealing with sensitive issues and vulnerable populations, as in the case of human trafficking, research is challenged by various methodological and ethical concerns (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Duong, 2015; Siegel & Wildt, 2015). Ethical considerations are relevant to a broad range of activities in human trafficking research, including the need to comprehend the nature of the field; the process of identifying risks; the attempt to mitigate these risks through a variety of feasible strategies; and the resolution of practical ethical dilemmas (Duong, 2015). Additionally, Brunovskis & Surtees (2010, p.6) highlighted the risks and, where possible ethical dilemmas may arise when involving trafficked people in research, such as 'what constitutes a representative sample; at what stage respondents are accessed (for example, during or after trafficking); selection biases by 'gatekeepers'; 'self-selection by potential respondents'.

In line with this understanding of researching trafficking, I reflected on the question of ethics from the beginning. Though I was guided in developing the research questions by gaps in the literature, deciding on an appropriate research technique represented a methodological difficulty, particularly considering potential victim/survivor involvement. Edwards & Mauthner (2012, p. 14) argue that ethics in social research refer to *'the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process'*. Ethical thinking throughout the research process is crucial (Macfarlane, 2009; Reid et al., 2021), as ethical concerns may emerge at any stage. Thus, throughout my research journey, the question of ethics went beyond ethical clearances and served me as a firm foundation, thinking carefully about the research topic and its purpose, my experience as a researcher and the values guiding me in this process.

The well-being of and implications of the research for all participants were carefully considered. The victim/survivor group represented a unique cohort due to their vulnerability and past experiences; hence I used a range of guidelines, including the World Health Organization *Ethical and Safety Recommendations* (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003) for interviewing trafficked women, IOM (2010) data protection principles, trauma-informed interviewing and practice, and guidance on ethics from the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2021). Although I concentrated on the group of trafficked women in terms of harm and risk, I was equally mindful of the potential consequences for practitioners and key informants; the principles guiding the practice remained the same, and these principles and considerations are discussed below.

Transparency: Researchers are responsible for upholding human values and sensitivities, ensuring transparency and proper access to information. To avoid deception, I provided detailed information and debrief sheets and answered participants' questions. The information sheet contained all the relevant information regarding the project, their participation, data protection and aspects of data usage (Appendix 13.1 and Appendix 13.2). At the beginning of each interview, I dedicated a few minutes to introduce myself and the project briefly. Additionally, all documents were translated into the Romanian language for the benefit of Romanian participants. Given the potential for survivors to have literacy issues, I reviewed the materials to ensure they used clear and accessible language[13].

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[13] During the recruitment process, professionals were asked to explain the research information to survivors orally. With those recruited, at the beginning of the interview, I explained once again the purpose of the research and the materials shared (e.g., information and debrief sheet, consent form).

Informed consent: Informed consent allows the participant to accept or decline participation based on full information about the nature and aim of the research (Homan, 1991). Gregory (2003) suggests that consent raises profound questions regarding privacy, autonomy, self-determination and respect in the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Further, he argues that once these aspects are considered, the chances of voluntary participation are higher and the participation more genuine. In my research, informed consent was essential for obtaining participants' permission to participate and ensuring further transparency and safety (see Appendices 7.1 and 7.2). Once they had decided to join and reviewed all the study material, and I had addressed any further questions, participants returned the signed consent form. When the interview started and the recording was on, they were asked once again if they understood the information provided if they had questions and were happy to participate. None of the participants raised any issues in this regard. Those working in NGOs and other agencies were familiar with these processes. For the survivors who took part, the consent procedures were explained by those recruiting them and by myself. Like the other participants, survivors also had previous experiences with these procedures.

*Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity***:** Social research can be intrusive, and researchers are not entitled to study all phenomena regardless of the implications (Homan, 1991). Participants' privacy must be respected regarding what type of information is sought and how it is obtained (Bryman, 2012). Confidentiality is an important aspect of research, as it protects the participant from potential harm due to their identity and to personal information being shared (Israel & Hay, 2009; Silverman, 2017). Confidentiality was highly respected in my research since it had implications for all participants in the study. The identity of survivors needed to be protected at all times. Survivors are at risk of being exposed publicly and within their communities with negative consequences or being identified by their traffickers (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Siegel & Wildt, 2015). All date was anonymised and any information relating to participants' identity was removed. Apart from this, the storage and data management complied with GDPR and UCLan requirements, such as storage on UCLan password-protected devices with limited access to the research team. At the start of the interview, I informed participants about the importance of confidentiality but let them know that there might be circumstances in which I might have to breach confidentiality, including perceived risk of harm to themselves or others.

*Power***:** Power imbalances in research, particularly with disadvantaged groups, are difficult to mitigate (Karnieli-Miller et. al., 2009). Power poses ethical questions regarding fairness in participation, equality

and justice (Bryman, 2012). Scholars suggest that there are different phases within the research process where power can be negotiated, and it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that proper methodological consideration is given to achieving balance (Karnieli-Miller et. al., 2009). I utilized a feminist approach to research, which aims to reduce power imbalances (Esim, 1997; Reinharz, 2006). As Israel & Hay (2009) argue, within the ethics of care framework, the researcher can emphasise the importance of the relationship with the participant by nourishing it and acknowledging the participant's context. 'The ethics of care', consistent with feminist approaches to research, urges the researcher to maintain an attitude of humility, respect, and compassion (Koehn, 1998; McCloskey et al., 2021; Robinson, 2011). Moreover, researchers acknowledge the need for rapport and trust in the research relationship between the researcher and participant (Easton & Matthews, 2015; Silverman, 2017). While survivors are experts on their life and experience, they might still feel powerless and undervalue themselves due to their experiences, shame and vulnerability (Doung, 2015). Aware of differences between myself and the survivors, such as educational background, socio-economic profile, and different life paths, I made a point of acknowledging and discussing the similarities between us (e.g. I am a mother, Romanian, migrant, with a rural upbringing) in order to establish some common ground with the women in the study. I used basic language and rural idioms (using authentically the language I grew up with), throughout the interviews to establish rapport, foster trust and create a comfortable atmosphere for survivors.

Regarding practitioners and key informants, I found that the power imbalance shifted in another direction. I had moments of insecurity when interacting with particular key informants and specialists, owing to their position, age, and authority (Smith, 2006; Harvey, 2011), and on a few occasions such aspects were visible in the direction of the interview (e.g., in interviews with senior male police officers, they tended to assume control of the interview). As Smith (2006) suggests, reflexivity in feminist methods can reveal and rethink power relations within the interviewing process. I was able to navigate such situations by focusing on developing trust, adjusting the tone of the interview and portraying my expertise (Harvey, 2011). Most practitioners and key informants had similar work experiences to me, which enhanced mutual trust and confidence. As Bergman Blix & Wettergren (2015) argue, the research process can be strengthened when the researcher and participants have common characteristics such as age, class, gender, ethnic origin, and social position.

No-harm principle: The no-harm principle is at the core of my research ethics. I had no intention of harming those involved, especially the survivors, either during or after the research was completed.

Nevertheless, social research has the potential to harm, particularly when it involves underprivileged people. For this reason, scholars emphasize the importance of avoiding harm and promoting good (Israel & Hay, 2009). Macfarlane (2009) argues that the researcher's values and integrity are important when evaluating risks and benefits, especially when respecting individuals' autonomy, as the researcher must see people as individuals rather than exploitable resources. Marshall and Rossman (2016) propose focusing on individuals and building relationships with all research participants, stakeholders, peers, and the community to decrease harm. This means that the researcher must be aware of the connections between herself and the other systems directly or indirectly involved in the research. Research with trafficked women (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010; Siegel & Wildt, 2015) indicates the potential for re-traumatizing and reawakening negative memories. This increases the pressure and stress associated with what survivors may believe is required of them. Avoiding harm also involves avoiding re-traumatisation discussed in the section below.

Trauma-informed interviewing and practice

My experience in research and working with vulnerable people, together with my social work background, helped me to understand the group I was approaching in terms of how I interacted with them. I first encountered trauma-informed approaches in my prior work with refugees. At the beginning of this project, I undertook training on trauma-informed work and survivor participation with the Survivors Alliance. The training provided a good understanding of survivors' responses to services, approaches towards trafficked individuals and the need for empowerment. As noted above, in preparing for the interviews with survivors, I was guided by the *WHO Ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women* (Zimmerman et al., 2003). The guide is built around ten principles for the ethical and safe conduct of interviews with trafficked women and provides brief examples of good practices and of what should be avoided. It is crucial to know the participant and the potential risks involved in their participation in order to avoid re-traumatisation. Thus, having the skills and awareness increased my confidence in engaging with survivors.

As McElheran (2011) points out, trauma cannot be ignored or dismissed after it has occurred, and people are forced to deal with rebuilding a life and worldview after what was previously there was destroyed; hence they tend to disconnect from that episode. This needs to be acknowledged since addressing the

post-trafficking experience in the interview can risk reconnecting with the trafficking episode. Despite these precautions, I was aware that the interview and the topics addressed might still have some emotional impact on the survivors. Though not intended, memories from the trafficking experience might arise and create discomfort, stress and anxiety. Ideally, emotional distress in interviews would be identified through physical reactions, such as noticing visible signs of sadness, non-verbal cues or body language (e.g., hesitation, blinking, looking down, among others). Yet, in an online environment it was more difficult to notice body-language and non-verbal cues might have been missed; the focus, where possible, was on the discussion. Thus, when I noticed such responses or moments of long silence, I asked if the interviewee wanted to pause or stop the interview, and I regularly asked the participants if they were comfortable or needed a break. At the end of the interview, I checked how the participant felt (e.g., if there were signs of distress) and reiterated where additional support could be sought after the interview was completed, such as support from the services mentioned in the Debriefing Sheet (see Appendix 8) and the organisations working with the survivor participants. These measures enabled safety during and after the interview.

While survivor participation poses ethical questions and their participation in research may pose risks, it is crucial to ensure that they have the right and option to manifest their agency by responding to the research call, even if this means deciding not to participate. Although distress and traumatic memories could return, there are also opportunities for transformation: the literature acknowledges both the drive to survive and the '*drive to thrive*' (McElheran, 2011; McElheran et al., 2012). Two survivors interviewed acknowledged this and expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to participate. Furthermore, by creating a space for survivors' voices to be included, the research acknowledged them as experts and valued their contribution.

The trauma-informed approach was also applied to practitioners who worked directly with survivors and victims, as there is potential to experience vicarious trauma due to constant exposure to traumatic stories (Kim et al, 2021).

Benefits and Compensations

Since there are contradictory views on compensation for study participants (Tyldum, 2012), I decided to address this concern with practitioners and survivors themselves. While attending various meetings alongside survivors, it became clear that there is a need for compensation to show appreciation for the participants' time and the trouble involved in participating in research interviews. Research with vulnerable populations demonstrates the need for researchers to ensure that participants feel both the immediate and the long-term benefits of their expertise and that their contribution is not misused once it reaches higher levels, such as policy and law-making (Pittaway et al., 2010). Therefore, I decided to provide a £20 gift voucher that the survivors could use as they wanted. While the rationale for providing the voucher was made explicit for interviewees, I had an instance where compensation seemed a sensitive issue as the terminology around compensation or payment became open to interpretation when translated into the Romanian language. However, survivor participants did appreciate the initiative and welcomed this contribution. Only one participant refused the voucher. The survivor participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time before or after the interview, and their data could be removed two weeks after the interview. Withdrawal would not impact on the voucher received, and they would not need to explain their reasons for withdrawal. However, none of the participants withdrew or asked for their data to be deleted.

I did not compensate practitioners or key informants, as most of them participated during their normal working hours, apart from one interview conducted at the weekend, and they benefited, as some stated, from the opportunity for sharing and the therapeutic reflexivity taking part in the interview allowed.

Ethical approvals: UCLan, Salvation Army and others

Ethical approval was sought and granted by UCLan's ethics committee, with a DBS check undertaken due to the research involving vulnerable groups. The ethical approval process started in April 2020 with the first submission. This was followed by amendments to the intended data collection process due to COVID-19 and further considerations and clarifications regarding vulnerable participants, and then ethical approval was granted (BAHSS2 0077 from 22 June 2020; Appendix 2). This process enabled me to reflect deeply on the aspects discussed above in the section on ethics and prepared me for fieldwork.

Once ethical approval was obtained at UCLan, I applied for ethical approval from the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army is a first responder and main contractor for the UK Government under the 2015 Care and Protection Act. Therefore, it plays a crucial role in providing care for victims and survivors of trafficking. The approval was granted (RCC-EAN201014 from 13 October 2020, Appendix 3), and was supposed to enable access to survivor participants in the UK directly through the organisation or their sub-contractors. However, the process was delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions on their side, staff changing regularly, and other bureaucratic difficulties and I was unable to access any survivors through the Salvation Army. One benefit to having had contact with and received ethical approval from the Salvation Army was that it enhanced the credibility and value of my project when contacting other NGOs.

Additionally, I submitted applications for ethical approvals to other NGOs and though they were approved, these organisations did not support Romanian survivors at the time of the study and were not in touch with those who left their services.

Data collection strategy

First strategy: Self-Introduction

As the first step in preparing for data collection and introducing myself to the research field; it was crucial to identify relevant gatekeepers and participants. Agencies and organisations were identified through discussions with the partner team at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, discussions with stakeholders, web searches and databases and information provided by agencies working with victims and survivors. In October 2019 and February 2020, I conducted two field visits in Romania (Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest), where I met some of the leading organisations involved in trafficking-related work to gain their support for the research and access to staff/survivor participants. Visiting the participants' organisations, safe houses, and facilities enabled a deeper contextual understanding of the care and services provided in Romania. In 2022 I visited again some of the NGOs supporting survivors and some who participated in the research in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Arad, Oradea and Baia Mare. These

visits proved helpful in connecting with practitioners and survivors and deepening my understanding around service provision and interventions.

Between October 2019 and February 2020, before the pandemic, I attended in person several forums, conferences, training and partnership groups to identify contacts and understand the care environment in the UK. I have continued to attend relevant meetings, webinars, seminars, and conferences online, which have helped me to understand the UK anti-trafficking context and to find relevant contacts for the research. However, identifying those organisations working with Romanian trafficking survivors was not always straightforward, as no specific NGOs worked with this group.

Second strategy: Being introduced and 'snowball effect'

Initial contacts provided other contacts and potential participants, with one participant introducing the researcher to the next participant. This 'snowballing' approach was predominantly used in the UK since those organisations who worked with Romanian cases could connect and refer me to other relevant participants in the UK (Bryman, 2012). This facilitated faster contact with other relevant participants. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face meetings were not possible, and it was difficult to build relationships and rapport spontaneously.

In both countries, after the initial contact, a support request letter and information leaflet were sent by email describing the project and the support sought. In the case of a positive answer and following further discussion (via email, phone, or meetings), I asked the organisations for their consent and agreement to participate. Consequently, the organisation identified relevant practitioners/key informants who were asked if they were interested in participating. Possible participants were given the right to decide if they would participate in the research; I provided more information once they agreed. Furthermore, in the UK, once I received the ethical approval from the Salvation Army, my details were automatically circulated to practitioners from organisations sub-contracted by the Salvation Army, that worked with Romanian cases. Recruiting professionals did not pose many issues, although naturally, there were instances when organisations rejected participation in the study on the basis of staff shortages, high workloads or not fitting the profile required for the research. A total of approximately 55 organisations (among which are included some individuals) were contacted in the UK (including England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and

Wales) and 25 organisations (including local government anti-trafficking agencies and local social services) were contacted in Romania. From those organisations contacted, 17 took part in the research in the UK and 15 in Romania. The organisations agreed for their participation to be recognised in the thesis (Appendix 1).

The organisations selected were providing front-line support in the form of emergency accommodation, health and mental health support, policing, legal advice and assistance. Some NGOs offered long-term reintegration programmes, which included shelters, educational and skills programmes, work reintegration, financial support, mental health, counselling and mentoring. Government agencies, especially in Romania, oversaw monitoring trafficking cases and worked in partnership with organisations which provided direct support to trafficked women. Some of the NGOs were engaged in trafficking prevention, delivering individual advocacy and wider lobbying for their protection and rights. Although survivor-led organisations were contacted in the UK, they could not support the project due to a lack of experience with Romanian trafficking cases. However, these organisations helped with referrals and contacts to their partners. At the time of the research, there were no survivor-led organisations in Romania. Similarly, NGOs working with sex workers or sex-worker led NGOs both in the UK and Romania were approached, they either did not express interest in participation or declined the request, and thus their expertise was missing from the study. A few organisations that addressed both sex work and sex trafficking were included in the research.

A complex mix of NGOs and other organisations allowed me to capture the range and variety of work in the area, including participants' perceptions of human trafficking. Practitioners in these NGOs and organisations inevitably draw on their professional judgement, but they also follow specific guidelines and are expected to adhere to the culture and ideology of their organisation. Appreciating this culture and ideology is important for understanding their practice and how they might interpret their experiences and observations in relation to the post-trafficking experiences of survivors.

Ethical Dilemmas before fieldwork: Gatekeepers and access to survivor participants

Access to participant survivors represented the most delicate part of the project. I negotiated access through gatekeepers from organisations working with victims/survivors, especially those participating in

the research. Access involved several levels of approvals and negotiation, and it became what Bryman (2012, p. 151) refers to as *'the research bargain'*. While there are inevitable power differences between practitioners and those who use their services, research shows that gatekeepers such as practitioners are more likely to be over-protective and to exclude service users from research rather than to encourage them to participate against their will (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). The gatekeeper and the researcher both have the opportunity to support empowerment or further oppression as they navigate between good practices in working with trafficked women or reinforcing predominant narratives of victimhood (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; Kelly & Coy, 2015; Kempadoo, 2015). Furthermore, adopting very protective approaches can result in rights to self-determination being denied and restrictions on expression of agency, especially if women are positioned solely as vulnerable and weak (Doezema, 1999; Kelly & Coy, 2015). Brennan (2005) advises that survivors often value the opportunity to tell their story to a third party. Sharing one's story and experiences can have therapeutic and healing potential if handled with care and attention (Pascual-Leone et al., 2017). Therefore, services being over-protective might reduce possible positive interactions and learning experiences for survivors.

I often encountered situations where gatekeepers strongly insisted that survivors' engagement would be impossible due to their vulnerability and need for protection and safeguarding. Research shows that gatekeepers tend to deny access for several reasons, such as protecting the image of the NGO, genuine care for their service users, and lack of trust in research and researchers (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2010). While acknowledging some of these issues, one cannot help but question whether such over-protection has the potential to silence further those already marginalised and exploited, both in the trafficking experience and post-trafficking, with the effect that their voices are further marginalised (Easton & Matthews, 2015). Kelly & Coy (2015, p. 42) argue that *'participation may be empowering rather than distressing and who is best placed to make this decision?'* Bearing this question in mind helped me navigate and understand the limitations of my research and the restrictions on access to participants regarding gatekeepers' concerns for vulnerable populations and the extent of protection. On the other hand, gatekeepers find themselves in difficult positions due to research saturation, and the question of *'how will your work improve the life of survivors*?' was occasionally raised. This encouraged reflection on my work and what I wanted to achieve, the ethics of the research and my responsibilities as a researcher and practitioner.

The researcher's role, the 'ethics of responsibility' and 'the ethics of relationship' are explored by Kelly & Coy (2015) who discuss challenges for ensuring non-maleficence and beneficence around human trafficking research. There are studies and instances where unethical practices have taken place, and these have influenced the attitudes of stakeholders and gatekeepers. Additionally, there are studies demonstrating how gatekeepers resist sharing and involvement in research due to their organisation's membership and beliefs (Lewis et al., 2020). Thus, I was aware that my learner role could undermine my claim to expertise and professionalism. As a result, I continuously negotiated and demonstrated my authenticity and credibility to relevant organisations to obtain access. This aspect of the study proved to be the most challenging, time-consuming and demoralising since all resources and connections were exhausted and access to survivors seemed limited. My questions regarding access and my persuasive attempts posed an ethical dilemma as to where to draw the line and when to stop searching for participants.

Finally, those survivors who participated were sometimes selected by gatekeepers as offering instances of '*good stories*' or '*success stories*' adding to the potential for conflict of interest and the possible influence of concerns about an organisation's image. Brunovskis & Surtees (2010) discuss this aspect which can bring limitations to the research, and yet, in this study, I was entirely dependent on gatekeepers to recruit survivors: survivor recruitment took place within the organisations that agreed to assist with the research and I had little control or overview of the process. Thus, I acknowledge the limitations inherent in this sample of survivors (five), as those selected voices might not represent the full spectrum of sex trafficking survivor experiences.

Data collection process

Pilot Study and preparation for fieldwork

Pilot studies are used to test research tools and increase the researcher's confidence and experience (Bryman, 2012; Malmqvist et al., 2019). The pilot study was designed to evaluate the interview guides in light of participant responses and comments. It took place between 17 June to 19 August 2020 and included four interviews in the UK and Romania with practitioners and key informants. It is important to

mention that the pilot study only took place with professional participants due to the restrictions on access to survivor participants described above. Since most of the participants were from these two categories, it was necessary to ensure that the tools, strategy, and online environment were appropriate.

Following the pilot interviews, I reflected on the clarity of the questions, the conversation flow, the time constraints associated with the interview, the information shared before the project, and the debriefing. Apart from my observations regarding these aspects, I discussed with pilot participants: length; clarity; flow and order of questions; how the interview was directed/conducted; use of diagrams or interview guide; the experience of the online platform; general feedback and recommendations for any changes or additions; the interview schedule and process to be taken with survivors.

The major challenge for conducting the interview was the time frame and how much time participants were willing to dedicate. This is encountered as a common research problem (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, following the pilot and discussions with the participants, I decided to ensure that interviews would not exceed one hour, especially for those participants with time constraints. To do this, I had to adjust some of the questions slightly and to ensure balanced coverage of topics within the hour allocated for interviews. So, for example, questions about the practitioners' background, NGO and strategies were removed, and more space was allocated to those questions about the female Romanian victims/survivors of sex trafficking in the UK.

In terms of clarity and flow of the questions, participants considered that it was unnecessary to make changes as the questions were found to be straightforward. Therefore, the interview guide remained the same throughout the data collection process once it was adjusted for time limitations. There were no changes in the documents that participants received prior to the interview (information/debrief sheet; consent form; interview guide), as participants considered them adequate. Pilot participants preferred the interview guide diagram, as it provided a clear structure and followed participants' suggestions, participants received the diagram before the interview to familiarise themselves with the topics (see Appendices 4.1 and 5.1).

Since the interviews took place online, I needed to ensure that the platforms proposed by UCLan (Microsoft Teams, Skype or phone) were appropriate for participants and they were able to use them. It turned out that the participants in the pilot study were familiar with Microsoft Teams as they were used

to conducting online meetings due to COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore, there were no additional concerns about their usage.

Due to access limitations, I could not conduct a pilot study with victims/survivors. However, the staff supported me in reviewing the interview guides at an early stage and ensuring that the materials used were easy to follow and clear. In addition, staff advised me to utilise a '*friendly and conversational*' style to help survivors feel at ease (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-03; UK-PR-01). The first two interviews with survivors provided sufficient insight into issues of length, interviewing approach and clarity. The interview needed to be flexible to accommodate possible interventions in the case of distress, to allow the participant the freedom to decide the level and depth of information they felt comfortable sharing, and at times, to let survivors guide the direction of the interview (see Appendix 6). The pilot interviews were included in the analysis.

First stage of data collection: Romania

This first stage of data collection was focused on the Romanian context and took place between September 2020 to January 2021. I conducted 23 interviews (twelve practitioners, seven key informants and four survivors). ANITP suggested areas in Romania where higher numbers of victims were repatriated from the UK, and therefore I was referred to the locations such as Bucharest, Iași, Galați and Oradea.

Figure 1. Geographic Spread of Participants in Romania: Stage 1
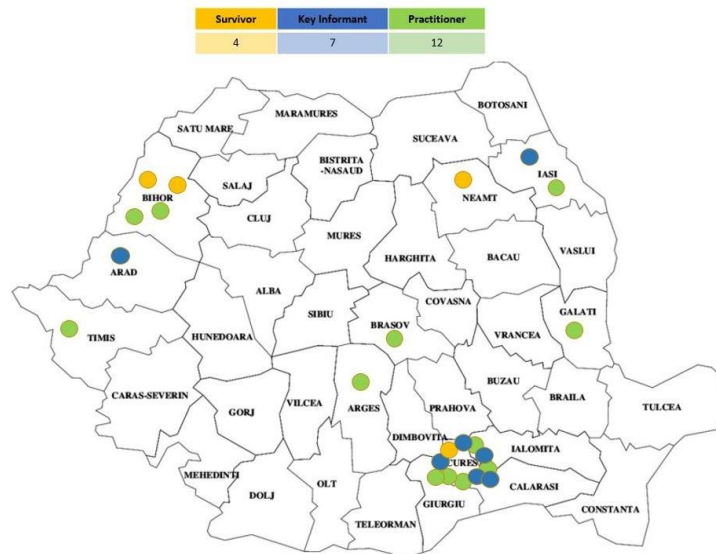
Second stage of data collection: The UK

This second online data collection stage took place in the UK between September 2020 to July 2021, with 20 interviews conducted (twelve practitioners, seven key informants and one survivor). I eventually needed to contact most of those I was aware of (over 60 NGOs) since it proved challenging to identify and obtain access to Romanian survivors.

Regarding geography, most of the participants were working and located in England (North-West, Yorkshire, West Midlands and South-East/London), and one participant was in Wales. The links in the NW England also reflected my location in Preston and initial connections forged via the supervisory team and Lancashire Constabulary. Unfortunately, although I contacted NGOs operating in Scotland and Northern Ireland, I was not successful in gaining their support.

Figure 2. Geographic Spread of Participants in the UK: Stage 2
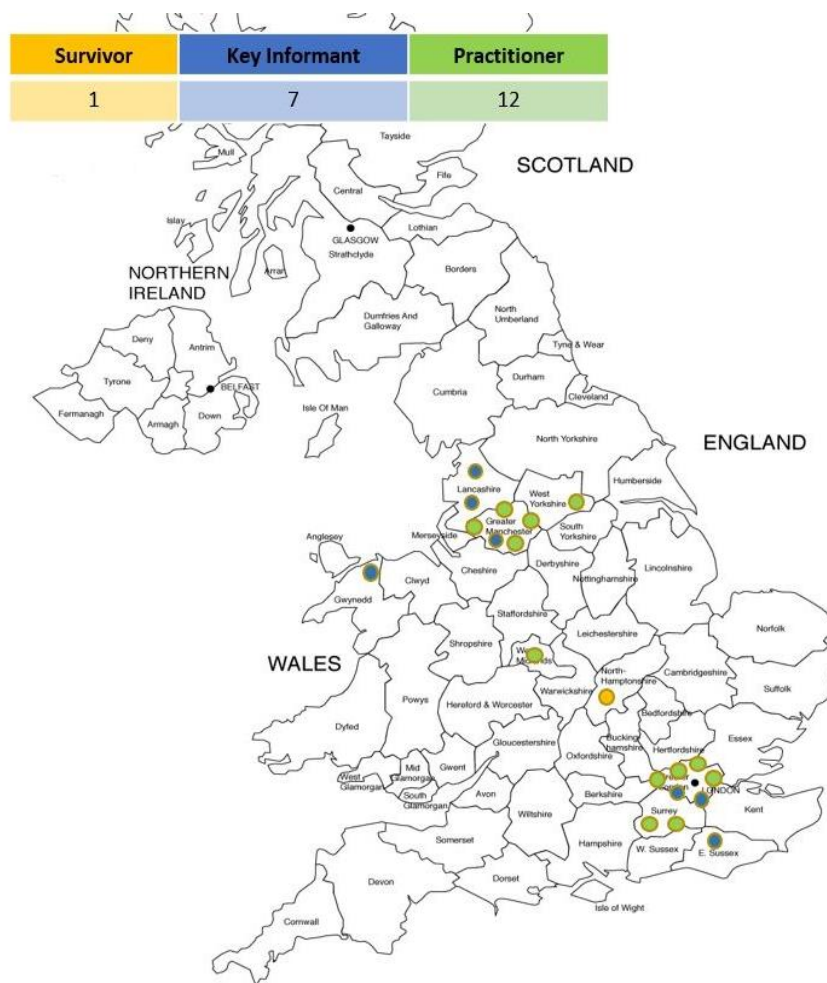
Interviewing sex trafficking survivors

A semi-structured approach to interviewing as opposed to other methods such as narrative approaches, was considered to be a means of reducing possible harm (Gerassi, & Esbensen, 2021), especially in an online environment. Research with survivors of trafficking (Burkonskvi & Surtes, 2010) suggests that trafficking victims are often asked for the 'whole story' by law enforcement agencies, caseworkers and legal advisors. Thus, the risk of using a non-structured narrative approach is that survivors might feel under pressure to tell the 'whole story', providing a detailed account of the trafficking episode; this was not the aim of this study. While a structured interview schedule would contrast with official approaches, thus I also tried to avoid any sense of interrogation.

The interview guides for survivors were designed to reduce any possible harm or distress that a standard interviewing process could trigger. For instance, questions judged more likely to trigger distress or painful recollections were placed in the middle of the interview schedule when a rapport with the interviewer would hopefully have been established and to avoid the interview ending on painful emotions. The questions were open, straightforward, and reduced in number to create a less rigid environment for their responses. The interview guides drew on several discussions with practitioners who worked directly with survivors. Their feedback informed my approach to interviewing and the questions I asked. Given the sensitivity of the research, I also considered sensitive interviewing practices (Dempsey et al., 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and trauma-informed interviewing and practices (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Zimmerman et al., 2003) when designing the interview schedules. I adopted a strength-based approach, which entails focusing on the individual's strengths, agency and resilience and the interview ended on a positive note, stressing the interviewee's resources, hopes and plans for the future (Saleebey, 2012). While the interview aimed to gather information, it was crucial to acknowledge its impact on individuals and vulnerable groups. Therefore, focusing on the resilience and agency of survivors enabled the complexity of their experiences to be addressed, so creating space for empowerment and highlighting their resources (Cojocaru, 2015, 2016; De Angelis, 2016). The interview guides were first written in English and then adapted into the Romanian language. Following an introduction and questions designed to collect demographic data, the topics addressed in the interviews with survivors were linked to their current life experience after trafficking, the support received via NGOs or authorities, their decision to stay in the UK or return to Romania, their current needs and resources, their views on migration, sex work and their vision on life post-trafficking and hopes. The semi-structured interview framework

provided participants with the opportunity to delve into some aspects of their own experiences, including pre-trafficking experiences if they wished to, although this was not requested.

All interviews with survivors were conducted in Romanian and transcribed in their original language (see Appendix 6.1, 6.2.). With the exception of the interview with Diana, which was completed in September 2021, these interviews were conducted between October and December 2020. Participation was firstly determined by access and gatekeeping, then by women's decision about participation, having been informed about the study (I was informed by some of the NGOs that four women chose not to participate). However, while other NGOs may have asked survivors to participate and received a refusal, I was not provided with full information by NGOs on how many survivors were approached and declined. When NGOs were contacted about progress with recruitment, most of them just mentioned that they were unable to recruit survivors. Other potential interviews did not happen because I judged the risks to the women concerned to be too high. Through my engagement and volunteer work with two organisations in the UK, I interacted with four Romanian survivors of sex trafficking and I met three other survivors who had been exploited in the UK in two shelters in Romania. In the course of becoming familiar with their stories and circumstances, I decided not to ask them to take part in the research as the risks observed around their mental health and safeguarding were high, and I could not provide them with adequate support. I was also concerned about increasing the pressure on those already supporting them. According to the feminist approach, ethics of care (Gilligan, 2014) and the no-harm principle (Duong, 2015), it was appropriate to focus on sources of information which would minimise potential harm to participants. Thus, I had contact with seven women who I decided not to interview on grounds of their wellbeing and fragile mental state. In addition to the five survivors included, I interviewed one more trafficked woman, whom I discovered at the moment of the interview was of a different nationality, though she had been introduced to me as Roma-Romanian. I decided not to include the interview in the main dataset as it did not conform to the selection and sampling criteria[14].

Regarding the demographics of this group, the victims and survivors of trafficking range in age from 23 to 36 years old, originating from both rural and urban locations in Romania. None of the women had received

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[14]This interview was not included in the research and analysis, as the participant did not meet the inclusion criteria for the study, as she was non-Romanian. I informed the participant and instead we agreed to talk about her experience on the understanding that she was not a research interview. She agreed to do so and shared with me for 20 minutes some of her experiences and described her involvement with the NGO that had recruited her for to the study.

formal education beyond high school. Their periods of trafficking lasted from a few months to seven years while, for all of them, at least one and a half years had passed between the trafficking episode and the interview date. The details of the survivors interviewed are included in Table 2 below. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Moreover, anonymity is particularly important for vulnerable participants such as human trafficking victims and survivors. Using pseudonyms is well-established practice in qualitative research and could have a therapeutic purpose especially if participants select it (Allen & Wiles, 2015). However, since the contact with the survivors was limited, it was hard to ensure that they chose pseudonyms. Consequently, I later attributed these myself.

Table 2. Demographics of survivors' participants (at the date of the interview)

Participant	Age	Origin	Relationship Status	Children	Trafficking Period[15]	Exit	Current Occupation
Larisa – RO	36	Urban	Single	One	1.5 years (approximately)	2018	Unemployed /Searching for work
Ana – RO	23	Rural	Married	Two	Few months (unclear)	2017	Housewife
Maia – RO	29	Rural	Single	One	2.5 years (approximately)	2017	Own company/Self-employed
Irina – RO	25	Urban	Single	One	Few months (unclear)	2018	Employee /Self-employed
Diana – UK	33	Urban	Partner	None	7 Years (approximately)	2020	Waitress/ Searching for work

A complex combination of accounts from different but complementary groups of participants helped create a nuanced picture of the post-trafficking trajectories of Romanian women. Although I only interviewed five survivors, this number provided some depth to the data while the practitioners and key informants enriched the breadth of information and brought additional context to understanding the post-trafficking trajectory.

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[15] I was unable to capture the exact duration of women's trafficking episodes; in some of cases, it was clear that they did not want to talk about it, thus it felt appropriate not to discuss this further.

Interviewing practitioners

I conducted twelve interviews with practitioners in each country, totalling 24 interviews which took place between August 2020 to July 2021. The demographics of participants are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below. In some of the cases, both in the UK and Romania, some professionals had worked with only a few Romanian trafficked women (UK) or few who had been exploited in the UK (Romania). This was a natural occurrence as there are no NGOs in Romania working solely with survivors trafficked in the UK or NGOs in the UK only working with Romanian survivors. Participants were asked to discuss only those Romanian (UK) or those exploited in the UK (Romania) women they had worked with, to avoid a possible generalisation to overall populations of trafficked women.

To ensure that participants are not identifiable I have used acronyms and removed any information which might disclose their identity. The majority had been engaged in anti-trafficking work for at least ten years and were female. This is not surprising given the notable over-representation of women in roles such as social worker, psychologist and other care roles (McLean, 2003; Simpson, 2004; Trusz, 2020). Most practitioners were aged between 30 to 39 years old. Some practitioners had undertaken reciprocal visits and were partially familiar with the Romanian context, while some participants in the UK were both Romanian nationals and UK residents. The interview process was straightforward since most had previously participated in similar research and were thus acquainted with the procedures, while some individuals conducted their own research. In terms of topics addressed, I was interested in their observations on post-trafficking trajectories, their perceptions of survivors' own understandings of their situations and trajectories, as well their reflections on the specific issues of sex trafficking in relation to Romanian women. The semi-structured format allowed participants to explore some points in more depth according to their experience and interests. The beginning of the interview focused on demographic data about the participant and some participants spoke about their motivations for working in the field. I considered this essential as it informed other aspects of the data related to their values, believes and vision, such as: 'faith', 'God', 'love', 'duty', 'humanity', 'justice', 'freedom', 'change'. These examples were similar to the key informant participants (see Appendix 9.1., codes 8 practitioners and key informants).

Following the introduction, the interview schedule (see Appendix 4) for these participants addressed the following issues: experience and observations related to trafficking cases, profile of victims and survivors, relationship between Romania and the UK, the particularities of their work and the post-trafficking

trajectories of victims and survivors with emphasis on vulnerability, needs, resources, resilience and agency of survivors. Finally, although some of the practitioners were also gatekeepers, some of those who participated were not necessarily those working with the survivors interviewed.

Interviewing key informants

The 14 interviews with key informants took place between August 2020 to July 2021 and covered similar topics to the practitioner interviews but also explored the themes of policy and collaboration between the UK and Romania in addressing trafficking, acknowledging the post-trafficking trajectories and opportunities available to survivors once exploitation ends. The process of interviewing followed the same strategy as that used for the practitioners. The interview (see Appendix 5) started with an introduction, demographic data and continued by exploring the post-trafficking trajectories in the context of the relationship between the two countries. This group comprised seven key informants in the UK and seven in Romania and included policymakers, government officials, law enforcement advisers/leaders, campaigners, academics, and activists. The sample size included a wide range of relevant anti-trafficking experts. Their observations on the relationship between the two countries, and on statutory and non-statutory policies and practice were highly relevant in deepening the research context and provided additional insight. Some of the key informants were able to inform and create trafficking policies or influence policy due to their roles and affiliations with government agencies.

The demographics of the key informants are presented in Tables 5 and 6. Most of these participants were male and over 40 years old, with a minimum of six years' experience in anti-trafficking. All key informants from the UK had direct interactions with Romania, working in or travelling to Romania for short periods. This brief exposure to Romania and its culture represents an important feature of their understanding of trafficking as they were able to notice and address certain issues from a unique position in contrast to those who were not familiar with the country and culture of Romania.

Table 3. Demographics of Practitioner participants in Romania (at the date of the interview)

No.	Participant	Sex	Age	Origin	Organisation	Role	Experience
1	ROM-PR-01	M	40-49	Romania	Local; Victim care/safe house	Case Worker	5 years
2	ROM-PR-02	F	30-39	Romania	National; Victim care	Case Worker	4 years
3	ROM-PR-03	F	30-39	Romania	National; Gov. Agency	Case Worker	4 years

No.	Participant	Sex	Age	Origin	Organisation	Role	Experience
4	ROM-PR-04	F	30-39	Romania	Local; Victim care/safe house	Case manager	6 years
5	ROM-PR-05	F	50-59	Romania	Local; Victim care/Safe house	Managerial position / Social Worker	11 years
6	ROM-PR-06	F	40-49	Romania	Local; Victim care/safe house	Case Manager /Social worker	22 years
7	ROM-PR-07	F	50-59	Romania	National; Gov. Agency	Case worker	10 years
8	ROM-PR-08	F	20-29	Romania	Local; Victim care	Educational Assistant	7 years
9	ROM-PR-09	M	30-39	Romania	Local; Victim care/safe house	Administration and PR	20 years
10	ROM-PR-10	F	30-39	Romania	Local; Victim care	Psychologist	6 years
11	ROM-PR-11	F	30-39	Romania	National; Gov. Agency	Specialist police inspector	1 year
12	ROM-PR-12	F	30-39	Romania	National; Gov. Agency	Police Officer & Immigration Inspector	2 years

Table 4. Demographics of Practitioner participants in the UK (at the date of the interview)

No.	Participant	Sex	Age	Origin	Organisation	Role	Experience
1	UK-PR-01	F	30-39	Romania	International; Victim care	Managerial position / Case worker	7 years
2	UK-PR-02	F	30-39	North-America	International; Victim care	Victim navigator / Case Worker	10 years
3	UK-PR-03	F	40-49	Romania	Local; Police	Translator	7 years
4	UK-PR-04	M	50-59	S.W. Europe	National; Victim care/safe house	Managerial position	5 years
5	UK-PR-05	F	40-49	South America	National; Victim care/Safe house	Managerial position	4 years
6	UK-PR-06	F	50-59	UK	Local; Victim care	Managerial position	20 years
7	UK-PR-07	M	50-59	UK	National; Victim care/safe house	Director Police and Justice	10 years
8	UK-PR-08	F	70-79	UK	International; Victim care	First Responder / Interviewer	10 years
9	UK-PR-09	F	30-39	UK	Local; Victim care, advocacy	Case worker	4 years
10	UK-PR-10	F	30-39	Africa	National; Victim care	Independ. sexual violence advisor	7 years
11	UK-PR-11	F	30-39	Romania	Local; Victim care	Outreach and Translator	7 years
12	UK-PR-12	M	40-49	Africa	National; Victim care	Immigration Advisor	15 years

Table 5. Demographics of Key Informant participants in Romania (at the date of the interview)

No.	Participant	Sex	Age	Origin	Organisation	Role	Experience
1	ROM-KI-01	M	60-69	Romania	Local; Prevention; Advocacy	Managerial position	10 years
2	ROM-KI-02	M	40-49	Romania	International; Advocacy, Lobbying	IOM representative	7 years
3	ROM-KI-03	F	40-49	Romania	International; Victim care; Lobbying	Managerial position	10 years
4	ROM-KI-04	M	40-49	Romania	National; Police	Law enforcement	6 years
5	ROM-KI-05	F	40-49	Romania	National; Advocacy; Lobbying	Consultant, Academic	12 years
6	ROM-KI-06	M	50-59	Romania	International; Advocacy; Lobbying	Activist, Policy; Former Police	12 years
7	ROM-KI-07	M	40-49	North America	International; Victim care; Advocacy	Managerial position	Over 20

Table 6. Demographics of Key Informant participants in the UK (at the date of the interview)

No.	Participant	Sex	Age	Origin	Organisation	Role	Experience
1	UK-KI-01	M	70-80	UK	Local; Prevention, advocacy	Managerial position	10 years
2	UK-KI-02	M	50-60	UK	Local; Advocacy, lobbying	Managerial position; Former policing	6 years
3	UK-KI-03	F	50-60	UK	Local; Prevention, advocacy	Chair NGO; Social worker	8 years
4	UK-KI-04	M	50-60	UK	International; lobbying, education	Policy Consultant; Former policing	14 years
5	UK-KI-05	F	40-50	Romania	International; Diplomacy	Diplomacy; Former policing	23 years
6	UK-KI-06	M	50-60	UK	National/International; Advocacy, lobbying	Policy advisor; Former policing	7 years
7	UK-KI-07	M	40-50	UK	National; Police	Victim Advocacy; Policing	15 years

Ethical dilemmas in practice: Conducting online interviews with survivors

I did not encounter challenges in the interviews with practitioners and key informants. However, the interviews with survivors proved to be more difficult and raised ethical concerns. The practitioners provided survivors with online interview access at the organisation's premises, or survivors were equipped with devices such as smartphones/tablets. While using an online platform for interviewing has its own benefits (Jowett et al., 2011), as participants can be in their own comfort zone, it does bring limitations in terms of confidentiality. For instance, two of the participants were interrupted by their children or partner, and the other participants were close to staff on the premises where the interview took place. Although participants said that they were comfortable talking in the presence of their families or staff, it did feel inappropriate and may have limited what they could share and the extent to which they were comfortable developing specific topics. In another case, the survivor was interviewed in the office of an NGO with the camera off, and while she was talking, I heard another person in the room, probably an NGO staff member and this may have impacted on the interview. In order to show respect and acknowledge her right to self-determination and privacy, I was careful not to insist on points that seemed to make her uncomfortable.

The challenge of upholding the no-harm principle while allowing an organic interaction with survivors and space for the unknown ultimately involves risks as observed. My previous experiences of working with vulnerable and at-risk populations equipped me with skills, an adequate understanding of adversity and how to respond to challenges in interviewing and social work practice (e.g. distressed participants). However, this was my first experience of online interviewing with survivors of sex trafficking, and it proved difficult, especially due to one participant's current situation. This participant showed distress several times, cried, and was very unhappy with her life. I tried to stop the interview a few times and constantly checked with her that she was okay but she wanted to continue. Moments of silence helped with this process, reassuring her about her safety, discussing solutions and emphasising available resources. However, I felt powerless and limited by the circumstances in my interaction with her. Afterwards, I talked to her care worker and understood more of the background, which explained her reactions during the interview. This instance represented an ethical issue due to potential breaches of confidentiality. Yet, in a situation of safeguarding and possible self-harm, it was my responsibility to ensure that the participant was safe and accessed support if needed. Information regarding safeguarding procedures was shared with the participant in writing (via the information sheet and consent form) and described at the beginning of the interview. Moreover, I did not disclose information provided in the interview, but rather shared my

concerns about the wellbeing of the participant. As this particular interview took place at the NGO site, it was straightforward to manage this situation.

Easton & Matthews (2015) argue that the emotional display can be a relief. While this particular experience was singular, it did highlight the implications of involving survivors in research and raised questions such as *is it worth it? is it harmful? is it necessary?* Although I was focused on looking for survivors' agency, it was hard to find it in her account at that moment. Nevertheless, the reality of this encounter increased my awareness of survivors' hardships and made me more realistic regarding the difficulties involved in identifying participants (including gatekeepers' hesitance).

Approach to Data Analysis

Introducing 'Reflexive thematic analysis'

I chose reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. The thematic analysis model introduced by Braun & Clarke (2006) has been widely used in social sciences and other fields in the last decade. However, it is worth noting that Braun and Clarke's (2006) model has not always been utilised as was initially intended (Braun & Clarke, 2019b; Braun et al., 2019). Braun and Clarke (2019b) have voiced concerns about flaws and misconceptions in how the approach is applied and have attempted to differentiate the notion and the value of 'interpreting' and 'creating' instead of 'finding' or 'discovering' truth from the data. Additionally, they have distinguished various forms of thematic analysis, highlighting the importance of reflexivity, which informed the aim of this model and adapted its name to reflect its analytical purpose better (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). Hence, *Thematic Analysis* became *Reflexive Thematic Analysis.*

Theoretical knowledge and the philosophical position adopted play a crucial role in analysis, and so need to be acknowledged early on (Braun & Clarke, 2019b; Collins & Stockton, 2018). Reflexive thematic analysis is concerned with meaning and the creation of meaning while recognising the context and positionality of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). As Braun and Clarke (2019b) emphasise, what distinguishes this approach from other types of thematic analysis is the role of the researcher at the centre of knowledge

formation. Due to its flexibility, reflexive thematic analysis allows the researcher to utilise both deductive and inductive reasoning in data analysis by generating themes from both the data and the existing literature (Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2020; Bryman, 2012), allowing a dialogue between the literature and the data. This approach aligns with a feminist research stance (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018; Olesen, 2005), employed in this study.

Preliminary analysis: Transcription and usage of the original language

Reflexive thematic analysis follows the steps of transcription, coding, analysis, and writing up systematically, yet organically moving back and forward through these phases as the analysis and the writing takes place (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96). Once data collection was completed, I started transcribing. I conducted 43 interviews, recorded via Microsoft Teams or Skype. The interviews with practitioners and key informants tended to be longer than those with survivors, ranging from 38 minutes to 2 hours and 40 minutes. On average, the interviews with practitioners and key informants lasted around 60 minutes. In contrast, the longest interview with a survivor was 55 minutes compared to the shortest at 25 minutes.

The interviews conducted in English were auto-transcribed via the Stream Microsoft Transcribed option, which provided a raw transcript which I then edited. On the other hand, I fully transcribed manually the interviews in Romania and analysed them in the original language. Translations represent a challenge for data interpretation because they can affect the meaning of a transcript (Temple & Young, 2004). The issues around translations include the subtle matters of connotation and meaning (Marshall et al., 2022, p., 225). For this reason, I decided to work with the Romanian data in its original language. This way, I would ensure the authentic meaning and maintain consistency across the data sets while analysing and writing up. I carried out all the translations for sections of the interviews and extracts presented in the following chapters to enable the readers to understand what was said and to remain consistent with the English interviews. Although I coded in English, I did not encounter any issues with the language and it was a straightforward process. Where relevant, nuances of the Romanian language and issues around terminology are raised in the findings chapters.

In transcribing, I was attentive to punctuation so that the message was clearly expressed. I used a clean verbatim transcription, also known as intelligent verbatim (Davidson, 2009), whereby elements of intonation, pauses, or repetitions are excluded whilst ensuring that the meaning of the message is not lost. In this way, I focused on '*what was said rather than how it was said*' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 169). I anonymised the data in the transcription process, and transcripts were password-protected to help ensure confidentiality. Transcription is time-consuming, but it provides a valuable opportunity for researchers to familiarise themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Watts, 2014; Marshall et al., 2022). Whilst transcribing, I was able to take notes and start the early stages of analysis.

Supporting system for conducting the analysis: NVivo

Once transcriptions were completed, I used NVivo software to help organise, code and analyse the data. NVivo provides tools that can assist with qualitative data analysis by supporting data management, managing ideas, performing queries and producing reports (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). The software was helpful since I had a lot of data, and I continued to use it throughout the analysis and drafting process. The debates around software usage in qualitative analysis highlight its strengths and weaknesses. Key risks, such as distancing from the data or focusing on frequency, needed to be considered (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, due to the repetitive nature of thematic analysis, it is unfeasible to upload a data set and run a straightforward analysis (Guest et al., 2012). Moreover, understanding the aims, procedures, potential manipulation and constraints enables users to better ensure the validity of their analysis (Woolf & Silver, 2018). Therefore, it felt appropriate to use the software given the volume of the data collected.

The steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Data was examined by identifying patterns and generating core themes using the six-phase guide developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) and described in their latest work (Braun & Clarke, 2019a; 2019b; 2020) regarding the reflexive thematic analysis. The coding frameworks can be found in Appendices 9.1 & 9.2. Data analysis is an active, creative process and ultimately a product of both the time and reflective depth employed on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). As Jackson & Mazzei (2013) suggest, data interpretation cannot be accomplished by mechanical coding, so limiting data to themes that would not

contribute to understanding the complexities of social life. Although I used a model and identified steps to analyse the data, I engaged iteratively with the data – reading, interpreting, re-reading and reinterpreting the materials – involving reflexivity and in the analysis process.

I used a reflexive research journal to record additional thoughts and reflections on research process and themes during data collection and analysis. I used annotations in NVivo to capture specific ideas and collect notes on each data item. In this process, I tried to empathise as much as possible with the participants to ensure the most accurate sense of what they were saying, or as Watts (2014, p. 5) suggests, '*trying to see the world through their eyes'.* This first step was beneficial as it helped me understand from an early-stage interviewees' perceptions of sex trafficking and trafficked women due to their professional background, experience, ideological viewpoints, and implications. I followed the same approach with the data from the trafficked women and found the process emotionally very demanding due to the traumatic experiences shared. However, it did bring a closer understanding of the women's post-trafficking experiences and the context of their lives. Once this process was completed, I created a brief coding framework, informed by the notes collected through the repetitive reading of the transcripts, the research questions and the literature review.

Generating initial codes was the second step of the process, and as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, it focused on identifying patterns in the responses. This was done in NVivo, where the coding framework was created through a fluid and organic process and organised in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process allowed me to question the assumptions I had made and how these impacted my interrogation of data, implying a reflexive process. As Braun & Clarke (2019b) suggest, reflexivity helps the researcher to clarify their assumptions. Once the coding of all data was completed, I started rearranging the codes and generating themes representing the third step in the model. Then, I reviewed, defined, and named the themes while writing and started writing the findings. Generating themes represents the analytical work which occurs from '*the intersection of data, analytical process and subjectivity'* (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). The thematic framework is presented in Appendices 10.1 and 10.2. I could connect different concepts and cases to the different groups according to their nationalities and gender, which allowed a nuanced description of the data and comparisons between groups were drawn out throughout the analysis. I presented the data as '*telling a story*', while also '*making an argument'* (Braun et al., 2019).

Reflexivity in progress: From data collection to analysis

The reflexivity process moves beyond the initial stages of data collection and follows into the analysis and writing up. It is an ongoing process (Stanley & Wise, 1983), providing opportunities for constant conversation with oneself and re-discovery. The data collection process was challenging regarding the realisation of the harm trafficking inflicted upon the women. Hence, having access to all that information and revisiting it constantly during the analysis did affect me. My understanding of my own role was constantly transformed through those opportunities for reflection shifting from just a researcher to a mother, daughter, lover, a woman in a society where the opportunities for success are reduced, to an unwelcome migrant and a returned victim of abuse and violence. Navigating the trafficking stories and how others present them has brought me through many stages of emotional discomfort and realisation. Macfarlane (2009) suggests that using our feelings as a resource in research instead of suppressing them enables understanding of our thinking and motivations and enables action. I was, therefore, able to ensure that I understood where these emotions were coming from and see how it was appropriate to keep my distance from them in the way I was interpreting the data while simultaneously challenging some of the preconceptions I had and also engaging with the data.

Reflexivity enables us to be aware of the effects of the research on the researcher and the experiences in the context – subjectivity - which will also inform the creation of knowledge (Letherby, 2004). Ellis & Berger (2002) suggest that traditional interviewing encourages a hierarchical distance between researchers and respondents, while researcher engagement promotes discussion rather than questioning and as a consequence, interactive interviewers probe personal issues that are generally covered in secrecy. This type of interactional interviewing encourages self-disclosure and emotionality on the side of the researcher and is supported by feminist research, especially when we are seeking a balanced and fair interaction as opposed to just collecting stories (Oakley, 1981). Such self-disclosure happened when interviewing practitioners and survivors when, led by the discussion, I felt the need to share specific experiences, which created a bond with the participant as there were similarities observed. This brought me a more profound empathy and understanding of their experiences. This type of self-disclosure is mentioned in the literature, especially around feminist research, when women are interviewing other women, and the aspect of care, reciprocity and mutual understanding transcends the rigidity of the professional relationship (Oakley, 1981). Thus, as Ellis & Berger (2002) argued, this reciprocity allows a degree of intimacy between researcher and participants, transcends the aim of solely encouraging the

participant to talk and encourages self-reflexivity. Tracy (2010) suggests that self-reflexivity is a crucial element of qualitative research and includes the authenticity and honesty of researchers in recognising their biases, questioning their motives and finally caring for the needs of its participants. Consequently, the researcher adds another layer of information through this process of sharing, self-reflection and self-knowledge (Ellis & Berger, 2002).

Research impact on researcher: Awareness, coping and knowledge formation

Feminist research is preoccupied with the ethics of care, to ensure that there is no harm done in the research process, including the impact on the researcher (Williamson et al., 2020). While the reciprocity of the research context allows individuals to share and ventilate their feelings, it was observed that many emotions were expressed in the research process, including anger, frustration, fun stories and optimism, and the flow of these emotions and their intensity had the potential to impact the person in the case (Williamson, 2020). The emotional impact of the interviews was felt at different levels: some discussions raised curiosity and inspiration, others confusion and offences, while others, especially survivor interviews conveyed negative feelings and trauma which directly affected me. This process occurred most intensely during data collection and slightly in the process of data analysis, when I had to read and re-read the same sections and reflect on them.

While disclosing traumatic experiences and sexual violence could be experienced by those sharing it as empowering, it is suggested that it can leave researchers overwhelmed and disoriented (Klein, 2012 in Williamson et al., 2020). I found interviewing survivors most challenging, especially when the online environment made it difficult to respond adequately. This increased my anxiety with some women, since I was not able to stay in touch with them and ensure they were alright. Such experiences reflect what Burr (1995, in Williamson et al. 2020 add pg.) called '*unfinished business'*. As I was keen to ensure women's safety; I discussed their trajectories post-interview with the staff on several occasions. This provided comfort in ensuring they were okay and was in line with my principles and 'ethics of care'.

As part of the reflexive journey, keeping a research journal helped in noting my observations about the attitudes, vocabulary and narratives around trafficking, especially with the process of 'interviewing survivors'. This helped as form of a debriefing and allowed emotion ventilation, creating a more profound sense of connection with the women interviewed and the issues around trafficking and vulnerability,

especially given my familiarity with the Romanian context. Journal keeping or a 'reflexive diary' is seen as a method of capturing what is not necessarily relevant in some areas, but it can be useful in sensitive research, as it allows the growth of the research reflexivity (Carroll, 2012). Keeping a diary helped me regulate some of the emotions related to the experience of interviewing trafficked women and assisted in maintaining a reflexive approach to the work undertaken. Additionally, regular supervision and discussions of these specific issues proved to be crucial to finding a balance while navigating the fieldwork and undertaking analysis.

The nature of the study poses ethical considerations due to the sensitive issues addressed, especially survivors' participation. Therefore, I constantly needed to remind myself of the purpose of the work and my role in ensuring that my motivation aligned with my values and the need for action. Action, apart from the learning process and dissemination, involves a vision and concrete plans to enable action for addressing trafficking.

Limitations of the study

The study was in the early stages when the COVID-19 pandemic started, and this shaped the initially envisioned methodological approach, the fieldwork possibilities and data collection. Thus, participatory approaches (such as ethnography, action research) or methods involving face-to-face engagement (e.g. field work observations, participatory methods with survivors) were not available to me and I needed to prioritise recruitment and data collection from the early stages. The impact of COVID-19 was a key reason given by NGOs that rejected participation in the study; organisations were reluctant to support research due to the ongoing pandemic's limitations and their inability to respond to general challenges posed by the restrictions and uncertainty as well as concerns about survivor wellbeing. A larger number of interviews with trafficked women who ended up staying in the UK would have been ideal but was hard to achieve given the time available and the impact of the pandemic. Though access represented a major challenge, the interviews with the other categories of participants proved valuable.

Online data collection has disadvantages, such as lack of engagement and rapport, technical challenges and possibly less depth (Braun & Clarke; 2013; Johnson et al., 2019). As Johnson et al. (2019) argue, the decision to conduct online interviews can be seen as a necessity and there are advantages, such as fewer costs, accessibility to a broader range of participants and easier access to specific individuals. Other studies also identified same advantages for conducting online interviewing, especially under the COVID-19 restrictions (Walklate et al., 2021). Though I encountered difficulties in the online environment, most were technical and were resolved. For example, I managed to interview a wide range of participants and reduced the costs in time and resources for travelling to their location; some participants were able to offer interview times outside their working hours which was more convenient for them. Since data collection occurred at the beginning of the pandemic, participants were used to the online setting and found it acceptable. I could attend a wide range of online meetings, which proved beneficial for data collection and engagement with gatekeepers. Although the pandemic added challenges to the research process, I managed to overcome the challenges and adapted accordingly.

The experiences of the five trafficked women who participated in this study cannot be generalised to the wider population of trafficked women, and a larger group of women would allow a more complex analysis. While the methods used for collecting data were adequate given the limited time available and limited access to the women, a longitudinal or participatory approach might have provided additional information on other aspects of the trafficking experience. These limitations suggest the need for further research to examine women's experience over time and also those hard-to-reach populations affected by trafficking.

An additional limitation was the risk of selection bias in participants interviewed. Organisations and participants volunteered to take part and some groups may not have been represented. For example, most participating organisations worked in the anti-trafficking field, and very few had specific services directed to sex workers or engaged with sex workers (although such organisations were invited to participate in the study). Among the women interviewed, only one had independent sex work experiences and was able to provide a different view on sex work. Due to the small cohort of women in the study, other voices and perspectives on post-trafficking trajectories could be missed and underexplored. The challenges of including those voices who do not want to engage with services or research can perpetuate further biases and limitations in exploring sex trafficking. Additionally, the cases which were included were considered by some practitioners 'success stories' which would again imply a bias even if those cases posed fewer risks of distress or trauma for participants as they were further advanced in their recovery

process. Finally, the lack of involvement of survivor and sex worker-led organisations in the research represents yet another limitation. As a consequence, it is possible that some survivor and sex worker perspectives were missed.

In this research, I have adopted a qualitative methodology in line with feminist values and used it carefully with an awareness of power dynamics, the language used with survivors, the ethics of care, and the role of reflexivity. Finally, as noted above, this research aims to give a voice to women whose accounts often go unheard or disregarded.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical foundations for this research, the rationale for using a feminist approach to researching sex trafficking and presented the research process, fieldwork and some of the main ethical challenges encountered and reflected upon. Firstly, it was argued that the values underpinning feminist research are relevant for this topic and informed this sensitive research which adopted a high emphasis on ethics and '*the ethics of care'.* The data collection strategy was described together with the rationale for the research methods and design. The chapter examined the reflexive thematic analysis used and the steps, benefits and connection to feminist approaches to research, which ultimately benefited the analysis. Finally, limitations were identified, including those related to the impact of COVID-19, which were experienced as a both a challenge and an opportunity for innovation and resilience. The following chapters present the research findings and discussion.

Chapter 4. Romanian survivors of sex trafficking sharing their stories

Chapter aim

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with Romanian survivors of sex trafficking using key themes identified in the data analysis (see Appendix 10.1). It introduces the five women and their journeys up to the time of the interview. Some women were impacted by their previous experiences, vulnerabilities and resources, while for others, the context and circumstances played a significant role in their trajectories. While women's experiences and post-trafficking trajectories were diverse and unique, there were also similarities in their stories, vulnerabilities and common points around agency, strength and resources.

Key themes from survivors' interviews

The main themes identified and created from the interviews with trafficking survivors addressed the trafficking experience as a whole. Although they were presented chronologically as a narrative, the focus remained on their post-trafficking journeys and elements that built up to the current and future events, emphasising the effects of the experience and the challenges encountered once they returned to Romania. The six key themes are:

- ❖ Desires to better one's life through migration, in light of vulnerability, poorly informed decisions and traffickers
- ❖ Violence and manipulation experienced in trafficking and exploitative 'love relationships'
- ❖ Negative impact of exploitation and exiting the trafficking situation
- ❖ Post-trafficking trajectories faced with challenges of reintegration. Finding 'peace' and safety
- ❖ Inner strengths and supportive others. 'What keeps me going'
- ❖ Meaning of the experience. Realising 'what changed' and 'what matters'

Introduction and survivors' stories

This section briefly presents the interview context and my observations and starts with summary accounts of the survivors' stories.

Larisa's story

Larisa was recruited for the interview with the help of an NGO in Romania and interviewed at the organisation's premises. It was challenging to ensure she understood who I was and why this research was being undertaken and, during the interview, she asked me if I was a police officer. However, she became more open when I started using simple language and rural anecdotes, which diluted the formality of the interview and seemed to make her more comfortable. Larisa showed signs of distress several times during the interview. Due to the heavy emotional load, and the difficulties with the internet she encountered prior to our online meeting, this was the most difficult interview.

Larisa was vulnerable in a number of ways before she was trafficked at the age of 34. She did not want to talk much about her family but mentioned she had had a bad relationship with her mother and that she had partly grown up in an orphanage. Larisa had a history of mental health issues, homelessness and previous sex work in Romania. She had a daughter but had little contact with her. Larisa had no formal education or qualifications. Her trafficking story started with her travelling to the UK with a couple who promised her work, but once she arrived there, she was forced into sex work. She talked at length about her trafficking experience, the violence, abuse and hardship she experienced in the UK. Traffickers relocated her several times, and mostly she did not know where she was. Her mental health deteriorated and she made suicide attempts whilst trafficked. After one client gave her the address, she was able to contact the police and was removed from the trafficking situation. She was then placed in a safe house in the UK for a short period (although for how long and when was unclear). For the first time, she felt secure and among people who understood her. Although she had wanted to stay and work in the UK, it was suggested by the NGO supporting her in the UK that it would be better for her to return to Romania.

The UK authorities formally repatriated Larisa and linked her with an anti-trafficking NGO in Romania. Due to the lack of information received by the Romanian NGO, Larisa was at risk upon return to the country. She

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spoke highly of the Romanian NGO that supported her and considered the staff her closest family. Larisa helped with the prosecution in the UK but was disappointed not to receive any compensation although the traffickers were imprisoned. She then found a job, continued psychotherapy and was slowly recovering from the experience. However, one month before the interview, Larisa lost her job, which caused her distress. She mentioned that was afraid of becoming homeless and that she would be 'forced again into prostitution'. Additionally, she discussed her pain, anxiety, attempted suicide and self-harm. Her main concern was to find work to avoid having to return to sex work.

Ana's story

Ana was recruited for the interview with the help of a police officer in Romania. The interview took place in her house over the phone. Ana seemed comfortable, easy-going and happy to talk about her life. However, we encountered challenges due to the circumstances of the interview as her children were at home, and at times she was reluctant to describe certain experiences and avoided explicit words such as 'prostitution', 'pimp' and 'rape'. She said that she was in a good place emotionally; and that she was stable and content with her current situation. We were able to create rapport because we were both mothers, a role she valued.

The traffickers promised Ana work in the UK. She did not spend much time in trafficking and had no prior experience of sex work. Her mother had some influence over the trafficking recruitment though she did not want to provide details on that. She also talked about difficulties she had had with her family and mentioned not growing up with them. Ana talked a little about her experience of violence and abuse. Ana experienced a lack of freedom and was being constantly under the control of someone else, which she described as hard to endure. She was enthusiastic about her escape and how she had planned to run. The story was short but detailed, and she mentioned that *'I was pregnant, running in the night barefoot until I found a police crew'*. She led the police directly to the traffickers. Afterwards, she mentioned that she wanted to get all the possible tests and medical check-ups to ensure the child was safe. Ana wanted to return immediately to Romania and was formally repatriated. She was in close contact with the Romanian authorities and the prosecution process. She recalled the immediate events after she arrived in Romania and her disappointment at not being welcomed and helped by her family although, she said: *'it was winter and I was heavily pregnant'*.

Different NGOs supported Ana in Romania in her initial stages post-trafficking. She placed her child in care for a short period so that she was able to work and then found a partner who she married and with whom she had had another child. At the time of the interview, Ana was contentedly living with her two children and husband and happy that she found what she called, *'a good man'*. She planned to start working once the children were in school. Ana mentioned her courage and determination to fight trafficking. She emphasised her critical thinking and how she was now cautious about *'things which look too good to be true'*. Overall, she was optimistic about the future and constantly mentioned her faith in God.

Maia's story

Maia was recruited for the interview with the support of the anti-trafficking agency in Romania. Maia was at home for the online interview. She was very articulate and spoke in depth about her experiences, feelings and struggles, reflecting on her mental health and needs. The interview was very intense due the depth of the experiences she shared.

She grew up with her extended family until she was a teenager and later moved in with her parents. She mentioned issues with her mother and being left on the streets due to conflicts during her youth. Maia had a daughter from a relationship that ended before she was trafficked and she took care of her daughter with the help of her family. Maia talked about her entry into trafficking as being: '*played out to me as a game';* a situation of debt-bondage. However, she was unaware that she would be expected to be involved in sex work when she decided to migrate and work in the UK. The trafficker was in a relationship with her, and she talked extensively about the abuse, manipulation and tactics he used to ensure her obedience. She referred to him as '*the loverboy'* and talked about his considerable influence in her community, involvement in high-level corruption and contacts he had in Romania. She was the first participant to describe her community, the clans (i.e., Roma extended family systems) involved in illegal activities, including trafficking, money laundering, drugs, guns and robberies and she was Roma herself. She could not leave the trafficking situation on her own and mentioned that *'the only thing keeping me alive was my daughter and the need to be strong for her';* additionally, she received some money from the traffickers which kept her silent and she did not try to escape.

During a police raid, UK authorities imprisoned Maia and accused her of running a brothel. She could not trust the authorities, and the traffickers still controlled her. She spent over five months in prison in the UK, but during the legal process, she was able to testify against the traffickers and was released. However, she was expelled and forbidden to re-enter the UK. She considered this an injustice, as she felt she was not trusted and was a victim while the traffickers fled to Romania and were free. Upon return, Maia experienced a lack of support and understanding from her family which exacerbated her mental health problems, including constant depression and thoughts of suicide. She finally accepted the support of an NGO, which she described as being like '*a mother'* to her, positively affecting her recovery. She then moved out of the

family home with her daughter, acquired additional skills and education, and opened an online business with the support of the NGO. At the time of the interview, she felt content with herself and could ensure that her daughter - '*the most significant purpose in my life*' - was safe and happy.

Irina's story

Irina was recruited for the interview by a Romanian NGO and the online interview took place at the NGO's office. I noticed that the staff from the NGO were in proximity and may have influenced how comfortable and open Irina was.

Irina also went to the UK to work but, as she put it, '*I was faced with something else*'. She did not talk much about her trafficking experience but emphasised her escape. Irina was trafficked for a short period of time (it was unclear from the interview exactly how long, and she did not want to discuss this) and managed to run from the traffickers' location and ask for help from a taxi driver who contacted the police. She was pregnant at that time and worried that her child might be affected by the experience. Irina wanted to return to Romania immediately and be with her family. She spoke highly of her family, who supported her extensively upon her return and she was still living with them. She was divorcing her husband. It was unclear from the interview whether he was part of the group of traffickers although this was later suggested by the NGO staff supporting her.

Irina was grateful for the support received from the NGO in Romania and the police officers in charge of her case. She was delighted to have won the court case against the traffickers and said that *'my confidence and trust in myself have increased ever since'.* Currently, she was working in a factory and was also self-employed. Her family helped her with childcare, and her main preoccupations were her child's wellbeing and safety.

Diana was recruited for interview with the support of the anti-trafficking agency in Romania. The interview was online whilst Diana was at home. She was living in the UK but was still in touch with the Romanian authorities and an NGO that supported her. Diana talked with humour, appeared brave, and seemed positive about life. Her reflections about love, self-love and values brought a different perspective to the data from that of the other survivor participants.

Diana had worked in another country for a while, but due to the economic crisis in 2015, had to look for other employment. She decided to move to the UK and practise sex work; she had some acquaintances practising sex work, and it felt like a good choice for her. In the UK, Diana initially needed someone to support her and initiate her into what she called '*the underground life of sex work'.* She found a man who helped her. She spoke about their relationship, how she fell in love with him and she mentioned that: '*I started doing everything for him*'. However, during the seven years of their relationship and sex work, she said she did not benefit much from the money she was making.

'*I was blinded by love',* she said. She could not see a way out of her situation and trusted the man wholeheartedly although he was married and his wife and children were in the UK. Diana blamed herself for '*being stupid',* being in love and suffering in the relationship. She said that: *'at no point in time I felt like a victim'*; this was all for love and her need to be with someone. However, in the last year of their relationship she decided to break up with him and return to Romania, where she was called to testify against him in a bigger international trafficking case. Only when talking to the Romanian authorities did she understand that she herself has been a victim and learned about the 'loverboy approach'; she quickly identified herself as a victim.

She started working in Romania, but mentioned that shortly after, '*I could not I could not find my place there'* and so decided to return to the UK. In the UK, she was working as a waitress at the time of the interview, but she had become dissatisfied with her life, her lack of options and the feeling that she *'wasted half of her life'* while being with this man and involved in sex work. As that moment, she was still looking for mental health support and wanted to resolve some of these issues. She also spoke extensively about sex work legalisation and her views on what would be best and safer for women practicing sex work. Diana expressed a strong desire to become a mother and have a family.

Desires to better one's life through migration, in light of vulnerability, poorly informed decisions and traffickers

Although the study was designed to focus on their current situation and post-trafficking journeys, survivors talked about their experiences as a whole, describing events and episodes before being trafficked, entering trafficking, the period of exploitation, their exit/escape and returning to Romania. In this section, the terminology of sex work and prostitution is used interchangeably reflecting participants' language as well as the terminology used in the legislation and generally in the Romanian context.

An initial major theme across the data was the women's vulnerability due to background factors and their need to migrate. Women's perspectives on their experiences authenticate the complexity of post-trafficking trajectories and trafficking's impact on their wellbeing. Thus, vulnerability was discussed early in the interviews, starting with their family and community contexts, which both became key elements of that vulnerability. Vulnerabilities encountered resonate with the wider literature on trafficking (see Chapter 1 and 2). Survivors perceived their families of origin as either a risk or a supportive factor. They described abuse, conflict and violence as part of their pre-trafficking experience and how their families supported them inadequately. Three survivors spent part of their lives with extended family: for example, Maia, who had not grown up with her mother, moved back in with her when she 13 only to be kicked out at 15. Meanwhile Larisa and Ana were placed in childcare institutions in Romania. Although still in touch with their families, Larisa, Ana and Maia did not have a good relationship with their parents (especially their mothers) and highlighted having many conflicts. Four of the women had children themselves, but Larisa did not live with her daughter due to her delicate situation:

> I have no family. I only have a 13-year-old girl who lives with my mother in [city name]. I talk to her sometimes. But my mother won't let me in the house. I don't go to her, no. When I was going there, she would yell at me and kick me out, *get out of here, you whore!* Loudly like that. And then I stayed here, an orphan. (Larisa)

Similarly, Ana spoke of being abandoned at birth and lacking a good relationship with her parents:

> When I arrived in Romania, my parents or my presumed parents, because I met my mother at 17 years old, and she didn't care when she saw me. She doesn't really have that motherly soul if you abandon your child at birth. I begged her; I wanted to stay with her for a while to give birth because I had nowhere

to go in the dead of winter with a small child in my belly. And she quickly wanted to get rid of me, so I could leave her. (Ana)

Survivors conceptualised the decisions which led to trafficking as either poorly informed or the result of coercion and manipulation. In the case of Larisa and Ana, their families influenced their entry into sex work and trafficking. Neither described explicitly what happened, and the women were visibly uncomfortable sharing more details[16]. However, there were signs of family involvement, abusive relationships, neglect and other elements which are perceived to heighten the risk of being trafficked. Bodrogi's (2015) study and Pascoal's (2016) identified similar concerns regarding family involvement in trafficking in Romania. Survivors mentioned that:

As for prostitution, without wanting, I was forced by my mother, but long ago… because of my mother. I had to take the money to her, and I had to sleep outside on the street. (Larisa)

I have [pause]; everything happened because of my mother. I told her at the very beginning. *Look, mom, I want to look for a job myself, with a work permit with an honest salary, I don't want to do what I did.* And through these things, all this happened to me, [pause] with these things in London [avoiding terminology]. (Ana)

On the other hand, Irina and Diana had supportive families, although Diana's family was unaware of their daughter's trafficking experience; both families supported them when needed. All the survivors talked about the value of family support, especially after coming out of trafficking. Maia said it was important to feel supported, *'that someone is there to hold your back and fight for you'*, although there was no support in her case. However, as noted in their accounts, where such support was available, it was a great resource and enabled them to become more independent:

I am currently divorcing. I live with my parents, and they help me. The child is with me. Grandmother or mother takes care of the child while I am at work. (Irina)

All the women talked about work opportunities and their journeys as economic migrants were prompted by the desire for a better life and autonomy. As discussed in Chapter 1, the increase in migration from Romania to Western Europe follows similar patterns and aspirations as those described by survivors in

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[16] e.g. the women avoided specific terminology or sharing such details; the breaks they took while talking showed that they were disturbed; some looked very distressed when talking about entry and I chose not to probe such topics; Ana had her children close at the moment of the interview.

this study (Mateoc-Sîrb et al., 2014; Mîndrican & Matei, 2023; Nicolaescu, 2020). The implications of gender, rurality, education level, and ethnicity play a significant role in expectations of pre-migration and migration outcomes for Romanian women, as noted by Pantea (2012), Croitoru (2018) and Horváth & Anghel (2009). Only Irina and Diana had finished high school, the others had only completed two compulsory high school years. Additionally, before trafficking, none of the women had any work qualifications. Larisa was the only one who practised sex work before trafficking; she spoke about her limited options and how she sometimes needed to do sex work in order to survive[17]:

> Many times, I ran out of money and had to go to the city to prostitute myself because I had no job. Well, if I had a job, I would not do it, where should I go? Hit one on the head? Steal and go to prison? God forbid. (Larisa)

Another key element of vulnerability identified was the need or desire to migrate due to the lack of employment and financial opportunities. Thus, entry, or being trafficked also represented a risk taken because of the financial opportunities envisioned through migration. Consequently, survivors noted, they accepted the chance to migrate, thus trusting others and taking a risk:

> Both the woman and her man were Romanians [traffickers]. They took me from my city; he said he was taking me to work and so on, but I ended up seized and sold. It was supposed to be a workplace. I didn't expect it. (Larisa)

> I thought it was a safe job as advertised, but when I arrived, something completely different was waiting for me. (Irina)

These experiences of migration were closely linked to traffickers and women acknowledged their involvement early in the interviews. Maia was recruited through the '*loverboy'* approach (see Chapter 1), experiencing being controlled and manipulated as well as having an emotional connection with the trafficker. Maia discussed her hopelessness while in trafficking and referenced her family again, as they knew about her situation but did not help her exit the trafficking situation. She described the traffickers as *'exceptionally well-skilled in manipulation'* and, able to *'play with the women's needs, desires and vulnerabilities'*, which they (traffickers) ultimately used these elements against the women:

> When I arrived in the UK, I never thought about this [sex work/trafficking]. I never thought I would get there. But it was planned for me, like a game. A certain scheme where someone helped me with money

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[17] Larisa talked with significant distress and discomfort about this, and she often stopped and cried.

with interest, and I got there… They [traffickers] are also watching how you are at home, your family, and what is happening with you… if you had a stronger family, they wouldn't be able to interfere so much; they might confuse your mind, but look, your family is there and fight for you. So traffickers wouldn't have so much courage [to exploit women]. But the moment they see that you are weak, there is no one from your family to pull you back; they become the masters [owners], know precisely where to hit you, know exactly how to talk, and how to manipulate you to pieces. (Maia)

Of all the survivor participants, only Diana had decided independently to become a sex worker, although this later became exploitation. She regarded her entry as a personal choice motivated by her need for economic benefit. Diana mentioned that she '*did not want to pose as a victim*'; it was a conscious and rational decision to join the sex industry:

> For seven years, I worked as a prostitute. I came to England after the economic crisis and said, *I want a better life.* So I left with the idea of practising prostitution here; for a year or two because I had an acquaintance who was already doing that, and she had a lot of money. And after all, *why can't I do it myself?*

However, when she looked back, she realised that the people she had been in touch with prior to arriving in the UK had planned to exploit her: *'I came through a mutual friend but didn't know that he already had plans, <u>come, I will help you.</u>[18] So he introduced me to another guy, and I spent a lot of time with him as he cared for everything. And, of course, I fell in love with him.'*

Finally, as participants recalled, the community and the locations they were recruited from represented another risk. These were described by survivors as vulnerable communities or places with a high incidence of criminal networks. For example, Maia, described her community and her concerns about the lack of law enforcement and governmental interventions in that place along with the risks of being brought up or living in that community and how traffickers '*showed off*' without repercussions:

> The person who brought me to UK used to brag; he told everyone what he was doing. He was not afraid of anything at all. And automatically, being with him, they [family, community] knew what was happening. My family didn't dare to confront him. He was part of several quite powerful clans and had much power… In the village I come from, where most people are pimps, drug dealers, and loan sharks…

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[18] Underlining was used when a research participant quoted or impersonated someone else; it was used to highlight such instances in continuous paragraphs and create a differentiation between what participants said that could be attributed to them and when they were quoting or citing someone else. When quotations/extracts were isolated from paragraphs in the text, to highlight similar instances I used italics.

> Everyone was part of a certain clan; you could not comment in front of anyone. And since childhood, it was something like that. That's how things work there (…) they don't even hide who they are (…) around 3000 inhabitants, but 80% of them do that (criminal activities). (Maia; described herself as Roma)

These factors and contexts of vulnerability represented a main theme addressed in this Chapter as it presented survivor's contexts and importantly, it shaped their trafficking and post-trafficking experiences, which are described in the following sections. Vulnerability, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, takes many forms, has many contexts that impact it, and informs possible risks when it comes to trafficking. However, as noted in this chapter, women's narratives reflect the complexities of choices in light of economic independence, which distance themselves from common perceptions of passive actors lacking agency (Agustin, 2007; Smith & Mac, 2018).

Violence and manipulation experienced in trafficking and exploitative 'love relationships'

A common theme identified from the interviews with survivors was the violence and abuse endured whilst being trafficked. This was particularly relevant given the complex relationships of attachment, love or partnership the women had with the traffickers. Importantly, all the survivors interviewed experienced violence at the hands of their traffickers, ranging from threats and emotional blackmail to severe physical abuse. Traffickers used physical violence to control the women, and they described beatings and physical abuse inflicted for all kinds of reasons: if clients were unhappy, for not bringing in enough money, for not obeying, for trying to escape (Larisa, Ana, Maia, Diana). Their stories briefly touched on the violence endured, the '*immense trauma*' (Maia), the constant fear, (including of being murdered), and the threats that, for some (Maia, Diana), had stopped only recently. They described a lack of self-confidence (Larisa, Irina), episodes of intense depression (Maia), undervaluing their existence and '*being hunted*' (Ana). As a result of these experiences and psychological impact three survivors (Larisa, Ana, Maia) mentioned thoughts of and even attempts at suicide:

I was forced, raped, robbed of money, drugged, injected, beaten, stripped to my bare skin… either C. [trafficker's wife] or her husband came and grabbed me by the mouth, and that's when he gave me that punch. I was facing backwards; I wanted to throw myself out of the window. (Larisa)

Traffickers combined physical with emotional violence and abuse, especially when they were involved in a 'loverboy' relationship. Even Diana, who was not coerced directly to stay in the relationship, experienced violence triggered by other factors. As Diana described, although she was free, her emotional connection with the trafficker resulted in her staying in the abusive relationship. She realised the extent of the exploitation only after talking to the police:

The police officers explained, *we know the whole story; we also have statements from other girls that you were beaten.* And I said *no, that in the end, I wasn't held with a gun on my head or forced.* It was through other methods; he didn't beat me because I wasn't making money, but all kinds of other reasons invoked either jealousy or that I spoke badly or I do not know what. They told me *we know it's not that thing, but that's also considered a crime, the loverboy.* And they told me that: *you are the injured party.* (Diana)

The emotional manipulation and the connection between the traffickers and the women, or the debt-bondage within which the women were caught, ensured women stayed with their traffickers and continued working for them. Such practices are common in cases of trafficking whereby various forms of coercion are employed by traffickers to exert power and control over women (Bodrogi, 2015; Contrares et al., 2018; Lee, 2011; Reid, 2016). It was a '*game of falling in love and keeping you there',* Maia explained. Maia and Diana talked about the strategies traffickers used for *'changing the women, turning them against authorities'* (Maia). Both considered that such strategies, ultimately changed the women's (i.e., trafficked women in general) values, and mentalities and normalised their reality through extreme violence and emotional manipulation. Maia explained that '*traffickers used to tell women that they were there to protect them and that they could not achieve anything without them'.* This was a matter of psychological abuse as Maia recounted:

The control was very high; you couldn't see much around you anymore... And the moment you hang out with these kinds of people, they have to change you, silence you, make you different, to become evil [mean]. For example, if they [traffickers] happen to be arrested or something, it's because they are very good people, but the police and the people there [UK] want something bad towards them; they want to take bread from their mouth: *No dear, you have to be by my side, because that's how you prove to me that you love me; you need to love me because I am by your side.* Or if not, it is the other thing: *I destroy*

you, kill you, throw acid in your face, etc. It's one of two, I don't know if there are any more, but I've experienced these. (Maia)

Diana shared how she fell in love with the trafficker, the attention, care, kind gestures and support for her sex work, and how she slowly started to develop feelings for him and ended up '*truly in love with him'*:

At first, honestly, he wasn't my type. If I had met him under any other circumstances, I would not have fallen in love with him ever in my life because he was not my type of man in terms of looks and all that. However, he won me over because he sat next to me night after night. He said *YES* to everything and spoke very nicely. So after a few months, I moved in with him while practising my job.

At the same time, she recognised that she also needed him for safety. Even when Diana found out about his family life, she decided to stay with him though it was not ideal: '*he said that he had nothing to do with her [his wife], nothing. And then I discovered that the wife and the children were in the UK; he kept them hidden'.* Moreover, she spoke about the need for trafficked women to rely on '*traffickers, pimps, lovers'* for their safety. She considered herself lucky because the trafficker mostly behaved *'nicely'* while she heard of other girls being beaten, physically tied up and abused. Thus, she considered her experience different from that of other trafficked women: '*I chose this guy somehow forced by my surroundings and ended up falling in love.'*

As part of the controlling, coercive mechanisms, Maia mentioned the threats traffickers made against her child. This caused her enormous anguish:

You have a weakness, and my weakness was my child. And every time, the threats were directed at my child. And I love my child more than anything in the world. Whenever I wanted to do something; I was told I would lose my child. *You will see that you will not have her anymore; we will take your child*. It was an extremely painful thing. (Maia)

For many of the survivors, the money was also an issue: they either did not get any or were left with very little - *'the money stayed with them. In the beginning, they let me send a bit at home to my child; I was able to send some money home and build my house* (Maia). Larisa worked '*day-in-day-out',* but the traffickers '*robbed her of 3,600 pounds'*. She just wanted to get that back in the end, although she suffered, *'it hurt me more because that money was earned by my hand and it was stolen. I didn't even get to eat or drink a coffee, there were so many clients at the door'* (Larisa). In contrast, Diana talked about how much money she used to make, and though she was sharing it with the trafficker, she could spend it on '*little*

things' and it still gave her satisfaction that she had been able to send some home and support her family. However, she was not allowed to make significant savings or investments.

Women also discussed the clients, noting that they needed to *'make clients happy'* (Ana) and have many clients per day or *'10 clients at the door'* (Larisa). Diana mentioned the risk of violence from clients and her own experiences of such violence, and how women would not take any action against the clients out of the same fear they felt both for the traffickers and the authorities, and the repercussions they might face if they made a complaint:

> They broke the door with their foot and entered with knives [presumed clients] … And I was one of the lucky ones with only one recalcitrant customer. But I've heard stories from girls who have been drugged, threatened with a sword, abused and yet didn't go to the police… Because they [women] say that eventually, they would also have problems. (Diana)

Maia also had a bad experience of inappropriate treatment from the UK police. Reporting that, a lack of trust in authorities and the women's disinclination to engage with them was also linked to previous experiences women had with the police whilst being trafficked:

> The police came over us and controlled us, finding us sitting there. Each time there was no one to actually approach you with *are you ok? everything is okay?* I was simply breaking the law, but they didn't see beyond that. They talked to you very harshly and very stupidly. (Maia)

Although the women spoke briefly about violent, abusive relationships with the traffickers, most did not want to share much. It was noticeable that they were generally distressed when recalling those experiences, yet they did describe the impact on their mental and physical health. Women's accounts present nuanced experiences with the traffickers, levels of exploitation and financial outcomes from trafficking.

Negative impact of exploitation and exiting the trafficking situation

The women talked about how trafficking affected their physical and mental health and general well-being, representing an urgent need to exit the trafficking situation. Irina and Ana were pregnant during trafficking

and were concerned about the impact of the exploitation on their child: *'After I thought what I've been through, I was extremely worried that the child might get something or be sick* (Irina); *'When I exited, the first thing was to ask for a check-up and see if the baby was fine'* (Ana). Motherhood during or as a consequence of trafficking is a common occurrence and reflects both further risks for survivors upon exiting, as noted in the literature (Pascoal, 2020; Surtees, 2018). Furthermore, survivors were also anxious about the impact of trafficking on their own physical health. For example, Larisa mentioned that was unable to eat properly for days because she had so many clients; Diana shared about her issues as she started to overeat and neglected her health. She noted her anxieties with weight gain, which further affected her sense of self-worth and control: '*I've reached 116 kg from 70; I just didn't feel good mentally and about myself, and I found comfort and satisfaction in food'* (Diana). Literature on the effects of trafficking on victims and survivors, regardless of gender, suggests the numerous negative outcomes of trafficking, which include *'medium- to long-term physical, sexual, and mental health problems, including injuries, STIs, and probable depression, anxiety, and PTSD'* (Oram et al., 2016, p. 1076).

All the women discussed experiencing mental health issues due to the constant fear, control, and violence lived in trafficking, which impacted on their self-perception. For instance, Maia described how being trafficked made women: '*feel lost, abandoned… not worth it… small'*, something the traffickers aimed at '*so they can control you better'* (Maia). Ana similarly noted how *'constant fear and desperation,'* reached the point where she *'couldn't take it anymore'*. Discrimination, exclusion and racism were other things that some women experienced. They talked about people treating them differently and knowing why they were there and how that further damaged their mental health. For example, Maia referred to the instances of discrimination and '*certain moments of racism'* she had experienced as a Romanian woman in the UK. She thought that people who met them knew what they were doing, and so treated them *'differently, disrespectfully*.' She had felt '*pretty miserable; constantly judged'*. Similar key points were encountered by other studies among sex trafficking survivors and sex workers, which suggest the extent of victim blaming at a societal level, even among authorities, is common, has negative consequences on their mental health, and promotes further marginalisation and exclusion (Hanks, 2021; Shin et al., 2022; Wiener et al., 2021).

At some points during their interviews, women talked about their desperation to escape the situation. Ana and Irina spoke enthusiastically about their plans to escape and their anxiety about the consequences: '*I ran, and a taxi driver helped me; he called the police, and at that moment, I felt like I owned it. I had the*

power and was confident (Irina). Ana also talked about her escape, and her courage and luck in finding police forces on the street:

> When I ran away from there, it was night, like 9 or 10 pm. I went through some neighbourhoods, I ran away 'holding my feet' [as fast as I could], and I was really lucky that I ran into that police crew. I don't know what would have happened otherwise, I'd probably be dead. They took my documents, but I hid a copy smartly; 5 minutes after the pimp left, I just ran. It was as if God would tell me: *run away from that place, run away from that place…* Many people asked me afterwards *how did you manage to escape this?* I thought about, planned and then acted on it. They said that girls rarely get away, but I had that courage in me, the nerve [gumption][19]. (Ana)

In some cases, being at the end of their strength and unable to endure more violence was a crucial factor in their decision to escape. For example, Larisa talked about her thoughts and tentative of suicide as the only way out or to get attention and be rescued: *'I wanted to jump, it was the third or fourth floor … I just couldn't do it anymore, I thought I am going crazy'*. Although the process of exiting the trafficking experience differed, four out of five women were similarly able to decide and act upon their exit. For example, although she wanted to escape the situation she was in, Larisa could not move freely. However, she was able to ask a client for help and so contacted the police:

> I will never forget that client. He was a gentleman. I was crying, shouting *help me, God bless you*, I asked him in Hungarian because the traffickers did not speak Hungarian... *please give me the postcode* and he gave me. That happened on Thursday evening, and the next day I gave the address to the police, and they came there. (Larisa)

Due to the complexity of her situation and the tactics used by traffickers, Maia was not able to fully explain her situation to authorities in the first instance and was consequently considered complicit in the trafficking allegations by UK authorities:

> I was arrested, spent over five months in prison in the UK. Because I was the person who ran the brothel on paper. Obviously, the trafficker would use someone else, not his name to rent things. I didn't know what to do and could not speak out of fear. The traffickers all ran to Romania.

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[19]Since it was difficult to choose the term that would best describe what the participant said due to language and traditional idioms, an alternative word is suggested in brackets to ensure a more accurate translation and interpretation.

As she recalled, in prison, she came to understand her circumstances and overcame her fears of speaking up and confronting her traffickers. However, this episode greatly affected her; she described the injustice, the absence of empathy and the lack of proper investigation of her case by UK authorities. She recognised what she called '*my limitations'* in not trusting the authorities in the first place and being manipulated and controlled by the trafficker while in prison. Regardless of that, she called several times her experience with the police *'a very bad experience'.* She talked at length about the court case and what had kept her quiet, highlighting once again the control, and manipulation, and how traffickers operated to ensure women would comply and that they themselves would not be held accountable for their deeds. Maia noted that at the time she was in court, the traffickers *'controlled everything even from the outside so that I could turn in guilty. They knew how to handle things from the outside. I appeared guilty.'* Fortunately, the judge requested a 30-day delay to find out exactly what had happened. Maia was released, but as she pointed out, the experience of being trafficked and the injustice of the court case decreased her self-worth and trust and left her traumatised. As discussed in Chapter 2 (FitzGerald, 2018), the challenge of proving one's innocence is even harder in a context where prescribed narratives of victimisation and ideal victims persist.

Finally, Diana talked about her escape, which was linked to the situation of the trafficker and her relationship with him. When she finished the relationship with him, he continued threatening her, but she returned to Romania. She testified against him after Romanian police explained that she was a victim of a crime. Though Diana spoke with the police in the UK many times, she mentioned that she '*lacked the courage to disclose'*. The following extract highlights the issues with trust and the struggle the women had with police engagement, and in consequence, police being unable to act due to lack of proof:

> That's what I said to the police at the interview: *since 2018, they have been followed [traffickers]. Why did you let them mock [exploit] all these girls all these years?* It was a massive case. But they needed proof. The truth is that if the police didn't come to me, I would have never gone to make a complaint willingly; I didn't have the courage. I was praying to God, Lord, how many times I prayed for the police to take them, to stop them. God listened to my prayer, and it all happened as they [police] came to me. (Diana)

While experiences of exiting the trafficking situation differed, the police were involved in all situations, and as mentioned in the previous section, policing experiences were complex and nuanced. According to the literature (Jonsson, 2019; Platt et al., 2022; Smith & Mac, 2018), policing around trafficking and sex

work increases the risk exposure to violence among trafficked women and sex workers. This was evident in several instances where survivors had interactions with police. Although not all experiences were portrayed in a negative light, those negative experiences (Larisa in Romania, Maia in the UK) impacted on survivors' well-being, engagement with authorities and general perception of safety and trust. Moreover, these episodes allowed for an expression of agency and taking control for some of the women, and, in spite of their negative experiences, they were enthusiastic in describing their escapes, distancing themselves from common perceptions that suggest the need for 'rescue' and 'saviours' (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; McGrath & Watson, 2018). The women faced several challenges once out of trafficking and emphasised their vulnerabilities and the adverse effects of the experience, presented in the following section.

Post-trafficking trajectories faced with challenges of reintegration. Finding 'peace' and safety

The challenges faced post-trafficking, especially in reintegrating, represented yet another theme. Returning to their country of origin was an urgent need and desire for Ana and Irina due to their pregnancies and safety concerns. However, the decision-making process varied for the survivors. Four wanted to return to Romania; Maia was not given any choice and was deported once the legal process ended. While she would have still preferred to return home, being treated as a criminal was highly upsetting for her. In contrast, Larisa was advised to leave the UK despite her specifically requesting to remain there. The reasons given were the lack of job opportunities in the UK. She wanted to return to the UK afterwards because, regardless of her experience of trafficking, she had found some of her UK contacts in safe houses to be friendly, accepting and non-judgemental. All the women reported they had not been informed about or were aware of the NRM system[20], and only one, Larisa, received support in the UK for a short period. Two were repatriated days after trafficking (Ana, Irina). Diana returned to Romania

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[20] To avoid confusion, I ensured that, apart from using the term NRM, I explained what it meant and how it was utilised in the context during the interview. Yet survivors were not recalling it or were unfamiliar with the process. It was not possible to probe this particular finding afterwards, and it could be further investigated.

independently and decided to restart her life in Romania. However, she was not able to re-adapt and later returned to the UK.

All the survivors interviewed passed through the justice system and interacted with the police in both countries. Four of the women reported a positive experiences with the police in the UK and felt that they received the support they needed. Moreover, they were also impressed with the quality of the approach and how the police treated them. Diana had a similar experience and was *'surprised to see the changes'* in the Romanian system and how professional and helpful authorities were towards her case. Only Maia had a negative experience with the police in the UK. She talked about how difficult it was to be understood by the UK authorities, who did not understand how traffickers operated. In contrast, she described a positive experience with the Romanian authorities later on. Maia recalled her experience coming out of trafficking only to end up in another '*much worse situation'* with more significant risks, from traffickers and other OCGs who knew her and started re-exploiting her:

> After you escape and get rid of these pimps, others follow you, who know how much money you made, who you were with. I was trying to get away from him and ran into someone else while trying to escape this vicious circle. And I got worse after that. I was beaten very badly and threatened, and serious threats. And I had no-one to ask for help. I couldn't go to the police because those people had much influence. Everywhere I went they knew someone, I had to get somewhere very high and found real people and traffickers were arrested. (Maia)

Other risks included a lack of safety in the family of origin, as Larisa experienced. Following a lack of assessment after her repatriation, Larisa was returned to her extended family, where she was at immediate risk of sexual abuse.

The women talked about their experiences afterwards and their emotional stability as being crucial. Whatever had happened whilst being trafficked, Ana said, was '*still haunting' her* (Ana). They experienced much negativity – lack of self-trust, confidence and esteem, which were worsened by the lack of acceptance and support from family. Upon return, Maia needed to deal with her family's rejection and bullying, negatively affecting her mental health:

> After I finished the experience and went back home and said I'm safe, I have a place to stay, I can fight on; my family came, they were totally unhappy with me, saw absolutely nothing good in me and this thing it made me feel a lot worse than I was. You feel I don't know, bad, bad, bad. Unstable.

She expressed profound pain, disappointment, and a state of confusion with mental health challenges:

> I didn't know what to do. On the one hand, I knew that I had to fight and I had to go on, and I would succeed because I am capable of succeeding. But on the other side, the people around me were pulling me down… Anyway, I had lost my confidence, and felt that I was insignificant, because those people destroyed my head…. And after that, other things followed at home, which was the same thing. *I'm no good, I don't mean anything*, and I've basically sunk like that into a bad thing, a big depression… a deep sadness. I would wake up crying and fall asleep crying. I thought that I had gone crazy. It was awful. (Maia)

For all the women, mental health challenges were the most difficult to deal with post-trafficking. Women talked about a lack of peace or as Larisa put it, after *'what I've been through it's too much'*, and of recurring depressions. In addition, Diana also talked about the *'anxiety and deep unhappiness'*, that she might not be able to have a family due to her experience and the time she had *'lost in her life'*. These findings represent common themes in the post-trafficking literature (see Chapter 2).

Employment, financial security and housing were needed to keep safe and independent; women spoke about how these were achieved or remained a challenge. Three women worked, and one was a housewife supported by her partner; Larisa felt that unemployment represented a significant challenge. Her vulnerabilities were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and her lack of income. Expressing profound sadness, she mentioned that not having a job would mean having to return to sex work:

> I have nowhere else to go because…I have nowhere to turn to if I run out of rent and stay on the street. If I end up on the street again, I better know I'm taking my own life; and I didn't have to end up in prostitution again… I don't know what will happen until Christmas. Soon it's time to pay the rent. Where to get money? So without wanting, I might need to go back and prostitute myself for money. I have nothing else to do. (Larisa)

Diana spoke about the difficulties of having a *'good job'* once you pass a certain age, especially if you do not have a qualification. She was concerned about her lack of choices and wanted work to offer her more than mere survival:

> I go here to work and just survive. Plus, the job they do now is waitressing. It is not a job a woman does in her 40s, also no one will hire you at anymore around that age… This was what happened since I left this work [sex work], survive, I didn't find anything else yet [work]. (Diana)

Financial needs post-trafficking are depicted as a prevalent need, whereby a lack of sustainability and financial independence could pose additional risks for trafficking survivors post-trafficking (Hynes et al., 2019; Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023; Pascoal, 2020). Moreover, survivors also needed to ensure their children were safe and did not lack anything (Ana, Maia, Irina). Maia feared for her safety and what might happen when the traffickers were released and might want revenge: *'I want peace'* she said. Although survivors highlighted their immediate struggles, their mental health issues, and the need to ensure their children were safe and well-looked after, they also spoke about their strengths and resources.

Inner strengths and supportive others. 'What keeps me going'

The resources women acknowledged and increased their resilience were seen as being crucial to their survival post-trafficking, such as their inner strengths and supportive others. All survivors mentioned their courage, inner strength and determination to succeed, which could be acknowledged through exercised agency and their actions. This was evident in their language, how they described themselves and in illustrations from their experiences, such as their determination to escape trafficking (Larisa, Ana, Irina). Ana felt empowered after escaping trafficking, as she had become self-reliant. For Larisa, not struggling with substance abuse was a strength and had helped her long term through her situation: *'Well, I don't drink, I don't use drugs, God forbid'*. Four of the women mentioned determination, strength, courage and confidence that they attained afterwards (Larisa, Ana, Irina, Diana). Additionally, Diana described herself as *'very sociable',* and Ana recognised humour as a powerful coping mechanism: *'When I'm sad, I have my husband, he makes me laugh. He is sometimes a clown. I have no reason to be upset because I have children who laugh'.* Supportive relationships and within the family context are considered positive factors in dealing with trauma recovery (López-Zerón & Blow, 2017) and crucial in facilitating recovery among sex trafficking survivors as other studies argued (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2013; Viergever et al., 2019).

Families and children were valuable supportive factors when women found partners or had children (Larisa had a daughter, although not much contact with her; Ana cared for her two children; Irina and Maia had a child). As noticed, there were different elements to this. First, good relationships in the family of origin were a positive source of support (Irina). Second, starting a family gave women support and intimate

relationships with a partner and the children represented for some a source of energy (Ana, Irina, Maia). Finally, parenting brought a new status and a meaningful role for some women (Ana, Diana, Irina), which was positively appreciated beyond the increased significant responsibility for their children. Ana considered that having someone to support and '*accept you'* increased her chances of recovery post-trafficking. For instance, she was grateful that her husband was a man she could: '*discuss things with; … a decent man; and I really wanted to start a family, and nowadays it's hard to find a man like that. I am really glad.*' Only Ana was married and Diana was in a relationship which she did not consider long-lasting.

The survivors interviewed were very much inclined towards having a family and children. Diana spoke about her desire to have a family and how even in trafficking, she had wanted to have a child with the trafficker. She said that she had been disappointed not to have got pregnant with him because she '*was so blinded by love'* but was now grateful that she had not. Nevertheless, Diana saw the family as a means of achieving something she longed for, and although she described her current relationship as unsafe and not ideal, she was willing to continue with it because of the prospect it offered for family life:

> (…) I am with this guy from desperation, because I think that this will be the happiness for me, to have a family and a child, I would have been willing to accept this guy I am with even if he has a few problems with alcohol. But anyway, he's not for me either. (Diana)

Those women who had children talked about them with enthusiasm and joy and described how they gave their life focus, motivation and what could be described as meaning: '*Now the kid is in the first place and I am just focused that he is well'* (Irina); '*What matters to me right now is just the family and the children, to know that they are well and healthy. This makes me strong, confident and hopeful'* (Ana). Similarly, Maia attributed her strength and hope to her daughter and spoke about the effects of motherhood on her, triggering fight, survival and meaning. She needed to be there for her daughter, who was her strength, as her compelling account of determination to ensure that her child was well and was supported illustrates:

> She [child] was my strength. I want her to have a better life, which makes me strong and gives me the ambition to fight on and succeed. I had moments where I felt like I was going to lose my mind and I couldn't do it anymore, well I also had moments where I didn't want to live anymore. But she was my strength, and I knew I had someone and something to fight for. And I wouldn't think for a second that anything bad could happen to her. I want to see her well (…). Because I have never experienced these things in my life (…). I want to give her the understanding not to be afraid. I have always lived with fear and been afraid. Anyone could control me because I was afraid. I didn't have anyone to come here and

lay hands, *wait, you're not alone, I'm by your side*. I didn't have that, and it affected me a lot. Instead, for her, I want to be her strength; even though I am a woman and she has no father, I want to be a mother and father. To be that power that if something happens, I'll be there to support her. (Maia)

Social support was essential for survivors; however as presented by survivors, it was not always easily found. While some women had friends and networks, those networks were not necessarily what they wanted or needed. Three of the women said that they did not need anyone [partners/friends] and wanted to be on their own: Maia stated that she didn't '*have friends, just a few old ones I trust*' (Maia); whilst Larisa said that she did not need at that time friends. She had had some friends in the UK, *'but I had to leave, they were like me and understood me, didn't judge*' (Larisa). Having someone with a similar experience close was important for Larisa's recovery. In contrast, Diana wanted to separate herself from the friends she had made in trafficking: '*They are good girls, but I don't want to live in the past. If I was friends with them and kept in touch, I'd still be somewhere in the past. I would remember all the time'*. Additionally, due to her migration experience, she could not maintain some of her previous friendships and had '*only a few good friends from the past'* who helped her, but in Romania *'I have only my family; no friends, I don't know people*'.

Upon return, UK authorities referred the women to NGOs in Romania that offered support. Survivors talked about the challenges encountered on return to Romania and how it was experienced as '*a constant fight'* to get better and *'back on their feet'* (Ana)*.* With NGO support, family involvement (Irina) and their children (Ana, Maia), they managed to regain confidence, move on and restart their lives as they mentioned. All the women talked about how important it was to get support from the NGOs, how lucky they were, and how they saw the NGO staff as family members who provided advice, resources, care, and attention. Some talked about their hesitance at the beginning due to the lack of trust and how that changed when they saw how non-judgemental and caring NGO staff were with them (Maia, Diana). NGOs provided women with skills (e.g. training and courses), encouraged and supported them through the justice system, and assisted them at difficult times. All the women had received mental health support and counselling through the NGOs in Romania. It was interesting to notice that women could recognise their own lack of trust and *'what those people could do for them'* and were positively surprised (Maia). Guidance was essential for them, especially in the early stages after trafficking: '*so from there with their help I started lifting myself a little bit, job, housing and then created a decent living for myself'* (Ana).

Another critical element in building strength was the possibility of self-awareness and reflecting on one's identity in terms of mental health, self-care, and freedom. The sense of self-discovery was significant for Diana and Maia and allowed them to explore their inner resources, understanding '*who I am and my value'* (Diana). Diana also spoke about *'previous family issues and bad attachment with my father',* which she later linked with the '*toxic love relationship'* she had had with the trafficker and the process of deconstructing that through therapy. She shared the ongoing process of establishing her self-esteem, self-care and self-love:

> This is me in the process of rediscovery of self. To discover who I am, what I am, and what makes me happy (…). During those days, I completely let myself go, and did everything for him (…). I didn't know what to do with myself or what to do for myself afterwards. So this year I travelled, that's all, I was at home, I was in Greece twice. I was like that cow you let loose in the cornfield, and I took it like that as I was held for so long. (Diana)

Obtaining justice also increased confidence and survivors experienced a sense of power when court cases were successful, and traffickers were punished. In some cases, justice was only partially achieved, and women still felt the injustices they had suffered (Larisa, Maia). Although four of the women criticised the law enforcement authorities and the justice system in Romania, they also encountered authorities referred to as *'real people, real professionals'* (Maia) who could ensure that justice was done and who re-established a sense of '*trust and hope in the Romanian justice system'* (Diana). For instance, successful prosecutions brought a lot of joy and satisfaction for Irina, and she '*won the trial'* against the traffickers, with her language denoting a sense of individual victory rather than a state process:

> The police officer called me and congratulated me that I was strong, told the truth about everything, and I won the trial. So I started to believe more in myself after they told me I had won the trial. (Irina)

Finally, all the women talked about their faith, God or their belief and described faith as a strength that gave them hope and courage to move on: *'God will help me'* (Ana); *'God protected me'* (Diana); *'Thank God for this!'* (Larisa, Irina). For example, Maia said: *'In a way, God works in each thing. And I entrust myself very much in God'.* She understood her release from the UK prison as a sign of divine intervention since she had thought it was impossible to make any major changes in her legal case. Similarly, Diana spoke about her faith and what it meant to her, removing it from a specific religious context and conceptualising a protective spiritual entity that guided and cared for her: *'God knew,'* she said*.*

He has everything aside, and he protected me. I used to pray to God all the time. I am not faithful in that way, a churchgoer, but I believe in my own faith. So, I am grateful to God that I am healthy; somehow, it's never too late.

In addition to external resources and supporting factors (e.g., family, children, NGOs, other actors), the women had a connection to inner resources in terms of faith which according to them, supported their recovery. These supportive factors will be further discussed in Chapter 6. Although they are encountered among survivors who have already accessed support from NGOs, social services, and the justice system, they remain important for being further explored alongside the needs of survivors (Davy, 2015; Hynes et al., 2019; Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023).

Meaning of the experience. Realising 'what changed' and 'what matters'

A final theme was the realisation that things had changed and what things mattered post-trafficking. This theme was connected to the meaning survivors gave to their experiences and, although they felt that trafficking and the exploitation endured had caused irreversible harm, they also found ways of managing the effects. All survivors interviewed described themselves as more cautious when meeting new people and in relationships. Some had restricted their contact with acquaintances and were always thinking ahead about people's intentions (Larisa, Maia, Irina). The fear, doubt and lack of trust that four of the women carried with them afterwards created significant challenges for how they related to others: *'I have a great fear about meeting new people. That's why even now... I am not going around to meet new people because I don't know what is hiding behind them'* (Maia). Trust issues and the process of rebuilding trust are crucial aspects in the life of survivors after being trafficked, yet this process is seen as highly challenging but essential for their recovery and well-being (Daniel & Kndse, 1996 in Brennan & Plambech, 2018; Evans, 2020; Loomba, 2017).

The experience had made Diana reflect on her life. She realised that she had been content before trafficking and the trafficking experience allowed her to change her view about mental health in general: *'Before this, I didn't realise that I was happy without knowing it, and I didn't need much. So when people*

talked about mental health and depression, I did not believe that… But now that I lived this, I see it'. Similarly, Larisa said the experience was always there, and the wounds were permanent:

> I am strong, but these things happened to me, I can never wipe them with a sponge. You can have palaces, whatever, you can be happy but this [trafficking experience] will remain for your whole life. So it's like someone comes and cuts you, leaving a scar for the rest of your life... that scar remains in my soul, no one can erase it.

The women considered themselves migrants; despite the worst experiences some were still interested in moving to another country and wanted to migrate (Larisa, Diana). However, all mentioned being more cautious when migrating. Irina said that she would lack: *'the courage to leave (migrate) again alone'*. Maia, too, emphasised the risks of migration:

> When I think about going abroad, I see things completely differently. I see the dark side of things. I met very bad people there, related to prostitution (…), maybe if I'd had other chances, I'd meet different kinds of people. But I saw only the dark side (…), related to drugs and many other things done behind the scenes. (Maia)

Unlike Ana and Irina, it was difficult for Diana to find her place when she returned to Romania. She had lived for over a decade abroad and returning home represented a challenge for her. Thus, moving abroad appeared to be the only option for her. She talked of finding a new place to '*start again'* and going to where she was previously happy and benefitting from that: *'I honestly think if I would finally find my place here [UK] and not hold on like this. To really feel happy, I am thinking of returning to [country she lived in previously before the UK]. I have old friends there, they found work... but look, I still didn't go.'* She further linked this with compromises she had made in the UK, her inability to decide, and the need '*to be pushed'* to move on.

The women's perceptions of sex work were described as having changed between being trafficked and the time of the interview. While some women did not want to talk about sex work (Larisa, Ana, Irina), Maia and Diana discussed the hardships and the courage needed to survive in sex work. As mentioned, their experiences had increased their awareness of and sympathy and empathy towards other women doing sex work. Maia also talked about her perceptions beforehand: '*I was driving with my partner, and we would see girls on the street and I would judge, how on earth could you do something like that? And few years later I got there.'* Her experience provided a different understanding of what it meant to be

there: *'they don't do it for pleasure, and I understood that behind there is someone who controls them, manipulates them, mocks them, and tortures them'*. She then spoke about having more *'compassion, pity, mercy'* and *'becoming aware that you don't have to judge people; because it is just a visual image that she is ok, but you don't really know what is happening to her'*.

In contrast, Diana said that she never judged women in the sex industry but had thought that it was a personal choice; if the women benefited from it, they should do it. She then emphasised the importance of safety (e.g., both sexual and physical) and independence, ensuring that women benefited from this, not others. However, Diana's biggest regret was that she had been used by a trafficker she had been in love with and had been unable to meet her financial needs - her motivation for engaging in sex work willingly in the first place:

> Even before I did this job I didn't judge the girls or those who want to do sex work; do it but do it safely and protect yourself (…). You really need a little strength of character to know how to do this job (…). I accused myself of *what an idiot I was, why I loved him and let myself be used for so many years*. Because this was my big dream, *wow, with this much money, I could do something* (…). But if women consider this is what they have to do, at least be smart about it and do it for THEMSELVES [interviewee's emphasis]. That's what it's all about, do it and do it for you. And do not make it something for your future because I have met women who are still doing it even at 40 or 50. (Diana)

Diana considered that sex work legalisation would empower women, create a safer environment for them, and enable them to avoid men who could later abuse them. She thought that if women could work legally as sex workers they would be less likely to be abused. She argued that the UK government would benefit from sex work taxes and reduce money laundering if sex work were regulated. However, she thought that the UK government *'would keep these issues underground'* and hypocritically avoid them. She then related a story when she was interviewed by the media and asked about criminalising the client or what is often referred to as the Nordic model, but she disagreed and maintained that legalising and regulating sex work would be safer for women:

> My opinion is to legalise it. From the moment it is legalised, like in Germany or the Netherlands; since the girls know they are doing this legally, they won't be calling the same traffickers, pimps, or lovers to help them. (Diana)

In contrast, Ana talked about trying to advise and advocate for other women '*to be strong and independent and not to trust the perfect stories of men'* who might take advantage of them. She aimed to use her story

to prevent others from ending up in similar circumstances. Notions of empowerment, self-trust, independence, and courage to fight were highlighted in her account, reflecting how women were able or unable to speak up owing to their position in the Romanian culture:

> I was advising the girls who went through the same experience not to do this anymore [sex work] or to trust men. If that man tells them, *look, I have a house that I want to offer you*, don't believe them (…). Whatever happened in their past, be strong, don't be silent, and ask for your right to freedom; don't shut your mouth and swallow [Romanian expression for being silenced]. (Ana)

Although survivors in this study had different views on sex work, they all suggested empowerment, independence, and freedom when it comes to choices and labour possibilities. These differences further highlight the need for survivor-led and sex workers-led expertise in exploring those perceptions and nuanced views in regard to sex work, gender inequalities, and women's conditions in specific contexts - such as in the case of Romania, where both survivors and literature suggest issues in regard to women's roles in society (see Chapters 1 and 2).

Some new realisations about life, wisdom, maturity and confidence emerged from the experience as women talked about the way forward, and described what gave them hope and their *'destiny.'* Diana talked about maturity and the realisation that *'life is short'.* She felt that she had *'wasted … and wasted half of it, I lived useless without doing something constructive'*. Although she talked about hope, she acknowledged that this was tempered by day-to-day hardship and their sense of lives *'spoilt'* and scarred (Diana). Some of the other women considered hope a resource and talked about what brings hope, what hope was for them or what it meant to be hopeful. In addition, some participants talked about gratitude (Ana, Maia, Irina) and that things were more or less acceptable in their lives and not worse as they could have been, increasing their sense of contentment.

What the women hoped for was stability, health, good relationships with their families (partners), having their children taken care of and being independent financially. For example, the women talked about new skills learned after trafficking and how that offered them pleasure and confidence and enabled them to continue and have their own businesses (Irina, Maia). Ana also wanted to see her children do well in school, get work and have her own house, *'to make my own place, to have my own door to lock and unlock'.* Diana talked about her desire and hope to have a family and be a mother. However, Larisa wanted

to get any kind of work and not resort to prostitution since she was unemployed at the time of the interview, and as opposed to the other women, she felt hopeless.

Finally, the women talked about purpose and meaning and their search for both beyond survival and merely living. They expressed determination to do more with their lives: Diana wanted to *'try to move somewhere with life, not just as now, simply surviving but doing something more* (Diana). Larisa, Ana, Maia referred to searching for peace, safety and contentment. Higher and meaningful prospects, or 'purpose in life and actualisation' were also identified in a recent study conducted with survivors in the UK (Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023) and resonated with the survivors' accounts and wishes interviewed in this study.

Chapter summary

This chapter reported findings from interviews with Romanian adult female survivors of sex trafficking in the UK. Although a small number of survivors were interviewed, the findings were rich and provided in-depth accounts of the trafficking experiences of Romanian women.

Various internal and contextual vulnerabilities, coupled with women's needs to become financially independent, emerged as a main theme in the data and resonated with the broader literature on vulnerability to trafficking (Alexandru, 2013; Bodrogi, 2015; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; Roth & Laszlo, 2023). Thus, migration was considered as a solution, and in all cases, women decided on migration to access work opportunities and trusted those who proposed employment abroad or were perceived as their boyfriends (Maia). These early decisions were in the main prompted by trust and visible signs of agency expression. Diana's story followed a different path as she migrated having taken a decision to undertake sex work. Realising the exploitative situation they had ended up in, experiences of exploitation and the awareness that their exploitation was planned, represented a shock for the women, and all expressed regretted being trustful and making poorly informed decisions while migrating.

Women's narratives included descriptions of the trafficking experience, and these accounts conveyed experiences of violence, abuse and manipulation commonly encountered in trafficking (Lee, 2011; Knight et al., 2022; Oram et al., 2012; see Chapter 2). Interestingly, for two of the women, these experiences

were also marked by the love relationship with the trafficker, which brought in the notion of the 'loverboy', discussed in Chapter 1. Under these circumstances, these relationships became highly exploitative, and women found themselves unable to exit either the relationships or the trafficking situations (Maia, Diana). This will be further discussed and addressed in Chapter 5.

Another central theme identified was the negative impact of the trafficking experience and the need to exit the trafficking situation. Survivors described the damage to their mental and physical health. Although all the women thought about, planned and actively attempted to escape, the escape was not always possible (Maia). Finally, four of the women exited the trafficking situation with the support of the police and Diana managed alone due to different circumstances. Exiting the trafficking situation with the help of the police is common in the literature (Ferarri, 2021; Hickle, 2017), yet women's agency was noticeable in this process. Some women (Ana, Irina, Larisa) spoke enthusiastically about their escape, highlighting a common thread that reflected their courage, strength and agency in action. Moreover, even in trafficking situations where women's choices have been reduced to a minimum, studies acknowledge that trafficked women continue to actively pursue survival and their agency is present (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; De Angelis, 2016), resonating with all the stories of the trafficked women interviewed in this study.

The challenges of reintegration and life after trafficking, with a need for 'peace', 'safety' and 'financial independence' predominating, represented another major theme. The women spoke about the negative impact of the experience on their mental health and their need for recovery. Recovery was described in terms of attaining well-being, being financially secure, having a family/partner and experiencing peace – alluding to the possible risks of traffickers locating them - and their needs post-trafficking were described in similar terms. Women's short- and long-term trajectories post-trafficking mainly took place in Romania (Ana, Larisa, Maia, Irina), and only Diana returned to the UK. Their post-trafficking experiences were complex and nuanced, with differences and similarities across the different stages due to their various circumstances, vulnerabilities and the resources available to them. The resources women possessed and had around them, such as their inner strengths (and the awareness of it) and the support from others (e.g., children, families, partners, NGOs) were equally valuable. Women described these resources as crucial for recovery and progress post-trafficking. Thus, suggesting the need for holistic approaches to care and support which are extended to the meso and macro level of their eco-system.

A final theme concerned the meaning attributed to the experience, which entailed changing perceptions

about life, migration, their experience and sex work, together with the realisation of what mattered to them. Although women remained afraid of the risks of meeting new people or migrating, they had developed new perspectives on life and trust. Some spoke about the realisation of what was important in life with Diana alluding to her pre-trafficking circumstances and how she felt happy with her life then, although she was unaware of it. How women saw sex work also changed; for instance, Maia mentioned that the experience increased her awareness of the challenges sex workers needed to overcome, thus increasing her empathy with sex workers. Diana advocated for sex work legalisation, and Ana suggested that women should be independent and speak up. Finally, they all touched upon things that mattered to them in life, and what they hoped for, such as stability, health, good relationships and meaningful experiences, as noted by other similar studies (Bodrogi, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023).

Although the women had diverse trajectories, they all showed signs of exerting agency, and this will be discussed further when examining the findings from interviews with practitioners and key informants in the following chapters.

Chapter 5. Particularities of the Romanian context. A complex trafficking landscape

Chapter aim

This chapter, and the next three chapters, present and discuss data drawn from the 38 interviews with practitioners and key informants. These are integrated with findings and themes from the survivors' interviews (Chapter 4). The findings are organised against the key themes and sub-themes identified in the analysis (see Appendix 10.2) and the four chapters cover: particularities of Romanian cases, vulnerability and agency post-trafficking, the macro systems impacting on post-trafficking and finally post-trafficking trajectories. Throughout, I will attribute quotes from participants using the abbreviations[21] explained in Chapter 3 (see also Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6). A key research question was to identify particularities of adult Romanian women trafficked in the UK. Although the research explores women's post-trafficking trajectories, features of the context and background of Romanian cases which precede the post-trafficking period were highlighted by professional participants and identified as relevant for understanding post-trafficking trajectories. These represented what participants perceived as particularities of Romanian cases when taken in considerations trafficked women from different countries of origin.

Particularities of Romanian cases: Key themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ Multiple individual and contextual vulnerabilities
- ❖ A culture of migration: From Romania to the West
- ❖ Roma ethnicity. Vulnerability and additional risks to trafficking

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[21] ROM/UK represents the country where the participant was interviewed in, not nationality; PR/KI represents the category, practitioner or key informant and finally the number of the participant in that category). Apart from policing, most professionals (affiliated to government and third sector) fall under social work, social care or related practice, relevant to the aim of this research and for addressing post-trafficking understanding and victim-care (see Chapter 3).

❖ The traffickers: organised crime groups (OCGs) and 'loverboys'

❖ External (UK) and internal (Romania) expressions and perceptions of 'otherness'

Multiple individual and contextual vulnerabilities

Professional participants painted a broad picture of adult Romanian women trafficked for sexual exploitation in the UK, describing them as usually young, with previous experience of abuse, from dysfunctional families, and with poor educational attainment. They also noted how women often came from rural areas, with limited social networks and described a high incidence of ethnic Roma Romanians among these women with some having been institutionalised as children. The characteristics of the women interviewed (see Chapter 4) resonated closely with professional participants' descriptions of trafficked women's profiles.

Most participants commented on the young age of the victims, describing the victims as '*very young* girls' (UK-KI-01; UK-PR-05; ROM-PR-09). Although the research focused on adult women (over 18 years old), professional participants referred to women as young but not necessarily underage. Similarly, at times the terminology of 'girls' was used to refer to 30 years old women, and some professionals interchangeably called trafficked women – women or girls - although they were speaking about adult women. Yet, young age represented 18 to 25 years old in most cases and was probed during the interviews. Interestingly, participants noticed that at times, whilst women were trafficked in the UK as adults, exploitation and trafficking could have started earlier. The perception that young age represented a risk for trafficking was common, especially if there were additional environmental vulnerabilities present. As the literature suggests, emotional and judgemental immaturity, lack of knowledge and experience regarding possible exploitation or young's people's environments represent other trafficking risks associated with young people (Cockbain & Brayley, 2012; Pearce et al., 2013). When talking about age, participants mentioned settings where prevention strategies could be implemented (e.g., schools and places frequented by youth) (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01).

A lack of education was frequently cited in professional participants' descriptions of Romanian trafficked women. Some participants considered that some trafficked women would not understand what trafficking

was, or be familiar with the terminology of exploitation, and that they generally had a '*lower level of education*' (ROM-PR-11; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-12). A common view was that, since education levels increase with age, a lack of education could have been both a cause and a result of trafficking. Consequently, women's young age and limited education were viewed as compromising educational prospects, restricting their work opportunities, critical thinking, and understanding of how different systems operated in different countries (e.g., concerning migration, working legislation, human rights) (UK-PR-03; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-10, among others). Moreover, Romanian professional participants highlighted issues regarding low education levels in the general population, the educational system in Romania, and poor schooling among young people (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-03), suggesting that education quality and educational achievements were generally low in Romania. The educational context has been highlighted in studies that have identified risk factors such as school drop-out, abusive school practices or poor human trafficking preventive initiatives targeting schools in Romania (Aninoșanu et al., 2016; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003). All these factors were perceived to contribute to and increase the risks of trafficking, especially since, in the communities trafficked women came from, there were also limited employment prospects. Consequently, participants saw these restrictions as increasing the attractions of alternative means of obtaining material benefits and status in prosperous places which provide more opportunities (e.g., outside of Romania) (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-11; among others).

Professionals typically described the families of those trafficked as '*broken*' (UK-PR-03), dysfunctional, with neglectful, abusive behaviour or prevalent substance use disorder (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-11, among others). As one practitioner stated, there was a '*history of childhood abuse, neglect, or experiencing the family domestic violence, usually a generic profile*' (UK-PR-09). This was the case for three survivors interviewed who experienced such family dynamics, which resulted in placements in institutions, foster care or with extended family at young ages (see Chapter 4). Such evidence resonated with the literature identifying family risks for entering trafficking (Hynes, 2019; Hodges et al., 2023; Pascoal, 2020). As both survivors and professionals implied, there was an evident contrast between supportive families, which fostered recovery resources for trafficked women, and 'risky' families, which could contribute to vulnerability to sex trafficking victimisation as noted in other studies too (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; Hynes et al., 2019). Only a few professional participants identified some cases where

victims came from '*good families*' (ROM-PR-06), were well-educated and had greater access to resources (ROM-PR-10). Yet, the general view suggested that this was not the norm.

For professional participants, when family care failed, childcare institutions in Romania were considered to pose additional risks for trafficking, with this perception supported by the accounts of three women interviewed (see Chapter 4, Larisa, Ana, and Maia's cases). Other studies have identified risks of exploitation among institutionalised children or children left behind due to parental migration (Bodrogi, 2015; Pascoal & Schwartz, 2018; Roth et al., 2018). Such concerns pose questions about the quality of care and protection provided by Romanian institutions and the need for targeted preventive interventions, further discussed in Chapter 7.

Many participants mentioned families being directly or indirectly implicated in trafficking as they encountered cases where families sold their children into trafficking: '*The Roma would sell their children to others in their clan to pay their debts*' (UK-KI-04). Such cases were linked with extreme poverty and Roma communities and did not represent the norm (UK-KI-04; UK-KI-05; UK-PR-01). Additionally, three of the survivors interviewed suggested family involvement in trafficking or family being aware of the exploitation (see Chapter 4, Ana, Larisa and Maia's accounts). Two professionals also identified trafficked cases whereby mothers initiated their adult daughters into sex work (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04). As one Romanian practitioner noted, sex work could be normalised as a means of providing for and supporting the family: '*Many of these girls have a mother who introduces them to this so-called profession, and part of the money can be left to them, and 50-70 % of the money can be taken*' (ROM-PR-10). The level of family support, financial pressures and obligations were all seen to exert significant influence on the likelihood of women becoming victims of trafficking or exploitation. Being '*pushed by family*' (ROM-PR-02) was also associated with women who were mothers and breadwinners, with forced sex work or trafficking providing a source of income: '*the majority have children in Romania*' (UK-PR-10), '*they have children who need support*' (UK-PR-03). As shown by the survivor interviews, family and motherhood was viewed as entailing sacrifices survivors had to make (see Chapter 4, Maia story).

In a study of experiences of motherhood among Nigerian and Romanian trafficked women in Italy, Pascoal (2020) concluded that Romanian women were more inclined to remain in exploitation, taking on the role of 'the sacrificed mother' as opposed to Nigerian women. Although she highlighted the powerful role of motherhood and how it could positively influence survivors' lives and increase their resilience, in the case of Romanian women, motherhood was not considered a strength but a vulnerability. Nevertheless, the

survivors in this study, alongside professional participants interviewed, also emphasised the role of motherhood as a catalyst for positive outcomes after trafficking. Family is an essential element and value in Romanian culture (Mihai & Butiu, 2012; Nadolu et al., 2007), and both professional participants and survivors highlighted its importance, especially post-trafficking when women's desire for a family was identified as a key element in their accounts of recovery (see Chapter 4). The multiple roles and social status provided by family and motherhood appeared to underpin Romanian women's desires to create a new identity, especially post-trafficking.

Participants depicted vulnerability as a problem that often transcended the individual, with external factors also playing a role. They agreed that social or systemic issues that coexisted in the Romanian environment had a significant influence on trafficking and on the risks of being trafficked. Participants' backgrounds influenced their views on Romanian issues. UK respondents viewed trafficking `from the outside' and emphasised the country's perceived socioeconomic destitution or poverty, representing another sub-theme of vulnerability. Romanian respondents, as 'insiders', were able to expand on these points and provided examples of how institutions fell short of meeting people's fundamental needs. One participant (ROM-KI-03) described the contextual vulnerability as institutional and community-based. Institutional issues were associated with a lack of political will or priority, manifested as institutional shortfalls or deficiencies in Romania, described in detail in Chapter 7. Professionals in both countries perceived rural Romania as impoverished and undeveloped, putting women at risk of trafficking*: 'they come from quite poor villages in Romania'* (UK-PR-06); or '*most of them come from rural areas'* (ROM-PR-07). Chapter 4 noted that Ana and Maia came from more rural areas.

Most participants described a poverty spectrum ranging from insufficient opportunities in the community (ROM-KI-02) to absolute poverty (UK-KI-06). At one end of the spectrum, Romanian women were seen to lack access to information which could have prevented trafficking, such as '*counselling, career guidance, employment opportunities, social opportunities and information on what the working conditions mean and what the contractual working conditions are in the UK'* (ROM-KI-02). In describing absolute poverty, UK professionals painted an extreme picture associated with Roma communities: '*people live in mud, no water, sewer, nothing'* (ROM-PR-09) or '*especially Roma villages, houses literally falling down, no running water'* (UK-KI-05); '*we saw absolute poverty in Roma communities in Romania'* (UK-KI-06). Some participants considered that the lack of financial prospects within disadvantaged communities increased

women's proximity to criminal networks looking for opportunities to make money and they saw women at risk if within their communities they were in proximity with *'the traffickers' entourage'* (ROM-PR-11).

Initially, interviewees tended to emphasise vulnerability with little discussion of any positive qualities, resources, or agency that Romanian women had prior to trafficking. Only a few frontline workers acknowledged women's strength, determination, or '*hardworking*' qualities (UK-PR-02) at the beginning of the interview, showing a degree of admiration for their toughness and endurance, before being asked to talk about their strength[22] and resilience:

> The push factor was a good reason: *I left Romania to get this job, because I could equally benefit my family back home, I could get that house done, get central heating.* So, I think they will suffer extensively but will only ever see it as it was just something *I had to do*. (UK-PR-01)

Professional participants did not always acknowledge the complexity of the lived human experience of trafficked women, and the image of the ideal victim was frequently encountered in their perceptions. Ideal victims of trafficking are often represented as young, powerless, vulnerable, and sympathetic females (Forringer-Beal, 2022; Lee, 2011; O'Brian, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2006). This conceptualisation was noticed particularly among professional participants who adhered to a more abolitionist ideology towards anti-trafficking and sex work, whereby the woman was a passive victim and the practitioner, a rescuer (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015, 2016; Doezema, 2001; O'Brien, 2016). This ideology was evident among some professional participants interviewed (particularly among faith-based abolitionist NGOs) in their attitudes, language, terminology, and descriptions of trafficked women. In not recognising any possibilities of women's agency, especially in their accounts of how women were trafficked, they ignored the possibility that women might choose to accept a job, migrate, place their trust in a relationship, or take a risk into the unknown.

As professional participants' and survivors' accounts highlighted, contextual factors, such as rurality, poverty, and ethnicity, offered fewer economic opportunities, which acted as push factors for trafficking (Bodrogi, 2015; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003). Most professional participants agreed that the issue of poverty needed to be fully acknowledged and accounted for, especially by the Romanian authorities. Consequently, vulnerable individuals' decisions about migration and risk-taking are unlikely to change if

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[22]Strength and agency will be revisited later on since it was more associated with later stages and the end of their journeys, and questions were allocated specifically to strength and agency during the interviews (see Appendices 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2).

the systematic and structural factors that contribute to their susceptibility to trafficking are not addressed. Despite the vulnerabilities which laid them open to deception, women's capacity to decide provided examples of women moving out of a passive role, especially in the initial stages of migration.

A culture of migration: From Romania to the West

The theme of migration was identified as highly relevant in the context of Romanian trafficking. The drivers for migration were many and participants drew attention to cross-border movement, suggesting that migration within Romania (i.e., internal migration) was more expensive than working abroad (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-10). Additionally, those *'poles of development which radiated wealth, such as big cities, created a vacuum and poverty around them'* (ROM-KI-03). It was, therefore, more convenient and economically beneficial for Romanians to migrate outside the country for work as one participant suggested (ROM-PR-06). Another significant characteristic identified in Romanian women was their EU status which facilitated migration (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-07; ROM-KI-05; UK-PR-03; UK-KI-02; among others), similar to other EU Eastern European counties of origin. However, their agency and determination were not always acknowledged in professionals' accounts of women's migration journeys, and aspirations for a better life and were instead linked primarily to vulnerability with little acknowledgement of the agency, and the decision-making that women's initial migration entailed. Concerns regarding women's migration and control over their movement represented a broad theme in the anti-trafficking literature (see Chapter 1) and reflected in some of the professionals' views regarding Romanian women's rights to move (UK-KI-03; UK-KI-04). This had the effect of reintroducing 'victim blaming' in a subtle way: such attitudes were noticeable among some professional participants. For instance, one participant referred to Romanian women as *'stupid migrants'* (ROM-KI-01), while others questioned their ability and capacity to enter and live in the UK (UK-KI-03; UK-KI-04).

The ease with which migrants might travel was brought up by UK key informants, who recognised the risks associated with migration and, more importantly, its negative consequences (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; UK-KI-04). Based on police data collected at the time, a former police officer detailed his observations of increased criminality after Romania entered the EU. He argued that OCGs were ready and waiting to

exploit the new situation: *'So, the Roma gangs were ready. They had their victims lined up behind us, and* *go, go, go, like an invasion'* (UK-KI-04). Or as another participant mentioned, people were desperate to migrate:

> There was a point, a few years ago, maybe, and it may still exist, where so many Romanians wanted to come to Western Europe, particularly to Britain. They were desperate to come here. Things weren't good for them where they lived. And they would come here of their own volition… They came full of expectation, hope, and excitement about a new job only to discover, quite soon after arriving, that they were the subject of a con. (UK-KI-01)

As noted in Chapter 1, migration from East to West is not always viewed positively by those in destination countries, despite its contributions to the destination country's economic and labour requirements (Andreescu, 2019; Duru et al. 2017). Although Romanians have been economic migrants for the last 30 years, professionals' attitudes betrayed elements of stereotyping and racism (especially in relation to the Roma), reflecting the inadequate political and social responses to migrants in the UK context.

Participants discussed the EU status of Romanian women, suggesting that whilst this status made it easier to move across borders and access support, it did not lessen the impact of trafficking. Women took a legal migration route, yet they were trafficked and exploited, something a practitioner contrasted with other nationalities (e.g., Albanians Vietnamese, Nigerians) whose migration routes he considered, were often '*underground*' (UK-PR-04). Professionals perceived that the impact on Romanian women was far more drastic, and as noted in the previous chapter, trafficking survivors expressed shock and disappointment when they discovered they were trafficked:

> Romanian women, as EU nationals, would come to the UK, thinking they would come to a safe environment, (…) then failure of the experience when they understand they were conned. It's very very serious as they become victims when they arrive. (UK-PR-04)

Similarly, the interviewed women described their shock on realisation of being trafficked (Ana, Irina, Maia, Larisa).

The notion of 'successful' versus 'failed' migration was noticed early on in professionals' discourses. Some participants described how women perceived trafficking as failed migration, particularly when it was brought to the public's attention or when the community became aware of it (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-10). In these narratives, migrants who became victims of trafficking were also viewed as being '*foolish'*

(ROM-KI-01) or *'naïve'* (ROM-PR-11) by society, unaware of the risks associated with migration. This perception was emphasised in relation to women being trafficked and groomed.

Researchers have identified a moral panic regarding the migration of women as opposed to that of men (see Chapter 1)[23]. This was also encountered in respect of Romanian women with some professional participants describing them as migrating with unrealistic expectations and trust in promises of work (regardless of those migrants who migrate independently to undertake sex work) (ROM-KI-01; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-12): they were seen as *'desperate'* to migrate yet not fully equipped with the necessary judgement to make this decision (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; UK-PR-08). Hence, while some professional participants underlined the ease with which one might migrate, others emphasised the dangers of migration.

Professionals, especially in Romania, spoke about successful migrants' pride, sacrifice, and the gratification of sending money home, evidenced '*by purchasing a house, a car, brand clothes*' (ROM-KI-02) and other goods, or simply being able to support their families. All of these factors contributed to the development of the migration culture, which was considered highly prevalent among Romanian nationals (ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-07; ROM-KI-05). Participants, especially in Romania noted how migration was viewed as normal and desirable by the wider community as it brought prosperity and development which was hard to achieve in the country of origin (ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-07; ROM-KI-02; ROM-KI-05, among others). Showcasing of successful migration stories, and the respect successful migrants attracted from their own communities, were all identified as affecting the choice to migrate (UK-PR-04). Negative migration experiences could be concealed from sight, and people continued to emphasise the positive aspects of their migration. Such stories circulated in the community and created links and further incentives for migration, even when the experience of migration has not been a positive one:

> And so this word of mouth created for this style of recruitment and grooming in females in particular, it's probably the one thing that guarantees a successful grooming process because other girls have done it, because no one comes back and says, *I've been raped 30 times today, they took all my money*. Very,

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[23] Since the study focused on women, general perceptions regarding male Romanian migration were not evident or expressed by participants.

very rarely a Romanian female will go back to her community and talk about what's happened to her. (UK-PR-01)

The line between secure and insecure migration was narrow and not always evident. Professional practitioners and trafficked women interviewed noted that, even amongst women who had had negative experiences and had been exploited, interest in migration remained high. Some professional participants drew attention to Romanian culture as a risk factor for trafficking (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-08) and as not aligning with the values and morals of developed societies, giving rise to what Kempadoo (2015) referred to as the 'white saviour complex'. Such examples illustrated how one culture could be conceptualised as superior to another in terms of development, values, morals, and its impact on human trafficking. This was also encountered in UK participants' attitudes towards Romanians with a so-called 'sense of superiority' recurring in the interviews with Romanian professionals which will be discussed in the following sections. In emphasising vulnerability and negative migration stories, participants' accounts tended to lose sight of the agentic aspects of migration.

Roma ethnicity. Vulnerability and additional risks to trafficking

Roma ethnicity represented another theme within professionals' accounts of vulnerability and risk. Most participants spoke about ethnicity and made direct connections between trafficking and the Roma or *'gypsy element'* (UK-PR-08). Two of the women interviewed were Roma; however only one identified herself as Roma and, in the case of the other, I assumed this based on her appearance and name. The terminology of both Roma and Gypsy was used interchangeably by practitioners and key informants. Participants in both countries often referred to Roma-organised crime, alleging that most Romanian *mafia* or criminal gangs involved in human trafficking were Roma (UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-03; ROM-KI-05, among others), in some cases, participants conflated the two:

> The bondage with Roma culture, you become a slave. So then, you must do what you're told until the debt pays off. And that's the culture, that's Roma culture (…). And by the way, Romanian organised crime is Roma. Sadly, about 70% of Romanian organised crime is Roma. (UK-KI-04)

Other participants had similar observations regarding the high incidence of Roma criminality: *'from a London perspective, we used to see a lot of Romanian-Roma exploiters, exploiting women as sex workers'* (UK-KI-06). A Romanian police officer mentioned that *'the majority [traffickers], statistically speaking, and here there is nothing linked to discrimination; the majority are Roma ethnic citizens'* (ROM-KI-04). Participants claimed that '*wealthy'* Roma were not held accountable in Romania financially, fiscally, or otherwise (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-05; UK-PR-09). Although these arguments were made by UK professionals, there is a widely held perception in Romania that Roma Romanians are not held accountable, but as of yet unsupported by rigorous evidence. Nevertheless, some participants perceived the Roma to be a disruptive minority, who commit disproportionately high rates of crime, with these views being reflective of existing literature around broader issues of self-exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination (Creţan & Turnock, 2009).

Consequently, participants noticed that *'a lot of the women who are trafficked come from the Roma community'* (UK-PR-11). Another participant commented on the implications of criminal impunity and emphasised the harmful effects of the normalisation of criminality on the wider Roma community (ROM-KI-07). This resonated with Maia's story (see Chapter 4): she spoke in length about the criminal clans in her community, highlighting the level of impunity within these groups. Participants unanimously agreed that belonging to a specific ethnic group or a minority could pose additional risks for being trafficked (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-11; UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-03; among others). Participant operations, views and the literature highlighted a relationship between an increased risk of trafficking and poorer regions of the country (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; Pouchi & Bryan, 2014), which include high proportions of the Roma population (Anghel & Alexandrescu, 2022; Raț, 2005). The consequences of extreme poverty, radical exclusion and discrimination increase the potential for behaviours many societies perceive as '*deviant'* (e.g., criminal activities, arranged marriages between underaged children, begging, and anti-social behaviours) (Bošnjak & Acton, 2013; Grill, 2012 in Leggio, 2019; Surdu, 2019). Thus, making Roma communities more vulnerable to trafficking according to the perceptions of professional participants.

The Roma ethnic group constitutes the second largest[24] minority ethnic group after Hungarian speakers in Romania. The Roma population have their own language, culture, and customs (Ferreira, 2019; Ioannoni

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[24] 3% of the population according to latest census 2011 (https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rpl-2011/rezultate-2011/).

et al., 2020; Surdu, 2019). The Roma population in Romania experiences high levels of poverty, and systemic discrimination (Anghel & Alexandrescu, 2022; Prodan, 2016; Raț, 2005; Roth et al., 2013; Roth & Toma, 2014), exacerbating the general lack of opportunities and increasing the likelihood of involvement in trafficking as the findings suggest. Additionally, they are the most marginalised ethnic group in Romania, living on the edges of society and experiencing high discrimination and exclusion (Breazu & Machin, 2022; Powell Doherty et al., 2017).

It was interesting to observe the differentiation made between Romanians and Roma-Romanians and it how important it was for both groups of participants to ensure they made this differentiation. In doing so, they revealed understanding of '*the other'*, distancing the Romanians '*we'* from the Roma '*other'*. Romanian participants were more cautious about discussing Roma issues or making these distinctions, and this was in a context where I had introduced myself as Romanian. The notion of a sub-culture emerged, as practitioners, especially in the UK, attempted to tease out the differences between Romanians and Roma-Romanians:

> Ethnicity in Romania seems very important, as the differentiation between Roma-Romanians and non-Roma-Romanians. The Roma-Romanians that we receive are very desperate. Poverty is knocking at the door. Then we have the Romanian non-Roma; usually, they are more skilled. They have a different understanding. And this distinction is also because of cultural specificities. (UK-PR-04)

Interviews with a few Romanian professionals revealed perceptions of the '*otherness'* and cultural inferiority of the Roma community among Romanians. Awareness of this discrimination, alongside some racist views, were shared by some professional participants in both countries: *'as the darker skinned'* (ROM-KI-01); '*Romanians are lovely and don't sell their children... ... But here in the UK people are ignorant, when they hear Romanian, they think Roma and that becomes the norm'* (UK-KI-03). Similar perceptions are commonly encountered in Romanian society (Breazu & Machin, 2022). Such views were linked with perceptions of Roma involvement in criminality and corruption in Romania contributing to the increase of Roma OCGs (Nicolae, 2019; Gravett, 2017; Molnar, 2021). The findings identified the challenges in Romania regarding links between Roma OCGs and Romanian authorities, highlighting both corruption and criminal impunity (see Chapter 7 and Maia's story, Chapter 4).

An awareness of '*the other'* raised concerns among participants about how Romanians were perceived in the UK. A UK activist, who had worked in Romania, discussed the sensitivities of failing to distinguish the

two groups as nationals of the same country. According to her, an association with Roma increased discrimination, prejudice and stigma and generally, Romanians did not want to be associated with Roma communities: *here in the UK people are ignorant, when they hear Romanian, they think Roma and that becomes the norm'* (UK-KI-03) which she considered would be disturbing for non-Roma Romanians. One Romanian participant directly (ROM-KI-01) referred to '*the others'* as '*the darker skinned'* in Romania, and expressed discriminatory attitudes in discussing ethnicity, class, education and culture.

Others identified wider structural factors that shaped the Roma experience and culture. A former police officer who had worked on trafficking cases involving Roma-Romanians described their culture as '*thousands of years old, good and bad'* but saw them as being highly oppressed which ultimately paved the way for criminality: '*they have been persecuted, treated crap and need protection'* (UK-KI-04). He argued that the Roma have their internal structure and hierarchies and '*Roma people were exploited by their own people… gangs who wanted to get-rich-quick, and the money flows to up, to the Roma Council, who decided which gang can do what [criminal activity] and in what country'* (UK-KI-04). Other participants described Roma culture in terms of strong family ties, hierarchical group structures within their communities (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-05). In the same manner, participants highlighted the cultural differences in understanding and the contested terminology around victimhood and the view that '*women did not know they were victims'* (UK-PR-08), based as well on ethnicity. Some professional participants claimed that victims and specific communities did not regard these practices as trafficking or exploitation [illegal or abusive] rather they were normalised and seen as cultural (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-07).

A pattern of multiple inequalities experienced in wider society but also within their own communities by the Roma was highlighted several times by professional participants. Some regarded the Romanian government's stance toward the Roma as prejudicial, with a lack of trust between Roma and the authorities (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-04). On the other hand, local officials were believed to collaborate with Roma leaders or gangs, increasing the disparities of power and control within the Roma population: '*gypsies are hand in hand with the local police, and women know that they are powerful and nobody cares about them, or if you are from a Roma background you're not treated anywhere near as other nationals'* (ROM-PR-09).

Interviewees also described the Roma as predominantly illiterate or unskilled (UK-PR-04; UK-KI-05; UK-PR-08), with *'no education, no work experience or qualifications'* (ROM-PR-10; ROM-PR-11). One participant described a particular instance where he noticed that in a specific Roma community, the leaders had prohibited youngsters from attending school so that gangs could keep younger Roma unskilled and available to be exploited by the bigger group (e.g. labour, begging and sexual exploitation):

> The Roma don't let the kids go to school (…). We went to one school, and it was empty. We spoke to the teachers, and they said that the gangsters don't let the kids come; which is quite logical because if the kids are in school, they can't earn money for them. So, it's again keeping the poor Roma groups, the lower clans, in bondage, with no opportunities for regular work or decent life. (UK-KI-04)

Finally, music was identified as another element specific to Roma culture with the 'manele'[25] subculture discussed by few participants. A Romanian practitioner (ROM-KI-03) described at length how certain criminal acts were approved in this music, along with materialistic ideals and the sexualised objectification of women suggesting that this music celebrated criminal impunity and influenced the broader community. This interviewee noted that songs about prostitution, trafficking, convicted individuals, criminal actions, and the idea of making money quickly and illegally outside legal routes were widely heard and viewed in Romania:

> …this model of a high-end prostitute, whether it's dancing or belly dancing, is massively promoted in the Romanian manele… you can see such songs with 20 or 30 million views[26] (…) and popular songs will influence [young people], subconsciously as it shows you girls dancing half-naked and it's beautiful, having a party, the clothes and money. (ROM-KI-03)

This view was reflected by other professionals who identified its potential to promote domestic violence and trafficking (ROM-PR-09; UK-KI-05). Roma history and culture draw on experiences of marginalisation, slavery, and intergenerational vulnerability (Haliliuc, 2015; Trandafoiu, 2016), and its music typically evokes such themes. These themes are encountered in the music of other marginalised people and can be interpreted as expressing common lived experiences and adaptation (e.g., hip-hop, Rose, 2018; Balkan and Roma music, Silverman, 2012, among others). Music can embody and communicate a cultural romanticisation of crime or fatalism as a way of coping and re-creating hope, instant gratification, and

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[25] Manele is a style of music predominantly sung by Roma, with roots in folk, Gypsy rhythms and oriental influences. (Haliliuc, 2015; Trandafoiu, 2018)
[26] Appendix 11, translation of a song regarding sex work and trafficking discussed by the participant.

desire for wealth as well as a passivity or '*acceptance of slavery*'– e.g., debt bondage within the community and clans (UK-KI-04; UK-KI-05; ROM-KI-03; ROM-PR-09). While practitioners comments could be perceived to reflect a moral panic around this type of music, its overtly sexist and violent lyrics (see Appendix 11) were perceived to contribute to an environment where crime is accepted and perpetuated, as in the case of human trafficking.

According to the perceptions of the interviewees, these findings suggest that membership of the Roma ethnic group or proximity to it was seen to increase the risk of trafficking, especially among those with additional vulnerabilities, and these perceptions are supported in the literature (Aninoşanu et al., 2012; Bodrogi, 2015; Poucki & Bryan, 2014). Yet the oppression of the Roma minority, both in Romania and in the UK, was evident to some of the professional participants and the need for a broader structural response was acknowledged.

The traffickers: Organised crime groups (OCGs) and 'loverboys'

Another theme under particularities of Romanian trafficking represented women's relationships with the traffickers and particularly the 'loverboy' concept. Most participants argued that '*trafficking cannot be addressed without addressing traffickers*' (UK-KI-01) and identified specific socio-economic characteristics and proximity to criminal networks as influencing involvement in this criminal activity (UK-PR-01; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-03).

Participants distinguished between single individuals exploiting their partners and those involved in OCGs. The former were described as opportunistic cases whereby '*a lot of exploitation is local Romanian guys who see a chance, where they can exploit a woman. And they can bring her over here [UK] and make money*' (UK-PR-06). Similarly: '*a lorry driver for over six months exploited his partner keeping her in that lorry and across Europe, at every stop, he would hire her out to other lorry drivers*' (UK-PR-01). Other participants described OCGs as involved in criminal activity for extended periods, with knowledge of legal systems and acquiring high socio-economic status and power within their communities (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-07, UK-KI-02; UK-KI-07, ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-03, among others). Law enforcement participants from both countries described such cases in detail and referred to the

complexity of the underground criminal systems, which operated *'on their own rules'* (ROM-KI-05). Participants claimed that women felt controlled by the criminal groups *'because we're talking about serious networks, gangs and organised crime, not about criminals smoking a cigarette in the corner'* (UK-PR-04).

A common view among participants was that in situations where a partner, family or small community group, was related to the victim and responsible for the exploitation, the challenges of exiting trafficking or ensuring successful prosecutions were high due to the complex personal relationships between the traffickers and the trafficked women (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-10; ROM-KI-03; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07; UK-KI-04; UK-KI-06). Other participants discussed the violence and the power wielded by these groups over the victims and specific areas or communities, reinforcing that it was hard, if not impossible, for women to get out of these exploitative situations, especially when a specific network of traffickers was involved and linked with the community/family of the victim (ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-07; UK-PR-11; UK-KI-04) (such as in the case of Maia, see Chapter 4).

Most professional participants consistently talked about the partner recruiter or '*loverboy'* as the most common form of recruitment and trafficking among Romanian cases. They explained that this approach combined women's need for partnership and love with their aspirations and potential for achieving their independence and financial goals (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-06; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-10, UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-11; ROM-PR-12; ROM-KI-02; ROM-KI-03, ROM-KI-04). Maia and Diana also described such experiences (see Chapter 4). As some participants pointed out, some women saw the traffickers as successful people who managed their way through life and would enable them to succeed (ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-03). With the arrival of a '*perfect partner'* (RO-PR-02) able to fulfil their expectations and the context of the intimate relationship created between the women and the traffickers, participants felt that recruitment became easy, if not inevitable: *'the boyfriend trick is a widespread method I came across'* (UK-PR-07). This element is important as it impacted on women's post-trafficking journeys and was perceived by participants and women interviewed as relevant to the experiences of trauma and loss of trust.

Notably, most participants talked about the 'loverboy' as a highly manipulative form of grooming. The courtship process was based on building trust and mimicked the creation of a '*meaningful story together'* (ROM-PR-01) causing the woman to '*fall in love'* (ROM-PR-01). According to participants, the method

exploited both emotional and contextual vulnerabilities (UK-PR-07), alongside women's experience of dysfunctional families, previous toxic relationships, and their need for caring relationships/partnerships (ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-10), which together created the perfect profile for a potential victim:

> The most common thing we have seen in all our cases is a lack of love. (…) I noticed that most, if not 100%, come from dysfunctional families or have no families at all and do not have love. And everyone looks at you: *the trafficker was beating you, why didn't you leave?* Wait, her father beat her at home three times a day, fed her once a day, and didn't even tell her *I love you.* At least the trafficker beats her once a week, tells her he loves her, and takes her to the restaurant and for her, this is love. (ROM-PR-09)

Participants perceived the close relationship built with the trafficker as binding women into a relationship of intense exploitation and ensuring that they remained in that relationship. They argued that unmet emotional needs for care, support, appreciation and validation resulting from early neglect and abuse could result in women remaining in exploitation even when they became aware of the situation (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-11, among others). The following detailed example of how the traffickers worked highlights the infatuation they encouraged, the superiority and power they exercised as apparent role models or how they might try to manipulate women in more vulnerable positions:

> The recruiter examines the situation, sees that she is a potential victim and starts to pull her to his side. He brings her a sandwich one night, calls her, and asks her: *Did you eat? well, you know I care about you, I want to stay with you on the phone so I can hear you eating.* Obviously, the girl is like, '*Lord, this guy really cares about me, because at home nobody does that.'* So that's where it goes. Until he gains her trust. Another method is more in a modest family in the countryside: '*I am interested in you being happy, and I can offer you anything*'. And what do you think he was offering her? In that village, there was a gas station with three products, and he gave her the wallet that was prepared in advance with lots of money, not only RON [Romanian currency] ... *You can go and buy whatever you want*. Well, what to buy at a countryside gas station? A juice, two croissants and a bag of pretzels. But it seemed to her that he had offered her, *Wow I can get what I want*. To impress and attract them, but if he was somewhere on the Champs-Elysees or Milan, he wouldn't have given her his wallet. (ROM-PR-01)

Alongside coercion and violence, participants also identified women's 'love', support and loyalty towards their perceived partners (UK-KI-05; ROM-PR-01). For example, the man '*could have several girlfriends at the same time, and their job is predominantly to get these girls to fall in love with him and then help him when it's a bad time'* (UK-PR-01). In other cases, participants talked about situations where the trafficker

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adopted the role of protector and supported the victim while simultaneously taking advantage of her, but it became an agreement between the parties involved: *'small groups of private business where a guy exploits several girls, marries one, makes a child with another and tells the third one he loves her; meanwhile he does the housework, drives them around and supports each one and women accept the situation'* (UK-KI-05). Participants referred to such exploitative relationships, which included an element of 'love' as 'Stockholm Syndrome', explaining women's toxic commitment, the inability to leave the relationship or the lack of awareness of their victimhood (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-07; among others). Participants highlighted the trust women often felt for the trafficker despite the exploitation (UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-02), as the following example shows:

> *I met Ionuț, we go to the UK. What do I have to do with trafficking? I get there and Ionuț tells me: '<u>Look, go there and spend a night with that gentleman because we get 500 pounds'</u>. That's not trafficking, is just that Ionuț asked me to do this for our own good, because we will buy a car and return to the village we came from.* (ROM-KI-02)

The 'loverboy' method of recruiting (lover boy, lover-boy or lover) and retaining victims in trafficking is well-established in practice, literature and accounts, and the concept is widely used in the anti-trafficking field, in respect of Romanian trafficking (Bodrogi, 2015; Nicolae, 2019; Pascoal, 2020), including ANITP statistics (See Chapter 1). Women's migratory aspirations are understood to be intertwined with their relationships with their traffickers (Aninoşanu et al., 2012; Hopper, 2018; Twis, 2020). In practice, Romanian authorities take the allegations of 'loverboy' behaviour seriously as was evident in the case of Diana (see ANITP data in Chapter 1). In the ANITP databases, the term 'loverboy' is identified as one of the trafficking recruitment methods and the term has been used both by Romanian government agencies and in media prevention campaigns (see Appendix 12). For example, in 2011, ANITP started a prevention campaign with the title '*Your boyfriend can be a <u>Loverboy</u>*'[27], including a Romanian movie called 'Loverboy' inspired by sex trafficking stories in the attempt to showcase the recruitment method as experienced by Romanian trafficked women.

The idea of love as an additional motivation for migration or a precursor of sex trafficking was evident in interviews with both survivors and professional participants, although it was not understood as an expression of positive agency. Instead, the experience of 'love' was considered a form of vulnerability when this led to trafficking and being 'in love' was considered by some professional participants as a form

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[27] https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/prietenul-tau-poate-fi-un-loverboy/

of naivety (ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-03; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-08; UK-KI-04). Ideas of risk-taking and sacrifice were perceived as the opposites of healthy relationships and ideals related to love. Gottman & Gottman (2017) describe being in love or the first phase of being in love as a process which comes with a high degree of risk-taking and additional biological implications which result in ignoring the 'red flags'. The binding nature of love is reflected within the domestic violence literature, with perceived love and attachment contributing to women staying in abusive relationships (Dovan & Hester, 2015; Hayes, 2014; Kearney, 2001). These same processes were evident in the trafficked women's journeys and demonstrate the complex interplay between trust in the name of love and exploitation due to love.

Many participants regarded '*falling in love*' as a potential risk factor that often led to the women being trafficked (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-03). Although Diana described her situation in a similar manner, her account also involved the independent decision to enter sex work (see Chapter 4), yet Maia's account reflects the views of professional participants. Nevertheless, leaving intimate relationships characterised by abuse and domestic violence is a complex process (Hendy et al., 2003), and similarities are evident in those cases of trafficking where there is a close relationship between the women and the trafficker. Accounts of relationships characterised by domestic violence and abuse highlight the abusive nature of the attachment, which may be especially strong when victims have histories of abuse and unmet emotional needs (Smith et al., 2021; Reder et al., 2001). This highlights the complex dynamics of the trafficker-victim relationship, as women often endured abuse and could not separate themselves from the traffickers (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-10, among others). The relationship with the traffickers is romanticised (as in Diana's case, see Chapter 4), whereby both the hardship and women's role take on a new dimension, co-existing in the context of the relationship and conceptualised as 'fate' by the women interviewed (see Chapter 4). Interestingly, some of the women in the study clearly differentiated between 'before and after' trafficking in describing their relationship with the trafficker (see Chapter 4). Some of the women interviewed identified confusion in their past perceptions of love and the romantic relationship with the trafficker; how the relationship was experienced and how they related to their experience. Understanding the substrata of such differentiations both from the inside (survivors) and outside (professionals) helps create a better understanding of women's experiences.

Although the 'loverboy' is a contested term (Merodio et al., 2020), it is predominant in the Romanian anti-trafficking movement. Merodio et al. (2020) suggests that the dominant social discourse that glamorises and promotes ambiguity in relation to sex traffickers, poses significant challenges to women's exiting

trafficking, their experiences of trust and engagement with authorities, among others. Similarly, one respondent critiqued the usage and connotations of the '*loverboy'* terminology, arguing that it was used to create moral panic and exaggerate the magnitude of trafficking in anti-trafficking campaigns (ROM-PR-06). This participant suggested that the connection and relationship between the victim and the abuser is a form of '*traumatic attachment'* and was hard to deconstruct. She claimed that the use of the word '*loverboy*' misrepresented the abuser, as it could sow distrust in genuine love relationships and it indicated that the trafficker was more benign than he was. Thus, using the term 'loverboy' '*was like stroking/petting his head'* (ROM-PR-06). Yet, it was clear that this terminology was widely used both in Romania and in the UK.

Finally, gendered roles in Romania were questioned by professional participants who noted that women needed to subscribe to cultural and gendered norms, which were also considered abusive (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-08; ROM-KI-01; UK-KI-01; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-01, among others). References to violence and sexual violence against women as a consequence of gendered cultural norms are highlighted in the anti-trafficking literature concerning Romania (Aninoșeanu et al., 2016), resonating with the findings of this research. Moreover, trafficked women in the study referred to obedience, male violence, and expectations in the context of Romania as part of the gendered differences (Ana, Maia). These attitudes and gendered perceptions were identified as contributing to the success of grooming and maintaining violence against women in Romania. The 'loverboy' element explained how victims experienced love and attachment to their traffickers, and professionals recognised that, from women's perspectives, understanding of the abusive and controlling relationship could remain blurred. Such perceptions create challenges for practitioners working with trafficked women, particularly those seeking to apply the clear criminal - victim distinction required by law.

External (UK) and internal (Romania) expressions and perceptions of 'otherness'

'Otherness' represented another relevant theme as it highlighted both the external (UK) and internal (Romania) perception of Romanian trafficked (or vulnerable/at risk of trafficking) women. UK participants' images of Romania, Romanians and their culture drew on encounters with Romanian people, visits to

Romania or knowledge acquired informally from personal contacts or the media. Conclusions were often based on comparison with their own culture and experiences, and they discussed '*the culture of corruption … or if they come from a criminal country like Romania or Albania'* (UK-KI-04), *'lack of culture'* (UK-KI-01), *'uneducated'* (UK-PR-08) and '*gender issues'* (UK-PR-09) in Romania. Notably, UK participants' views often embodied an othering of Romania and Romanian culture, raising questions around the notion of superiority, racism and discriminatory attitudes towards Romanians and their culture. This concept was encountered earlier in relation to the Roma ethnic Romanians and Romanians (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-06) but it is also relevant for understanding UK professionals' wider perceptions of Romania and Romanians as inferior. Some accounts conveyed distinct signs of discrimination and racism and Maia's account included instances of discrimination and racism (see Chapter 4).

'Othering' or the 'othering of the other' fits with the descriptions and perceptions of some of the UK professionals in relation to Romania and Romanians. The creation of the 'Other' involves creating a sense of separation from oneself, where the characteristics assigned to the 'Other' are opposite and distorted versions of those claimed for oneself (Balibar, 2005). Thus, alluding to prejudices and discrimination based on these perceived differences, especially when morally were not in alignment with their own principles and cultural development as noted in the previous remarks around perceived issues with the Romanian culture. 'Othering' was noticed as an active process with consequences on the individuals and the collaboration between them, especially at micro level (see Chapter 7). Otherness, too, could be perceived as a multi-layered phenomenon as noticed in reference to Romanian migrants in the UK and their attitudes towards Roma Romanians, raising the question of 'us' and 'them' or othering within othering. Such attitudes are prevalent in Romanian and Europe, contributing to the unfair treatment, marginalisation and discrimination of Roma communities (Creţan et al., 2021).

The accounts of UK professionals included a range of negative comments about Romanian attitudes and culture. Some highlighted how gender inequality within Romanian culture and society could have increased the risk of trafficking: *'because of culture, the way that perhaps women are treated (…) And that's a major cultural thing (among others). So how do you change these cultural things?'* (UK-KI-01). While another professional stated: *'there are many cultures where women are at the bottom of the scale, they are not valued, treated badly and also dehumanised'* (UK-PR-08), this point was made in the context of Romanian trafficking, and pointed towards a similar cultural reality in Romania. Participants talked about Romanian culture, education and mentality regarding women's role in society and what is expected

of them, especially in rural areas. In such settings, they considered that there was little respect for women who were socialised to accept violence, control and obedience to a male figure (ROM-KI-01; ROM-PR-09). Some participants (UK-PR-08; UK-PR-09; ROM-KI-01) highlighted the issues of domestic violence, women's roles and the '*silencing culture*' whereby the community was aware of the abuse but did not discuss it or address it and this was mentioned by Ana as well (see Chapter 4):

> … women are told that they had to endure because it's normal and make their husband happy… moreover if authorities don't take such cases seriously and only give the guy a fine because he's beaten up his wife again. (UK-PR-03)

Women's voices were seen to be silenced, with violence and abuse becoming part of the sacrifice required to live up to societal standards of a faithful spouse or partner. Some professionals discussed Romanian women's roles as perceived to be loyal, trustworthy, and obedient (UK-PR-01; ROM-KI-01) and argued these expectations acted to normalise abuse, with these roles and attitude transferred into the trafficking situation. Thus, women were described as facing both prescriptive expectations and criticism if they did not conform to social standards of their prescribed roles (ROM-KI-01). The survivors in the study too, identified these elements within Romanian culture and the influence of these cultural concepts on the relationships between women and traffickers (see Chapter 4) and discussed in previous sections and themes.

While Romanian participants supported some of the negative views of education and culture put forward by UK participants, they were also sensitive to the perception that Romanians were uneducated, poor, corrupt, and untrustworthy and some talked about what they felt was a sense of superiority among different cultures, especially in the UK context (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; UK-KI-04). A Romanian participant, who spoke about this superiority, highlighted the abuses women and young girls endured at the hands of English men: '*they are aggressive, drunk, humiliating the women, and the girls tell me, <u>anyone could come, only the English should not come </u>and that says a lot'* (ROM-PR-06). She considered that deficits in education and culture were found '*both ways'.*

Some Romanian participants reflected on how culture and values influenced human trafficking, highlighting commercial sex as morally unacceptable behaviour (ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-06). While others, described a degradation of traditional Romanian values, contrasting current attitudes with those of a possibly idealised past: '*Long forgotten Romanian village, where there were some*

principles of old and wise people as in Moromete [classic Romanian novel], where nowadays a man exploits his wife and gets money from men who come to his wife; all the village knows and talks about it with an air of normalcy' (UK-KI-05). Another Romanian professional referred to similar villages of 100 people where old men spoke about '*girls who went to produce [to produce or as product, referred to prostitution] in Spain'*; the participant then later said that he was expecting to see at least '*that popular shame'* when people talked about this, but on the contrary, such attitudes were perceived to be normalised in the community (ROM-KI-06).

Romanian professionals considered that young people believed it was simple to gain material goods, even if they lacked education or did not work hard lawfully and were aware of others who had succeeded and did so via unlawful behaviour (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09). These changes in expectations and attitudes contributed to what was referred to as '*the switch of values and the mainstream materialistic culture'* (ROM-KI-03), described as having a direct impact on trafficking and shaping the pull factors for trafficking (ROM-KI-01; UK-PR-01). Pull factors included: traffickers who were attracted to the possibility of '*getting money fast'* (ROM-PR-09); women wanted to '*be famous'* (ROM-KI-03); and young people aspiring to material wealth (ROM-KI-01). However, realising new material expectations and achieving success was part of the emerging culture which was not always attainable in the country of origin. One consequence of such aspiration was the increase in migration or the culture of migration, previously discussed.

Romanian participants also argued that materialistic values affected younger generations, their perceptions of achievement, and their aspirations for wealth with minimal effort (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-03). As in their accounts of the negative influence of 'manele' music (discussed above), they considered that materialisation and positioning sex workers as role models were promoted in the Romanian media. One Romanian participant highlighted that: '*those who made a name for themselves with sugar daddies and working with their bodies while bragging about it on TV and everyone knows they are high-end prostitutes*' (ROM-KI-03). Such perceptions suggest both concerns regarding the aspirations of young people in light of morals and societal standards while also possibly disregard towards sex workers' value in society. Furthermore, some professional participants expressed anxieties around sex work when referring to the development of the sex industry, the materialist culture, or the fall out traditional morals and values in Romania (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; ROM-KI-01). Their attitudes and views could be influenced by moral panics (see Chapter 1), as they resonate highly with women's

victimisation, and the perception of them as passive, and lacking agency and control (Cojocaru, 2015; Lee, 2011).

In terms of practice and working with trafficked women, a practitioner who was himself a migrant in the UK, emphasised the importance of awareness of '*the other*' (UK-PR-04). He highlighted the value of holistically understanding trafficked women's context and culture with the added understanding that they were, above all, migrants. He considered that those professionals who were themselves migrants had developed a better understanding of trafficked women through their own migratory experiences:

> I'm also from a migratory country. And we reflect a lot on what this migration means... By learning and speaking a second language, you understand the other better... you have more empathy. (UK-PR-04)

Although perceptions of 'otherness' emerged from different angles – from both the UK and within Romania - and had different targets: Roma people, educational achievement, gender roles, materialism and youth culture it is important to acknowledge its impact. This may be profound for trafficked women, affecting both their self-image and their trust and communication with professionals. It may also have implications for transnational collaboration and communication as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the particularities of Romanian women trafficked in the UK. It highlighted the different vulnerabilities encountered and reported by professional participants who worked with this group: the Romanian culture of migration, the role of Roma ethnicity in trafficking, the role of traffickers – particularly the 'loverboy approach' and finally questions around otherness as perceived by participants. Many of their views were consistent with the accounts of trafficked women reported in the previous chapter, yet differences were notable regarding expressed agency in decisions towards migration, relationships and victimhood self-identification. Professionals identified multiple reasons for women to become exploited or enter into sex work (and be exploited at a later stage). Many professional participants who expressed strong faith-based abolitionist anti-trafficking views tended to see Romanian trafficked women as vulnerable and lacking agency as migrants due to the multiple vulnerabilities. Although practitioners aimed to promote women's recovery, an emphasis on women's vulnerabilities may have

missed acknowledging their potential resources, strengths, and agency which were visible in women's accounts in Chapter 4 and will be explored further in Chapter 6.

The picture of trafficked women's experiences that emerges from the research is one where coercion, compliance and consent inter-relate and slide into one another. The complexity of these relationships operates in a restricted space, whereby trafficked Romanian women are situated at the intersection of economic and social exclusion, gendered power and anti-Roma and anti-immigration sentiments. A professional focus on women's vulnerabilities and lack of resources in the initial stages of their journey hampered recognition of women's needs for actualisation, family, care, belonging and success which might be achieved through migration or love relationships. While there are specific characteristics linked with Romanian cases of trafficking, such as ethnicity, Romania's EU membership, migration and recruitment methods, there are also multiple and more general vulnerabilities that impact trafficking and women's experiences. This highlights the reciprocal interconnection of women with their environment and the intersectionality of roles and characteristics, that makes them vulnerable to trafficking.

The combination of supply and demand and a lack of societal awareness was understood to contribute to Romanian women being easily targeted by both the sex industry and by traffickers. Some women understood they were seizing a work opportunity but found themselves '*conned*' (UK-KI-01). Others entered independently and consciously into sex work (UK-KI-06). While there is a need for increased public awareness of sex trafficking, Kempadoo (2015) has pointed to the moral panic that increasingly characterises public perceptions and argues that the concept of saviour could be applied to many faith-based groups where activism has taken on a new role, while disregarding women's independent decisions to enter sex work, as illustrated by the accounts of Diana and other women (Agustin, 2005; 2007; Mai et al., 2021; Jones, 2016; Pheterson, 2016; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). Such views limit women to their vulnerabilities and victimisation rather than considering them holistically, as individuals in all their complexity.

Individual experiences and well-being are highly influenced by the external environment and connected systems, such as family, community, organisations and institutions (Barner et al., 2017). These interactions positively and negatively impact individuals, and as Butler et al. (2016) suggest, vulnerability can be transformed into agency and resilience within these relationships and are addressed in the following chapters, starting with the aftermath of exiting trafficking.

Chapter 6. The vulnerabilities, resources and agency of sex trafficking survivors post-trafficking

Chapter aim

A key research question was to explore the area of vulnerability, resources and agency of trafficked Romanian women. This chapter draws on the professional participants' interviews to examine these themes in relation to the post-trafficking period. The key themes and sub-themes are discussed together with key points from the survivors' findings presented in Chapter 4. Although multiple vulnerabilities existed pre-trafficking, these were exacerbated during the trafficking episode and trafficked women exited the trafficking experience with higher and more complex vulnerabilities and needs. Nevertheless, internal and external resources were acknowledged by participants together with women's agency at different stages in their journeys. Factors that impact upon agency are also identified in the analysis, with a focus on the micro and meso levels. Through this ecological lens, I argue that both victimisation and agency do not always resonate with women's actual experiences and definitions.

Vulnerability, Resources and Agency: Key themes and sub-themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ Exiting as the first step of the post-trafficking trajectory. Factors supporting exit
    - ❖ Trust and mistrust post-trafficking: implications for engagement and accessing support
- ❖ The aftermath of trafficking: negative short-and long-term impact on women
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Exiting as first step of the post-trafficking trajectory. Factors supporting exit

This key theme highlights both the agency and vulnerability of women exiting trafficking as well as the discourses and terminology used by participants, whereby women were rescued, saved or escaped. Furthermore, it represents a particular initial point in the start of the post-trafficking journey whereby the sub-theme of trust and mistrusts in the first contact with authorities and afterwards can be identified. Respondents highlighted differences between those cases involving women who left trafficking shortly after entering, within days or weeks, as opposed to those who remained trafficked for years. The impact of the experience was complex and affected by many factors, yet the dimension of time was considered relevant when measuring the impact on the women's mental, physical and reproductive health. Participants differentiated between the length and type of abuse and the process and time needed to recover from the experience and perceived that with those survivors who came out of trafficking earlier having better outcomes (ROM-PR-03; UK-PR-08; UK-PR-09). Hence, the exit was considered a critical element that needed to occur immediately.

Practitioners' accounts of both the initial and later stages of the experience of trafficking included the topic of the need 'to escape' (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-12; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-05; UK-PR-09; among others). They described different cases, ranging from those women who managed to escape before the exploitation intensified, to those who endured many years in trafficking. Participants noted that once traffickers knew women's weaknesses, they could exploit them and build psychological control around them (e.g. having children; extended family in need; debts). Traffickers threatened the women by referring to children being taken away (UK-PR-01) [as in Maia's case] or damaging their immigration status (UK-PR-12). The nature of coercion and control was seen to vary depending on women's cooperation and compliance, the nature of the bond or relationship (e.g. boyfriend, partner, husband, family member) and the benefits she might get from trafficking, including finance and power. Many participants talked about the experience of debt bondage and things women needed to re-pay to '*get free*' (UK-KI-04).

Exiting trafficking is a complicated and difficult process for trafficked women (Ferrari, 2021; Gonzales et al., 2019). Participants mentioned that women could exit trafficking with the support of police (e.g. as a result of police raids). For example, '*if they've been identified in a brothel, manage to run away, leave that situation and come to the attention of the police*' (UK-PR-01). In terms of individual factors, participants identified women's strength, determination, motivation and luck as supporting exiting (such as in the

cases of Larisa, Ana and Irina described in Chapter 4). They also noted the role of the community, clients or other individuals who detected the signs of exploitation and informed the authorities or directly assisted women in exiting (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-07). According to participants, the police represented the most common way of exiting via police raids and visits to brothels or locations known to have a high incidence of sex work where exploitation could have taken place (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-11; ROM-PR-12; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-11). Lastly, participants mentioned a mixture of all these elements which, coupled with the circumstances and the context, facilitated exiting.

Police officers and NGO staff often used the words 'saved' or 'rescued', to refer to the experience of exiting trafficking: '*at least she was saved after two weeks'* (UK-PR-03); '*when they are rescued'* (UK-KI-01); '*We went in the night there to save them'* (ROM-KI-01). Yet, it was interesting to note that terminology could vary within one organisation. For example, some staff used '*saved'* and '*rescued'* (ROM-PR-01), while another staff member from the same NGO criticised this language as reducing women's agency and being paternalistic (ROM-PR-06). Furthermore, a few participants emphasised that, regardless of the exiting circumstances, women played a significant role in their journey and that exiting could not be ascribed solely to external entities such as the police and NGOs (UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-06). One participant mentioned that it was important that women recognised their value and decisions and understood that no saviour was going to rescue them: '*The woman has merit, due to her efforts and losses in trafficking, and she needs to be aware of it and of the fact that there is no such thing as a policeman saviour or salvation army'* (ROM-PR-06). Similarly, another participant mentioned '*the dangers'* of entering into the '*role of saviour in the NGO field'* (ROM-PR-10).

As noted in Chapter 5, strength was not acknowledged by professionals in the early stages of trafficked women's journeys, and that was reflected too in the language used by participants. Terms like 'saved' undermine women's agency or reinforce the commonplace perception of their vulnerability, and passivity in the exit stage (Cojocaru, 2015; Kempadoo, 2015). Such terminology is widespread in specific sectors, and as noticed in the data: for example, anti-trafficking NGOs may use it in lobbying or in the media to present in a 'dramatic' way the damaging characteristics of the experience and elicit emotional

responses[28] from policymakers and the public (Doezema, 1999; Weitzer, 2007). As other studies have showed, not all women required salvation or rescue; some said they were not saved but made it out on their own (Cojocaru 2015; 2016). Similarly, in this study, such accounts are demonstrated by the women who decided to escape and took active roles in their exit (see Chapter 4). Moreover, it was unclear if all participants shared a common understanding and meaning of the term 'victim' as there were discrepancies even within the same organisation as mentioned earlier. Such as Diana (interviewed), she did not want to be identified as a 'victim' (Chapter 4). Given debates about the implications of the word victim, some professional participants argued for using the term 'survivor' or just 'trafficked women' to avoid negative connotations and reducing trafficked women to their victimhood. However, many of the trafficked women (that professionals worked and interacted with) rejected this label as noticed by professional participants and other researchers (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007).

Regardless of terminology and intentions, police interventions played a key role in removing victims from trafficking situations, with this being supported by findings of this research, particularly in survivors' accounts and the wider literature (Ferrari, 2021; Hickle, 2017; Hodge, 2014). Police interventions occurred when clear signs of possible exploitation (e.g., also referred to as '*red flags'* and '*intelligence'*) came to their attention. Exiting with the assistance of police operations generally positioned women in a more passive role in these accounts. This contrasts with the agentic accounts of some of the women who planned their escape included in Chapter 4. Many participants considered that women often did not leave the exploitative situation following police interventions – as discussed below - although such interventions might enable women to reflect on their situation and ask for support later (ROM-KI-04; ROM-KI-06; UK-KI-02; UK-KI-07).

Police intervention and the interactions between NGO frontline workers and the women were seen as the first steps in offering support and possible facilitators that enabled women to exit trafficking. While Platt et al (2018; 2022) argue that police raids on brothels are frequently not experienced as benevolent in relation to sex workers, including possible exploitation, both professional participants and women interviewed tended to see them as the first stage in the process of leaving/exiting trafficking. Some

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[28] A similar approach can be identified in the writings of Bales & Trodd (2008) or Kara (2017) among others; although they attempt to capture the stories and experiences of survivors and personal observations, it can be argued that the tone, language and narratives are pursuing an agenda of eliciting sympathy for trafficking victims; additionally, practitioners in the UK, including some who did not take part in the research, talked about their work in these terms.

participants mentioned hearing similar stories from sex workers (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-10). Police corruption and brutality have also been identified as affecting women's willingness to engage, when victims learned that the police offered no adequate protection (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Jansson, 2019; Ditmore & Thukral, 2012; Nicolae, 2019).

In Romania, professional participants identified barriers to engagement with and trust in law enforcement authorities (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-11), and these are also discussed in the literature on the topic (Bodrogi, 2015). Thus, although the police were generally portrayed as a 'benevolent force' by professional participants (a number of whom were working in the police, were former police officers – 12 participants, while most of the others worked closely with the police), the violence associated with police raids on brothels, as reported by those researching the sex industry, may have implications for women's future trust and willingness to seek help. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this study was not able to include sex worker-led organisations, so their views of police raids and their impact on sex workers are missing but this experience was briefly touched upon by Maia (see Chapter 4). Maia talked about police attitude and treatment as 'very bad' and 'humiliating'. NGOs who worked with sex workers and police provided nuanced examples of what worked and did not work as part of the police action and attitudes.

Professionals reported that some women were still under the control of traffickers at the time of raids and were scared of talking to the police and noted that, only when traffickers were arrested, did women feel secure enough to talk about the exploitation or change their statements (ROM-KI-04; UK-KI-02; UK-KI-04, among others). As a result, participants considered that women had few possibilities to escape unless the police intervened. Moreover, women were afraid to ask for support from clients or authorities due to the threats and fear of traffickers: *'if they say that they will burn the house down with the family, we know they've done that, and they will do it to you'* (UK-PR-01). Survivors too, spoke about the brutality and threats of traffickers (see Chapter 4). According to participants, many women tried to escape but failed. If women were in touch with the police and other organisations, or others noticed their attempts to escape, exiting was slightly easier. Although not successful, attempts to exit demonstrated courage and increased the likelihood of authorities becoming aware of their situation: *'She tried to escape a couple of times from the premises, and we were acting on that intelligence'* (UK-PR-03). Additionally, the mix of actors involved in exiting, such as the police, NGOs and other individuals, often appeared in the discussions with professionals (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-07; ROM-KI-04; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-07, among others).

Nevertheless, women's active role in exiting was acknowledged by some of the professionals. Some mentioned that during the exploitation, women might decide to escape (e.g., *'had enough'* (ROM-PR-01), *'feared for their lives'* (UK-PR-01), or *'had nothing to lose anymore'* (UK-PR-07) or *'found opportune moments to escape'* (UK-PR-11)). Their awareness of the high risks they faced and the potential for accessing safe spaces influenced their decisions to escape. One participant (UK-PR-07) mentioned cases where women ran away when faced with the likelihood of being re-trafficked to the Middle East, where the chances of survival and exit became highly improbable. Furthermore, some participants described exiting as a more active process whereby women used their social capital and exercised agency (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; UK-PR-10; UK-PR-11). They spoke about women spending time preparing for their escape and acknowledged their strength and agency in deciding, planning and escaping. For example, when they wanted to ask for support, they would '*switch her phone off and SIM card out. They will ensure they wear better shoes at night, trainers rather than high heel shoes. Some will take their documents with them if they are lucky'* (UK-PR-11). Ana and Irina recounted similar stories regarding their escapes (see Chapter 4). This active process of exiting the trafficking situation, whereby some trafficked women used their social capital (Ferrari, 2021), and, consequently, exercised agency in their escape (Cojocaru, 2015), was highlighted by the women interviewed (see Chapter 4). The literature on exiting sex work has implications for sex trafficking and suggests that exiting usually happens after many failed attempts to exit due to the barriers the women encounter such as lack of opportunities among others (Baker et al., 2010). Yet, asking for support and trusting authorities or others was seen as significant point in facilitating exiting.

Trust and mistrust post-trafficking. Implications for engagement and accessing support

Trust was a significant factor influencing whether women would engage with authorities and facilitate exit and trust can be understood as a way of exercising agency in both directions – when to trust and ask for help and when not to trust. The process of building trust, if understood, could be used to assist policing to be better able to support women in exiting sex trafficking and to recognise their agency. Participants considered that the women's first contact with police and NGOs was essential and generally determined how the relationship developed and whether they accepted support (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-02; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-10, among others). Participants who either worked in the police or

supported the police in victim identification discussed the need to be more sensitive to women's experiences and adapt policing approaches accordingly (e.g., treating them as victims rather than as criminals) (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07). They also mentioned challenges such as working with groups of women where one spoke for all; while this was often considered a control mechanism, participants recognised that some women did not speak English and having translators on board for these first interactions was beneficial (ROM-PR-02; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-10; UK-PR-11).

In the first interactions with possible victims, support from police and NGOs was *'9 out of 10 times rejected'* (UK-PR-03). The main challenge to engagement identified by professionals was a lack of trust. This was perceived to be linked to previous bad experiences with authorities, problems with communications and language, cultural differences, the influence of grooming, and the effect of constant abuse and humiliation, which decreased women's sense of worth and confidence. Participants highlighted that if the woman sensed superiority and a lack of empathy from police or NGOs, they would immediately withdraw and reject any support (ROM-PR-01; UK-PR-11). Maia and Diana reported similar experiences (see Chapter 4). One participant considered that distrust in authorities was directly linked with previous experience of corruption in their own country and the fact that in first encounters, women *'didn't want to engage, especially with a stranger… and tell their deepest and darkest history and secrets'* (UK-PR-07). He then addressed the importance of establishing rapport and continuity of initial interviews with NGO staff and those familiar with the women. Yet, rejecting support can be seen as a multifaced issue: it could be a consequence of what support means or what is available for women. For example, some practitioners pointed out to instances where women were asked what they wanted and needed and responded by challenging the services with what they could offer (UK-PR-04; ROM-PR-06). Moreover, the question remains of whether support organisations could guarantee trafficked women's safety, or support their needs (e.g., financially, employment etc).

A similar concern was the question of victimisation and who determined that women were victims. One participant talked about giving women a choice to speak and ensuring they knew the consequences of their actions while at the same time enabling them to reflect on their situation, especially in cases of sex work where possible exploitation occurred. The participant mentioned that generally, a policing approach involved officers coming in and stating that *'we know you are a victim'* (UK-PR-11). This left no time for women to decide whether or how they wanted to interact with the police. Another participant suggested

that women needed to be given time and choices regardless of their awareness and recognition of victimhood at the moment of the raid (UK-PR-06).

The accounts of Romanian professional participants started from the point when women were repatriated, and similar issues of mistrust and lack of engagement were encountered. According to the Romanian participants, lack of trust was due to a range of connected factors, including poor information from different police forces, corruption in some sectors of policing, lack of protection before and after trafficking, the traffickers' connections with the police, traffickers' manipulation, individuals' ability to comprehend these differences within the police system, lack of justice and prosecutions (ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-10, among others). Some of these issues are furthered discussed in Chapter 7. However, all participants in both countries saw building trust as a significant concern, stressing that both authorities and NGOs needed to work more on ensuring that they were transparent and capable of building trust with trafficked women. Some participants also mentioned that Roma-Romanians were even more reticent due to negative experiences in the past: *'a lot of the women who are trafficked come from the Roma community. They hate dealing with the police, they do say, they say see I'm Roma or I'm gypsy I don't like to be dealing with the police. I don't trust them straight away'* (UK-PR-11). Additionally, participants discussed that traffickers deliberately created negative impressions of the police and reinforced women's mistrust in the police (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09, UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07, among others).

Trust was identified as key at different stages of the trafficking journey, particularly when exiting. Professional participants described women's trust as damaged by multiple actors (e.g., family, partners, traffickers, communities, police, and NGOs), with negative impacts on engagement with authorities and their ability to seek support and/or exit trafficking. Building trust was seen by professional participants as being present and sensitive to women's experiences and needs, being friendly, attentive, actively listening; being there with the women; not pushy; respecting confidentiality; being soft and kind (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-10; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-09). Participants recognised that it was important for women to understand the role of NGOs and other agencies and to understand that they would do nothing to harm them (e.g., maintain confidentiality, not take decisions on their cases or instigate legal actions) (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-10; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-11). The development of trust and engagement was assisted by a combination of factors, such as attitudes towards victims and demonstrating cultural competencies, as other research shows (Hershberger, 2021; Hodge, 2014).

The aftermath of trafficking: negative short-and long-term impact on women

Needs and vulnerabilities post-trafficking: Safety, mental health and financial security

Professionals linked the short-term effects of trafficking with women's immediate needs and vulnerabilities post-trafficking. This period could last up to a year when women were still in the initial recovery stage. Therefore, a first step out of trafficking, apart from safeguarding, was ensuring that women's basic needs were covered (e.g. food, accommodation, medical, psychological and legal support) and that they were safe (observations discussed by all participants). Describing their first interactions with trafficked women, participants working for NGOs spoke about ensuring their approaches were '*more humane'* and provided genuine care: '*that we just don't become a faceless service that doesn't care about them'* (UK-PR-01). The main issues were for women to feel safe and understand what support was available to them. For example, women were often 'pregnant', had 'sexually transmitted infections' or other health issues, including possible 'addictions', and would need specialised support (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-06; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-09). Finally, there were long-term needs such as immigration status, family support, employment, and education (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08).

According to professionals, trafficked women also faced extreme mental health challenges, including PTSD, suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression, and sometimes constant fear for their lives (UK-PR-02; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-06; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08, among others). All survivors interviewed reported experiencing these effects too (see Chapter 4). These complex needs meant that receiving adequate support was crucial. In addition to these health needs, participants identified the need for safety, acceptance, understanding, inclusion, respect and empowerment (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-11, among others). Participants in both countries emphasised women's need to keep their experience hidden, even if it meant rejecting any support or services. Whether supported or not, the life post-trafficking was characterised by participants in terms of '*secrecy'* (ROM-PR-01), '*anonymity'* (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-03) or '*trying to remain invisible'* (ROM-PR-09)*.* For those who returned to Romania, participants emphasised the importance of family and community not finding out about their sex trafficking experiences in order not to damage their reputation, thus creating a hostile environment and a constant need for secrecy:

...that is probably a real issue and concern about this kind of rejection from their community and long-term shame. There is a big focus on being labelled as someone who was trafficked, deceived and was just a fool and now is dirty. I saw those implications with the Romanian victims, especially in small communities. (UK-PR-02)

Noticeably, different factors made some women more vulnerable than others (e.g., age, education, period of trafficking, lack of support). In those cases, social services' and NGOs' assistance for women was considered essential (a key observation among practitioners in both countries). Romanian participants commented on the significance of a trafficked women's education level on her reintegration experience and their trajectories (ROM-KI-02; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-05). Moreover, a central issue was women's financial independence. If this remained unresolved, women faced similar situations to those they faced pre-trafficking regarding their needs for income and stability; as evident in Larisa's account (see Chapter 4). Since migration did not solve these economic needs, some participants observed that trafficked would believe that *'migration had let women down'* (ROM-KI-01; UK-PR-08).

Women's needs and vulnerabilities were similar once they returned to Romania: '*most victims are emotionally exhausted when repatriated; often because they have stayed in shelters in the UK, other times simply because the distance from home and the experience of trafficking made them emotionally exhausted*' (ROM-PR-11). Upon return, NGOs, together with the women, considered the priorities for support, such as mental health stability, financial independence and family and community reintegration, according to the particularities of the cases. Participants identified a risk of re-exploitation and re-victimisation if these were not addressed. Mental health recovery, safety from traffickers and financial independence (in addition to the wellbeing of their children and families) were the most acknowledged and urgent of women's needs, with considerable evidence of these issues in the research literature (see Chapter 2).

Regardless of the support women received, participants talked about the long-term impact of the experience and how trauma continued to shape the women's lives afterwards. They recalled that, for some, the long-term effects could last for years or decades, while the effects would be lifelong for others (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-09; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-10, among others). For example, the recent lockdowns and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., fear, loss of jobs, instability, solitude and isolation) had triggered symptoms for some, and participants had recently dealt with survivors who had exited trafficking as long as 15 years ago (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06). The degree of long-term trauma

depended on a women's profile and the extent and period of the exploitation, as some women would cope better than others. Similarly, studies have found that survivors' immediate PTSD, trauma and mental health affected their capacity to act independently and posed additional risks such as substance abuse, possible re-exploitation (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Hopper, & Gonzalez, 2018).

Participants noted that it was not only long-term mental health issues that women had to cope with but, in many cases, feelings of constant fear, shame and anxiety (ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-10). This was experienced by the survivors interviewed, Maia especially described '*long episodes of depression'*. Prolonged experiences of exploitation were considered to have left some women desperate and hopeless about what they could achieve:

> So they just see it as *… I don't have any dreams. I don't have any future vision or expectations because, for the last 20 years, all that's ever happened to me is wake up to what I have to do and then sleep.* The confidence is not there in their abilities or opportunities, and it's hard to exit trafficking, even mentally. (UK-PR-01)

There are knowledge gaps regarding the long-term mental health impact of trafficking and mental health services accessed (Powell et al., 2018; Stanley et al., 2016; Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013), especially when looking at the broader spectrum of trafficked women and the range of vulnerabilities, culture and other elements which influence this. Unfortunately, in Romania, stigma around mental health problems remains high (Coman & Sas, 2016; Sfetcu & Ungureanu, 2020) and could affect both trafficked women and their communities. Professional participants too, attributed this stigma as contributing to the barriers to women's engagement with support and mental health services post-trafficking (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08). Yet, professionals noted that if support was not accessed, not only the women but their children and family would be affected (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09). It was, therefore, thought crucial that women accessed services early on and that professionals treated them with respect and understanding. Moreover, women's mental health was affected long-term by infertility (UK-PR-01; ROM-PR-11), which was identified as another long-term issue.

Notably, women's resources and vulnerabilities played an essential role in the potential for re-victimisation or re-trafficking. This was especially noticed by professional participants among those women who did not access any support or were informally repatriated (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06). For example, participants noticed that if the women had the same financial vulnerabilities and

returned to their communities in proximity to the traffickers, the risks of re-victimisation were high (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-08; ROM-UK-01). Finally, questions of victimhood, trauma, dissociation from the story, and women's neglect of what had happened to them emerged as key in addressing vulnerability and mental health issues. Some participants argued that those women who could recognise their trauma and reflect on their experiences were judged to have better recovery rates than those who did not (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-11). The long-term effects were likely to be noticed in relation to women's health and mental health, self-image or perceptions about life, migration or sex work.

Perceptions of life after trafficking: Changes in meanings and attitudes

Another key sub-theme identified concerned women's perceptions of life after trafficking and meanings attributed to the experience. Participants thought that women became more cautious and fearful after their experiences of trafficking and noted that some women claimed not to be comfortable with men anymore and were afraid of developing intimate and other relationships (UK-PR-02). The survivors interviewed shared similar concerns although Ana had married and described herself as happy in her relationship (see Chapter 4). Thus, trafficking left women with harsher views of reality:

> … once you are faced with traumas like that of trafficking and especially of sexual exploitation, you start to realise that the world is not only what we want it to be or what everyone wants it to be, but that there also much more evil things… Then, they shut down. (UK-PR-08)

In the context of migration and sex work (e.g., those who decided to migrate for sex work and became exploited along the way), participants perceived that women blamed themselves or others for being tricked negatively impacting on their self-esteem (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09). Whilst some would keep these feelings hidden, others managed to overcome them. However, there were differences in how women saw themselves in relation to exploitation and sex work. Professionals noticed that most trafficked women did not imagine that they would be doing sex work (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-10; UK-KI-01, Maia, Ana, Irina), and as one participant mentioned, '*more than 80% of the women would not have anticipated or expected to practise sex work'* (ROM-PR-03). However, due to material gains, some trafficked women would have changed their perception of sex work, and if initially they might not have imagined doing it, they continued doing sex work as it offered more beneficial

financial gains (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-04); as a participant noted, *a 'few hours of sex work'* compared to *'12 hours in a supermarket'* (ROM-PR-09).

Thus, apart from blame and shame, some women changed their views on sex work, normalising it by considering, for example, that *'each job has its risks and shame'* (ROM-PR-10). While they still had *'awful experiences'* and were exploited in sex work (UK-KI-04) women would continue doing sex work as it met their need for financial stability. This too came across in the interviews with Larisa, Maia and Diana. Some participants mentioned that women could earn four to five times more than an average salary if they worked independently in the UK and some sex workers could earn as much as £1000 a day (UK-PR-10; UK-KI-04). Participants noticed that some women's perceptions of the gains and opportunities of sex work led to their continued involvement in sex work post-trafficking, despite the risks involved as women themselves acknowledged, with this further explored in Chapter 7 and 8.

Participants reported that many trafficked women would seek to migrate again regardless of their exploitation experiences due to their needs, the financial gains, and the 'culture of migration' (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-01; among others). Some women would leave Romania immediately following repatriation and migrate to another place; some considered that their experiences had taught them how to care for themselves and be more confident (ROM-KI-07; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-07), rather than being deterred from future migration (ROM-PR-02, ROM-PR-10, ROM-PR-11): *'They all have the desire go abroad (…) they come, get some services, and we noticed that they leave again after a short period'* (ROM-PR-02). Diana's case provided an example of this, as she migrated again post-trafficking (see Chapter 4) and Larisa wanted to migrate again if she would have the opportunity. Such cases demonstrate that apart from women's needs for financial independence it also entails an expression of agency, courage and perseverance in achieving their aims.

Participants described women giving diverse meanings to their trafficking experiences, and some women understood their vulnerabilities and what had brought them to exploitation (UK-PR-06). *'Some understand it exactly as it is… Others try to downplay it because it's probably too painful. But in general, I think that the majority realises'* (ROM-PR-08). Women had pride in presenting themselves to the world; some created their own stories about their migratory experiences as participants observed. These narratives showcased their successes and what worked well in their lives, such as *'kids going to school, dressed well, the house being built and taken care of, a nice car, because as far as anyone else is concerned, they are*

working abroad and take care of their families' (UK-PR-01). This represented a success; women wanted to identify with these stories, not the exploitation, and built their images and identities around '*what they did well'* (UK-PR-01). Some were seen to conceptualise the experience as a sacrifice and acknowledged the positive outcomes, maintaining their image as providers and breadwinners despite their horrific experiences of exploitation and abuse. Such views resonated with Maia's account of her care for her daughter and Diana's claim that she '*could support her family a bit'* (see Chapter 4). While a range of outcomes may result from the trafficking experience, most professional participants emphasised negative outcomes.

The analysis confirms that, at times, NGO services enabled women to regain financial independence. This contributed to ensuring that immediate needs were met. Trafficked women interviewed (who were of course recruited via NGOs), also appreciated NGO support and reported positive outcomes (see Chapter 4). For example, counselling helped Maia and Diana during episodes of depression to regain a sense of worth and self-esteem and process their trauma. Housing and material goods supported Ana in the immediate post-trafficking stage, as she was unemployed and could not care for her child. Finally, training and qualifications helped Maia and Irina to become financially stable and find work. Thus, services reduced specific vulnerabilities, increased resilience, and facilitated recovery and reintegration (see Chapter 4).

It was concluded by participants that the effectiveness of support is influenced both by women's will and determination and by what they could access from NGOs, community and society, which would determine their degree of recovery and reintegration. However, it was noticeable that professional participants were inclined to acknowledge only the positive side of professional support post-trafficking. There might be cases where, regardless of the support delivered, women remain vulnerable and at risk of exploitation, especially among those who reject support, and limited data is available about these lives post-trafficking (Brunovski & Surtees, 2007; 2010). Despite needs and vulnerabilities, women's agency, resources, strength and resilience represent positive indicators often overlooked in the trafficking discourse.

Beyond victimhood and vulnerability: Agency, Strengths and Resilience

Professionals noted that women who were not involved in sex work before trafficking were more affected by the experience (UK-PR-04; ROM-PR-10). Moreover, they claimed that Romanian women had more agency and independence than women from other nationalities who migrated irregularly and had more difficulties accepting their trafficking situation: *'it's more complicated for countries where individuals thought that they were not at the mercy of others to accept the experience'* (UK-PR-04). Other cases represented those women who were aware of the possibility of engaging in sex work but had not understood the full implications, the level of control and working conditions (UK-KI-07; UK-PR-01), and thus these women recognised themselves as victims.

As previously noted, trafficking results from the interaction of several individual and environmental factors. However, some participants saw *entry* into trafficking as a passive process in which women did not possess the capacity to exert agency (UK-PR-08; UK-KI-01; ROM-KI-01). In contrast, other participants discussed women's conscious choice to migrate regardless of any knowledge of possible sex work involvement. While most practitioners talked about how women *'aspire for better lives'* (UK-PR-10) and to secure a '*better future*' (ROM-PR-03), their agency was not much acknowledged initially, though some spoke about women's choices and willingness to accept the risks, claiming that *'they will go to the UK and be exploited, but she will get more money than in Romania'* (ROM-KI-03). Or, as another participant argued, while there were women who entered sex work by choice, he questioned how they acquired the potential to migrate and women's passive role: *'my question is why is it a Romanian woman in the UK? There's an expense to that. How did she come to be here?'* (UK-KI-04). Such comments act to dismiss women's agency or capacity to independently travel and may be informed by discriminatory attitudes towards Romanian migrant women.

A few participants also mentioned those women who chose sex work on their own or as a last alternative given their fragile or unstable situations; such this group was presented in contrast to those '*lured*' (UK-KI-03; ROM-PR-09) '*groomed*' (UK-PR-01; ROM-PR-02) or '*tricked*' (UK-KI-01; UK-PR-08) into trafficking. Participants' beliefs and values affected how this sort of decision was seen and discussed, with those from an abolitionist or faith-based organisation more likely to minimise or omit the agency of women who voluntarily participated in sex work. In contrast, practitioners affiliated with secular organisations or organisations that were pro-sex work were more likely to acknowledge women's autonomy and accept

their decision-making before engaging in sex work. Their decisions were based on the *'huge amounts of money they could make'* from sex work (ROM-KI-06); therefore, professionals spoke about *'girls who knew what they would be doing in the UK'* (UK-PR-03).

Other participants recognised the independence of Romanian women, who had agency and '*made a really good business for themselves'* (UK-PR-10; UK-PR-07). A few participants agreed that, to some extent, some women chose to do sex work and that such decisions should be respected: *'I'm not one for trying to push people out of sex work if they want to be sex workers, just make sure it's in a safe environment'* (UK-KI-07). The fine line between women exercising agency and choice regarding sex work and the potential for experiencing exploitation and negative external reactions was noticeable in professionals' accounts, as in other studies regarding involvement in sex work after trafficking (Agustin, 2007; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Hennink & Simkhada, 2004; Pascoal, 2020). Only a few participants acknowledged the complexities of such circumstances and that women's decisions were grounded in a context of risk.

Professional participants had various interpretations of victimhood; however women reacted differently to their experiences, and their self-esteem and self-image did not always fit professional narratives of victimisation, as the findings showed (see Chapter 4). Professional understandings of victimhood may not have always encouraged trafficked women's capacity for independence but rather highlighted their need for support and protection and such views appeared more prevalent amongst those working for anti-trafficking abolitionist or faith-based organisations.

Inner strength, agency and faith as resources

An important sub-theme identified was women's strengths, inner resources, agency and resilience and their positive effect on post-trafficking trajectories. Participants identified women's strong wills and their determination, stressing the importance that individuals working with trafficked women ensured that women could recognise these characteristics in themselves. They noticed that when women were aware of their strengths, they expressed their agency more efficiently, and their resilience increased: the better the inner resources, the better the post-trafficking outcomes (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-10; UK-KI-05; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-11, among others). Some thought that Romanian trafficked women had '*massive strength'* (UK-PR-12; UK-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-11; UK-PR-06) or '*they are very*

strong people' (UK-PR-09; ROM-PR-04), ambitious, hard-working and determined (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-10; UK-KI-06; UK-KI-07). However, according to many participants, Romanian women would also detach themselves from experience due to their mentality of '*work, work, work'* (UK-PR-04) noticed by many participants (UK-PR-05; UK-PR-09), and once they exited, they just wanted to know '*what's next for me'* (UK-PR-01). Moreover, a participant commented that the women often referred to their mothers and culture, or women's strength in general, as an intergenerational impact: *'my mother was strong, I have to be too'* (UK-PR-02). However, some participants questioned whether the claim that the women were becoming stronger was a protective response and not necessarily a genuine reflection of how they felt (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-02; ROM-PR-02).

Professionals observed that women could move out of situations without making a big fuss and did not want to be victimised or pitied but instead to move on as quickly as possible (UK-PR-02; UK-PR-11). This was seen as a '*very pro-active attitude'* that showed how '*rather than wallowing in self-pity' or 'crumbling'* – even though this might be understandable given what they had been through –women often wanted to *'better themselves'* and *'get out of this situation'* (UK-PR-10), without victimising themselves (UK-PR-07). Thus, a majority of participants recognised women's determination to overcome the trafficking experience as vital to their success (ROM-PR-03). Some women were described as showing a significant amount of agency despite their challenges. According to participants, agency varied depending on where women were in the trafficking journey. Their agency, was understood to be amplified in the moment of escape as the following excerpt suggests:

> I don't think any of them felt they had agency or control, which is why they then escaped because they recognise that they no longer have that independence or that control that they wanted. (UK-PR-08)

Participants noticed that some women rejected support services and often refused to live under specific rules/conditions (e.g., safe house, NGO rules), as they wanted independence and were determined to get it (UK-PR-02; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-08). Although their situations were not yet secure or improved, these women decided to leave the services and manage independently as participants noticed and was discussed earlier in this chapter regarding reasons for not engaging with services.

The capacity to survive trafficking was linked with women's inner strength and coping mechanisms. Participants mentioned cases they had seen when, even in the worst situations, women would find coping mechanisms and adapt; these might include getting closer to traffickers and exaggerating their stories

when they sought support (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-11; UK-KI-04). The women often developed adaptive behaviours which participants considered inconsistent with social norms, such as lying, manipulation, and aggressive behaviours (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-10). At the same time, participants highlighted the struggle for survival faced by women who were unable to leave trafficking, as one woman commented to one of the professionals, '*I want to break free from this, but in the current moment I can't, so I better do my best now'.* The participant considered that such attitudes showed *'extreme resilience'* (UK-PR-11). On the other hand, some participants talked about women needing to show that they were strong and ruthless (ROM-PR-02), to survive in trafficking and afterwards, especially if they continued in the sex industry post-trafficking and concluded that life experiences contribute to individual resilience (UK-PR-10; UK-PR-07).

Some participants talked about strength and resilience resulting from previous adverse experiences (UK-PR-07; UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-02). However, one of the survivors interviewed (Maia) considered that she became more vulnerable to coercion due to her early childhood adversities. Whilst adversity often has multiple negative effects, an individual's strengths can enable them to adapt, find solutions, and thrive (Banyard & Hamby, 2022; Saleebey, 2012); thus, in some instances, women, regardless of their experiences, demonstrated a positive sense of self, and a developing resilience which ultimately helped them survive. As noted in Chapter 4, some women also felt stronger as a consequence of having survived trafficking, especially after traffickers were punished.

In terms of positive elements of the socially embedded subjectivities around culture, roles, and responsibilities, participants drew attention to how women perceived themselves in exploitative relationships. Loyalty, love and sacrifice were resources of strength and spoke for women's role and standing in society, while simultaneously these factors contributed to their exploitation (see Chapter 5, section on 'loverboy'). Some participants mentioned the tension between personal resources and shared resilience within the excluded Roma communities, their loyalties and exploitation. They referred to women's central role in the Roma culture and the contradictions with their exploitation as they *'felt bound to help their boyfriend, to be the good girlfriend and I think they also feel independent and strong'* (UK-PR-02). At the same time, loyalty to one's own culture (e.g. Roma) could have both harmful (e.g., further marginalising women from accessing support) and protective impact (e.g., sense of belonging) and can only be understood when examined in the context and the meaning individuals gave to this behaviour. Some women who could not escape the trafficking situation were described as finding adaptive

mechanisms to cope with it, extending their gains from sex work and coming to terms with their exploitation, so allowing a degree of agency and consent to be experienced (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; 2016).

Religious or spiritual elements also contributed to women's sense of worth, trust and hope for the future in and after trafficking. In common with the survivors interviewed, participants talked about women's faith and trust in God, or the divine, and how these beliefs gave them strength whilst in trafficking, as they were connected to the notions of loyalty and sacrifice (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-011; UK-PR-12, ROM-PR-04, among others). Women were understood to draw on the idea of divine intervention (see Diana and Ana, Chapter 4) to help them overcome their reality and find justice. Faith was considered to represent an essential element in increasing women's strength and confidence post-trafficking, as did the idea of sacrifice: *'their kids are sorted, so it was worth the suffering'* (UK-PR-01); *'she sacrificed for their boyfriends to get out of a debt situation'* (UK-PR-02). Some NGO staff, who were attuned to the women's faith, were keen to guide and promote that thinking, which ultimately helped them to understand *'there is a need of divine help too ... and then they can see that little light at the end of the tunnel, motivate them, gather their forces and help them get through the process to achieve their aims'* (ROM-PR-10). At the same time, some women would accept their faith and suffering' as their destiny: '*her strength, she kept saying <u>God will punish him</u>. (…) <u>This is what God has planned for me and I'm just going to follow it. I'm going to trust there's a reason why he's giving me this life'</u>* (UK-PR-01).

Faith and religion were identified as significant for women as found in Chapter 4, and they can be explored in terms of how they increased agency and resilience or suppressed it. Faith and religion still represent an essential part of people's lives in Romania with a long history and a sphere of influence in state power and society (Flora et al., 2005; Stan & Turcescu, 2011). Over 99% of Romanian nationals in the 2011 census declared that they belonged to a religious group, and 86,45% to the Orthodox Church (INS, 2013)[29]. Trafficked women's faith may have represented an essential element that kept them strong along the way, as participants suggested. Studies have emphasised that faith and religion or traditional practices (e.g., voodoo, juju in Nigeria) have placed trafficked women in a state of compliance (Baarda, 2016; Pascoal, 2020) while others argue that faith may support recovery (Lewis et al., 2020).

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[29] Final data from the last census in 2021 is not yet public, although according to a press release, the INS (National Statistics Institute) mentioned that 15% of the population did not declare their religion in 2021 (https://romania.europalibera.org/a/religie-recensamant2022-romani-/32210549.html).

It was interesting to observe that the religious language and concepts which surfaced both in the women's language and in that of the professional participants (e.g., sacrifice, salvation) might have the effect of both perpetuating trafficking and challenging images of trafficking (both in trafficked women's and professional's narratives). For example, interviewed women considered their faith a strength, but it can potentially reduce agency, especially in Christianity where the concept of Divine will suggests that events are understood to happen with little human input, and the individual is positioned as a passive recipient. Despite of this, faith and divinity also represented comfort and hope, and increased rather than suppressed resilience thus allowing different experiences to surface. Faith can also inform victim care – and indeed many of the professional participants were employed by faith organisations: it taps into the values which support growth, development and resilience and deconstructing narratives which harm women post-trafficking (Lewis et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2014).

Other participants claimed that at certain stages in the trafficking journey, *'there is no agency whatsoever'* (UK-PR-08). Some participants mentioned that there was no agency even in migration: *'I don't think that generally, we see the person as a migrant capable of taking decisions. Maybe later, after the reintegration process'* (UK-KI-01). Some professional participants encountered cases where women did not show the same resources, strengths or agency as described by other participants: these trafficked women were seen as passive (UK-PR-05; UK-PR-08; UK-KI-01; ROM-PR-12). In cases where the women were too young and inexperienced and unable to make their own choices, they would rely on others to make decisions for them (UK-PR-05). Agency, or the lack of agency was a contested topic, and as the following example shows, some participants had strong views (or perhaps prejudices) regarding women's autonomy, rights and capacity to express themselves:

> I am very conflicted about this. Any adult, in principle, should have been considered responsible and capable of agency and of seeing himself as one with the system, not as zero. Now, if this does happen, I think it would probably not happen among the victims. I think not because you are incapable but because they did not have this exercise of agency or to exercise their free will. (ROM-KI-03)

Some professional participants also questioned women's strengths (as discussed in Chapter 5) and whilst some would become stronger, others would lose the resources and capacities they previously had (UK-KI-05; UK-PR-08; UK-PR-09; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08).

When professionals' and wider society's views are examined, the victim role takes centre stage. Prior to the experience of trafficking, these women were mainly seen in terms of their vulnerabilities and risks, reduced once again to a type of 'vulnerable body' with their motives, hopes and expectations for a better life (as pursued through migration and love relationships) missing from professionals' accounts. This highlights again the conflict in how trafficked women or sex workers are perceived, impacting their autonomy and recognition of their individuality beyond vulnerability (Agustin, 2007; Mulvihill, 2018).

Similarly, the consumption of drugs and alcohol was also mentioned by participants as amplifying a lack of agency. Some considered such behaviours to create *'a destructive or unreal agency'* as women would make harmful choices or put themselves at risk (ROM-PR-02). Although alcohol consumption and other substances are commonly used in street sex work (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Stoklosa et al., 2017), the findings also show that they did not always represent a choice, and some of the women were forced to use them as recounted both by survivors (see Larisa's case Chapter 4) and professionals. Professional participants understood drugs create unreal agency, self-deception, and passivity, which may reflect moralistic views regarding their usage, and contributed to portraying women as having no agency or false agency.

Agency was viewed on a spectrum with different levels of intensity of expression or not identified at all. Thus, professional participants remarked on the choices, behaviours and moments which enabled an expression of agency in contexts where women generally lacked agency, had inconsistent agency or displayed self-destructive behaviour (e.g., drug use, which was correlated with a passive or self-destructive behaviour). Furthermore, some professionals also identified women's lack of awareness of their victimhood – with those who did not want to recognise or accept victimhood considered lacking in agency. This represented a further way in which agency can be denied or unrecognised. Some professional participants had firm convictions regarding trafficked women's lack of agency and this resonated with what Cojocaru (2016) found when questioning activists who claimed knowledge of trafficked women lives, while dismissing her account as a survivor. It was clear that understandings of victimhood are varied and complex, and the interpretation of victimhood is impacted by individual perceptions.

Finally, while most participants recognised women's strengths, agency and the individual characteristics that contributed to resilience, others expressed doubts and referred to them as coping mechanisms for some women or did not acknowledge the agency and strength demonstrated by trafficked women.

Nevertheless, they acknowledged that when identified and nurtured, their inner strengths and capacities could support women post-trafficking, and these strengths were increased by external factors such as children, family or friends.

External resources and support: Children, family, services and justice

Professionals perceived family and children as an essential element in women's survival: they represented increased possibilities for love, support, and acceptance (UK-PR-06; ROM-PR-01). They contributed to a woman's strength, motivation and resilience: *'those who come from families or had a person of attachment, who supported them, had an anchor, and always drew their strength from there because they had unconditional love'* (ROM-PR-09). For the women, the family was a protective factor that kept them going. However, there were also cases where the family represented a risk (e.g. where they were trafficked or exploited by the family, when family did not support them afterwards or they experienced family-linked vulnerabilities). They drew distinctions between the family of origin and the constituted family (partners and children). Interestingly, professionals noticed that most, if not all, women were also mothers and had children in Romania, and described how they would '*often talk about them fondly'* (UK-PR-11). As noted, four of the women interviewed had children and made similar comments (apart from Larisa, who was not close with her daughter, see Chapter 4).

Participants described the financial and emotional drives towards success and moving on both while trafficked and after; an inner fight for survival and a sense of purpose were linked with women's families. Women's sacrifices (UK-PR-06) often involved sending money to their children and families at home. Furthermore, participants observed and perceived that the family and children build up a sense of strengths, increasing women's resilience (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-12; UK-PR-01; ROM-PR-08). Family is also an essential value in Romanian society, as some participants noted; therefore, women constructed their realities around the family, and their acceptance, support or sacrifice were rooted in the concept of family (ROM-PR-02). For example, Diana and Ana discussed this in detail (see Chapter 4).

The emotional role of the family was captured by this UK participant: '*to hear the words of the children sometimes, or the voice of their parents or their own family it adds a layer of safety, comfort, and strength.*' (UK-PR-01). Likewise, children were understood as a source of motivation (ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-11; UK-

PR-11; UK-PR-10), something worth fighting for and an essential factor in recovery as Maia suggested. Some considered that motherhood increased resilience (ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-12) or even assisted women in getting out of trafficking as the following example suggests:

> What helped her was that she had a little girl, and then she had a purpose of detaching herself completely and changing her life. And those who learn resilience more easily have a support network and the support of their families, and many times, I have seen that the victims who can rehabilitate the fastest are those who take care of the children… They rebalance themselves more easily psycho-emotionally because they know the children need them to be present. (ROM-PR-11)

The positive meanings and experiences associated with motherhood helped some of the trafficked women overcome the trauma and sustain themselves through hardship and the sacrifices they made, as was reflected in the cases of Maia, Ana and Irina's accounts post-trafficking (see Chapter 4). Even when exploited, some women would decide to remain and help their families. Interviewees described women as focused on: *'children's future'* (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-11); *'better future'* (UK-PR-11; ROM-KI-03); *'sending money home'* (ROM-PR-04). Such instances were prevalent as participants in both countries observed (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-12, among others) or as the following example suggests: '*they will say I've got young children there with my mum. I'm working to pay school or health fees'* (UK-PR-10).

The family represented a supportive factors identified as important in recovery by professional participants. Although women yearned to have a family post-trafficking, it was also clear that the trafficking experience might undermine future relationships through the legacy of damaged trust, sexual trauma, fertility issues and anxiety around men as noticed in the interviews with the survivors (see Chapter 4). As the literature suggests, these effects are felt by other women who experience trafficking, and the question of trust and how to build or rebuild trust emerges (Contreras et al., 2018; Hodges et al, 2023; Pascoal 2020). The survivors in this study had multiple roles and were breadwinners, thus taking responsibility for ensuring their families were safe and not lacking anything. Simultaneously, survivors with children were described as inclined to try harder to recover and fight, so increasing their sense of pride and conferring meaning on the sacrifice and suffering endured in trafficking through their role as breadwinners. Although this might not apply to all trafficking cases, motherhood represents both a risk for trafficking, and despite its demands, a potential source of self-esteem and motivation in the post-trafficking period (see Maia, Ana and Irina's accounts, Chapter 4).

Children too, were valued by both professionals and trafficked women as something new, changing women's role and meaning, which could push women towards self-actualisation and regaining a sense of independence (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-10). Similarly, other studies too have showed that motherhood positively impacted trafficked women (Hopper, 2018), although motherhood in itself proved to be challenging for some women due to forced marriage and forced childbearing (De Angelis, 2016). Further studies have shed light on cases where women have experienced increased vulnerabilities due to motherhood and children born as a result of trafficking (Surtees, 2018) and the additional financial and material pressures of providing for their children (Pascoal, 2020).

External resources and support was considered yet another essential aspect of success post-trafficking, at both the micro and meso levels. Professional participants believed their services were 'of real help' (ROM-PR-04; UK-PR-01) and 'benefited those who accessed them' (ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-07). One Romanian practitioner (ROM-0R-01) claimed that, after the support programme, *'99% of survivors were not exploited'*. This was a common perception based on the feedback NGOs received from service users. Similarly, all women interviewed (who of course were recruited via NGOs) agreed with this and were grateful for the support and noted its relevance to their lives (see Chapter 4). Reasons for this included their financial situation and the need to become financially independent. Therefore, NGOs and services that could support with securing training, employment and financial management skills post-trafficking, were deemed crucial but limited (ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-04). However, the lack of these skills, particularly financial, does not represent a substitute for poverty and was not discussed in detail by professionals.

Finally, participants generally agreed that successful prosecutions positively impacted women's experiences and trajectories, increasing women's confidence and safety. All participants talked about prosecutions as a success, but this was particularly stressed by those involved in policing. Professionals suggested the many benefits for prosecutions and convictions, these were not easy to achieve and very often, women were reluctant to engage with authorities (UK-PR-02; UK-KI-02). Nevertheless, some participants believed there was a *'higher recovery rate'* for those victims who gave statements against traffickers (ROM-PR-09) – there was some support for this in the women's own stories (as in Irina's case, see Chapter 4). The following example illustrates the challenges women might face and the value of telling their stories in court:

> She was summoned to court, and she came and asked *what do you think? Should I go or just write that I maintain my statement?* And I explained to her why it would be difficult if she went because she would

face everything again. Because she also had doubts about being able to or not, speaking of self-confidence and self-image. She decided to go and was interrogated for about 4 hours, and she called after, she was very happy and said that she was very glad because she felt much much better, went all the way in it, and succeeded … from now on she will do a lot more with more ease, precisely because she was able to face the traffickers in court. (ROM-PR-06)

Prosecutions were thought to reinforce a sense of justice in those communities where punishment for trafficking was often absent. The value of prosecutions went beyond emotional gains. Sometimes they enabled women to receive extra support and compensation but they also ensured the community was aware that traffickers had been convicted for their actions (UK-KI-02; UK-PR-01; ROM-KI-07). Convictions were identified as offering positive effects for women and their communities across the research data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and discussed data on the aftermath of trafficking, including the issues encountered by professionals in the initial stages post-trafficking, such as trafficked women's lack of engagement with authorities. It then highlighted the vulnerabilities exacerbated by the trafficking experience as well as women's resources, resilience and agency and described external resources available to trafficked women. The initial vulnerabilities which led to trafficking were often encountered and intensified post-trafficking. Yet, for instance the responsibility for children (e.g., financial and material) can represent a vulnerability or a risk to being trafficked, in the study this responsibility was acknowledged as well as a strength and supportive factor in recovery. Such findings resonate with wider literature on vulnerability to trafficking linked to context (see Chapter 1) and post-trafficking trajectories (see Chapter 2).

Factors that influence agency are linked with the eco-system of the women, as some of these factors stimulate agency. It is also important how agency is perceived, recognised and utilised by individuals from the outside (e.g. by organisations supporting trafficked women) and in wider society. Agency was first discussed by professionals in respect of exiting trafficking, although exiting was often understood by professional participants as the result of an intervention by a third party, with terminology such as 'saved'

or 'rescued' employed. However, such terminology is open to criticism as it implies that one group (in this case, the police and NGO staff) is superior to another in terms of knowledge, judgement and power and consequently overlooks any signs of potential agency the women possess.

The role of policing in anti-trafficking, though applauded by most professionals and recognised as essential, could be also questioned in terms of good practices and its linkages with wider issues of policing irregular immigration and sex work, with its relevant outcomes in regard to discrimination, stigmatisation and inappropriate treatments to trafficked women and sex workers. Such aspects were noted in the findings and wider literature (Platt et al., 2018; 2022) or within elements of the 'rescue industry' similarly targeting these specific groups (Agustin, 2007; Kempadoo, 2015; Mai et al., 2021). Thus, impacting on survivors' reluctance to engage with authorities, the perceived lack of trust and minimisation or lack of recognition of agency. Additionally, issues of self-identification as a victim poses questions around expression of agency, and who determines who a victims is. Such as in the case of Diana who did not consider herself as a victim until authorities made her aware of it; yet, even under these circumstances and acknowledging the fact that she was victimised, Diana believed that she had free will and was not fully a victim.

The findings showed that there were different ways in which participants perceived and experienced agency and that are capable of exercising agency despite trauma as other studies show (De Angelis, 2016; Cojocaru, 2015). However, some factors reduce what would be socially considered safe or acceptable expressions of individual agency. Professional participants described a few cases where women's safety and autonomy were so restricted that others took decisions on their behalf. Agency, too, could be differently manifested and acknowledged at different points in the trafficking journey, as it could be situation-dependent or expressed in various ways. For instance, although traffickers ensured that the circumstances of trafficked women were highly constrained, with little physical agency, women nevertheless found means of exercising agency (see Chapter 4). Post-trafficking too, there could be a tension between women's desire to be free and express agency regardless of their vulnerabilities, while some practitioners expressed concerns in that regard.

Consequently, agency and vulnerability in trafficking and post-trafficking are interconnected and neither should be disregarded. Moreover, the research suggests that women's views on both agency and victimisation might differ from those of some professional participants. This was noticed especially around exiting trafficking, the desire to migrate and other decision-making processes. These different views on

victimisation and agency suggest the social construction of victimisation and agency in many instances. This awareness has potential to improve practice in victim-care by recognising and utilising trafficked women's agency while simultaneously seeking positive post-trafficking experiences and re-writing the post-trafficking narrative, resonating with other studies who highlight the agency and strengths of survivors (Cojocaru, 2016; De Angelis, 2016). The following chapter focuses on the macro level and its implications for post-trafficking trajectories.

Chapter 7. The external systems shaping post-trafficking trajectories: Professionals' accounts

Chapter Aim

This chapter explores and discusses professionals' perceptions of other actors involved in trafficking and their impact on trafficked women's trajectories. The chapter addresses the wider macro context in which trafficking occurs and how it impacts on survivors' lives post-trafficking. It draws on the accounts of practitioners and key informants to identify those issues in the Romanian and UK contexts most affecting anti-trafficking and considers their views against key findings from the survivors' interviews. Finally, it explores additional external factors such as services, sex trafficking and sex work narratives, policymakers and the impact of COVID-19 on post-trafficking trajectories.

The external systems shaping post-trafficking: Key themes & sub-themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ The Romanian context impacting post-trafficking: multiple systemic issues
    - ❖ The consequences of corruption, lack of political will and accountability
    - ❖ 'No turning back from prostitution' (regardless of trafficking)
- ❖ The UK context impacting post-trafficking: positive practice or a hostile environment
    - ❖ The UK perspective: 'Good practices' and approaches for tackling trafficking
    - ❖ Challenges with the NRM and the lack of support for survivors
    - ❖ Brexit impact on migration and post-trafficking
- ❖ Other external factors impacting the post-trafficking trajectory
    - ❖ Services and collaboration: Joint investigations versus repatriations
    - ❖ The trafficking narrative and the 'thin line between trafficking and sex work'
    - ❖ Shaping the future: Policy formation and the lack of survivor involvement
    - ❖ Covid-19 impact on trafficking and post-trafficking trajectories

Context impacting post-trafficking: Romania and multiple systemic issues

The consequences of corruption, lack of political will and accountability

Both UK and Romanian professionals described the Romanian context in terms of poverty and lack of resources and development and saw these elements as further eroding the poor quality of the justice system, social services, and education, ultimately impacting the post-trafficking journey. The current Romanian political and societal system had developed from communist values, which some participants referred to as a '*communism hangover'* (UK-KI-04) or *'communist influence'* (UK-PR-01). A Romanian participant mentioned that: *'On paper, everything looks perfect'* (ROM-PR-05); *'Writing papers and reports and strategizing is what we've learned from communism, but we do nothing. We are hiding the problem—an inheritance from communism'* (ROM-PR-09). Some regions in Romania were seen as underdeveloped; however, the conditions were worse among Roma communities, where there was felt to be absolute poverty (UK-KI-O4; UK-PR-06; ROM-PR-01).

Most Romanian participants spoke about different types of corruption, including high-level corruption, where resources were inadequately shared and those in power misused them without accountability and transparency (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01, among others). UK participants too, mentioned instances of corruption in Romania: *'I saw corruption when I would visit small-town police stations… they would go for a 5-course lunch and offered palinka [traditional alcohol] … the cops would not pay for that meal'* (UK-KI-04). Both UK and Romanian participants provided several examples of perceived corruption: *'I'm not blind when I go there. I can see the extent of poverty, where the corruption is, where the money is'* (UK-PR-01). Some participants also linked corruption with OCGs and suggested that the authorities did little about the situation: traffickers '*bribe everyone and nobody checks how much money they have — a tremendous underground economy'* (ROM-PR-09). For example, a former UK police officer (UK-PR-07) mentioned that victims' engagement with the authorities was also linked with the corruption they experienced or witnessed in their countries of origin and considered that women did not cooperate with police due to previous bad experiences. He described Roma communities in Romania where *'there was corruption. You had to be very careful, particularly in some Roma villages. Many vulnerable victims knew that the police procrastinate deliberately or are paid to create difficulties'* (UK-PR-07). Professionals understood that a perception of widespread corruption was prevalent in communities and reinforced the traffickers' power. The narrative of a corrupt country and government increased distrust and discouraged

future engagement with authorities because '*the girls know how powerful traffickers are and that nobody cares about them [trafficked women]*' (ROM-PR-09). These examples resonated with Maia's experience (see Chapter 4).

A Romanian participant (ROM-KI-05) provided detailed examples of what she perceived as corruption in terms of legal action and government will to change legislation. She discussed at length government officials' connections with criminal groups:

> Almost a month ago, the Minister of Justice mentioned that organised crime networks had captured all state institutions and that organised crime networks influenced political decisions (...). And, unfortunately, they didn't want these reforms to be implemented in the previous or current government. More precisely, the current DIICOT [Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism] leadership was investigated for acts of corruption. (ROM-KI-05)

Most Romanian participants spoke with disappointment about instances of lack of proper governance, transparency and accountability and some suggested impunity around trafficking situations (ROM-KI-07; ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-05).

Despite this widespread perception of corruption in Romania, there were differences in how professionals understood its impact for trafficked women and the messages that should be conveyed to them. For example, participants in the UK spoke about their interactions with the women and how they did not want to engage with the police and remarked that '*the Romanian police are corrupt and there is never justice back home*' (UK-PR-09). However, Romanian participants suggested that such accounts were not necessarily accurate (UK-PR-06; UK-PR-12). One Romanian participant claimed that '*victims were encouraged not to believe in the Romanian judiciary or police… we know that traffickers try to manipulate and claim acquaintance with the police and the victims believe [this]. We try to deconstruct this mentality… not every trafficker has such contacts*' (ROM-PR-04). There were concerns that generalisations about corruption would define the entire system and country:

> *All police officers in Romania are corrupt.* They have an image of Romania, unfortunately. But we must also raise awareness in the UK that human trafficking is handled by specialised police who have nothing to do with the village police they have heard about… It's quite hard to change this [perception]. (ROM-PR-06)

Political will was another factor that exacerbated issues with tackling trafficking, and a common view among Romanian participants was that *'there is no political will'* in Romania (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-05). Some participants thought that trafficking was generally not taken seriously by Romanian politicians and society (ROM-KI-03; ROM-PR-09). Others mocked the way authorities handled trafficking, and some mentioned the anti-trafficking support helpline, which *'closes at 4 pm, so after 4 pm there is no more trafficking'* (ROM-PR-05; ROM-KI-03). Participants also discussed the lack of urgency in strengthening legislation and how changes were impossible, as legal proposals *'remain on the table for years with no outcome'* (ROM-KI-02; ROM-KI-05).

A common view was that Romanian authorities needed to do more to tackle trafficking, starting with prevention, prosecutions and victim care (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-06; UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01). Court processes in Romania could in some cases last several years, negatively affecting recovery post-trafficking (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-07; ROM-KI-03; ROM-KI-06). Participants specified the lack of adequate victim protection, compensation, and services, which decreased women's interest in collaborating with authorities, especially because they knew there would be minimal consequences for the traffickers, despite risking their lives:

> Many testify against the trafficker, after which the trafficker comes to their house and asks, *what are you doing? you testified against me?* Of course, they withdraw the complaint or lose the lawsuit. Then, [authorities and public view] *look, they filed a complaint and dropped it. They are whores*. This is the situation in the country, and without help, it's difficult to testify in court without protection. (ROM-PR-09)

There were complaints about how public legal support was provided and how NGOs always needed to ensure they had enough lawyers and staff to support prosecutions (ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-08; ROM-KI-03), especially since traffickers had highly qualified private legal support.

Participants felt that the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) and social services in Romania failed to provide good services, were generally underfunded, lacked proper training and specialised support were politicised and corrupt (ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-05; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-09). Some experienced working with Romanian social services as challenging due to their regulations and lack of cooperation and openness (ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09). Those who worked closely with social services spoke about their inconsistency and lack of professionalism and

resources and how these negatively impacted victims and increased re-trafficking risks. A large number of participants mentioned placement in childcare services as one of the factors that increased vulnerability, and some described trafficked women who had been previously institutionalised (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-10, ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-05; among others). Interestingly, three of the survivors interviewed experienced some sort of institutionalisation and/or placement in their extended families (see Chapter 4). Moreover, one participant (ROM-PR-09) discussed corruption in childcare institutions and how he was aware of groomers and traffickers recruiting underage girls from such places in collaboration with the staff. Other participants (ROM-KI-04; ROM-KI-05) made similar comments, resonating with this example:

> It's easy to get a girl from the DGASPC. It's like a nursery for trafficked girls—you just have to bribe. I have had many cases involving social workers, security guards, and people involved in trafficking networks… if you take a girl from the DGASPC and you're working with them, no one looks for her. (ROM-PR-09)

The issue noted with young women who left care was that most had no proper education and skills to enter workplace and lacked post-care support (ROM-KI-04). Consequently, participants suggested that many would end up engaging in sex work and were at risk of being trafficked (ROM-KI-04; ROM-PR-10). Although the government staff interviewed did not discuss such issues extensively nor criticise the system as harshly as NGO staff, they mentioned their worries regarding the connection between trafficking and childcare services or young people engaging in sex work after leaving childcare institutions (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-11). Furthermore, a policymaker (ROM-UK-05) spoke at length about the issues in the Romanian child protection system, citing examples from her work, observations from lobbying for legislative changes, and her experience of questioning government institutions which, according to her, hid statistics and declined access to information on cases (e.g. the number of children in institutions and missing children).

The lack of investment in policing represented another issue. Romanian police forces were described as inadequately equipped in respect of cars, fuel, computers and IT systems; therefore, some considered that there were minimal expectations of resolving cases successfully (ROM-KI-01; UK-KI-04). In the non-governmental sphere, many organisations operating in Romania complained about the lack of funding and interest from authorities to adequately finance services for victims, as well as major challenges in securing funding (ROM-KI-06; ROM-KI-03); *'all the NGOs in Romania receive zero RON'* (ROM-PR-06). Most

participants in Romania agreed that NGOs' limited funding highly impacted service provision. Some NGOs closed because they could not sustain themselves and *'never received a penny from the government'* (ROM-PR-09), while those still operating competed for funding instead of collaborating and cooperating (ROM-KI-03; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-08; ROM-PR-09).

In terms of prevention, UK participants discussed preventing *'dangerous'* migration (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-08)*,* which according to them, ultimately led to trafficking. Although both countries generally applauded preventive measures, Romanian participants criticised campaigns that did not resonate with those people at risk and these were considered useless. Such examples highlighted how prevention campaigns failed in Romania (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06). Conversely, while supporting the same arguments regarding inappropriate prevention, a Romanian practitioner presented an example of what he considered a *'real type of prevention'* (ROM-PR-01), which included financial opportunities for people in vulnerable communities, such as creating workplaces and grassroots activities, which decreased the desire for migration and trafficking risks.

Finally, participants in Romania, especially those who worked in policing, or UK participants who closely worked with Romania, referenced the famous Țăndărei trafficking case. A few police officers interviewed in both countries were part of this investigation; their disappointment was visible when discussing the case, as ROM-PR-09 indicated, *'everyone in Romania knows the Țăndărei case and the corruption that comes with it'*. The Țăndărei case began shortly after 2007, followed by one of the largest joint European investigations, involving forced begging, child and sex trafficking, and other elements of human trafficking (Europol, 2021; Gravett, 2017). A former UK police officer who was involved in the case provided a detailed account of his experience, observations regarding the investigation's early stages, and the follow-up process in Romania. The OCG was composed of four criminal gangs from Țăndărei [a Romanian town] and was identified in the UK and Romania as having trafficked hundreds of children in a few years (UK-KI-04). The case received considerable media attention due to its magnitude and prolonged investigation (UK-KI-04; ROM-KI-03; ROM-KI-05).

While talking about this case, participants discussed the lack of quick responses from Romanian authorities as opposed to those from UK authorities or even the *'lack of interest in following up with big and difficult international cases'* (ROM-PR-09). For example, ROM-KI-05, who contributed to the investigation in the Țăndărei case, remarked that the main issues were the time allocated for

investigations and how, in this case, two suspects were imprisoned in the UK after six months as opposed to none after ten years in Romania[30]:

> After going to trial, the Țăndărei case lasted almost ten years. Those underaged beggars in the UK in 2007–2009, at the time of the definitive decision, were adults and no longer in the same situation… And in the UK, I think that the process was completed in six months… So, it did not take years.

According to participants in both countries, the consequences of such cases demonstrate the weakness of the Romanian legal system, with the attached issues of corruption and lack of transparency and political will to resolve the case (ROM-PR-05; ROM-KI-03; ROM-KI-05). Finally, participants mentioned the power of OCGs when influencing authorities, the notion of impunity for trafficking and exploitation and its consequences; the messages regarding this case received by the community, practitioners, international community, and Romania; and how these factors negatively impacted anti-trafficking endeavours. That is, how the '*traffickers got away with it*' (ROM-PR-05; ROM-KI-05; UK-KI-04; ROM-KI-07). According to the participants, an example such as the Țăndărei case, due to the lack of adequate explanations offered to the public, portrays the Romanian justice system negatively, which ultimately contributes to victims' and potential victims' lack of trust in and cooperation with Romanian authorities. Although the Țăndărei trafficking case occurred years ago, participants considered its impact to be significant for understanding the state's approach to trafficking in Romania.

As noted in Chapter 5, many structural and contextual issues impacted women's post-trafficking trajectories in Romania. However, the role of Government practices, such as political will and corruption, needs to be acknowledged as these were identified as contributing to mistrust in social services and authorities and the lack of appropriate victim care through Romanian institutions. Along the years, Romania was considered one of the most corrupt states in the European Union (Ristei, 2010), and although much action has been taken to challenge corruption and increase democratic practices, corruption still affects trafficking (TIP, 2022). On the other hand, while acknowledging these limitations, some participants considered that much focus on corruption and overgeneralisation of corruption, risks to harm the relationship between victims and Romanian authorities or Romanian authorities and international partners (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06). Additionally, there were instances in the data where

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[30] After nine years of court process, 25 suspects have been acquitted for the crimes of child trafficking and money laundering by a Romanian court in the Țăndărei trafficking case due to changes in legislation and lack of evidence as mentioned in an official press release by DIICOT in 2019 (DIICOT, 2019).

participants labelled customs and cultural norms (e.g. hospitality and generosity) as corruption, thus taking out of context, misrepresenting and generalising those instances to the whole population. Finally, it was notable a focus on issues in Romania, with potential impact on the post-trafficking trajectories and highly emphasis on destination countries as responsible for trafficking.

'No turning back from prostitution' (regardless of trafficking)

Sex work or prostitution (the term used by all Romanian respondents see terminology discussion Chapter 1) before or after trafficking represented an important sub-theme under the Romanian context. Professionals perceived risks of trafficking to be higher for sex workers thus, some expressed concerns on how, in Romania, sex workers were impacted by victim blaming and subjected to hostile attitudes towards sex workers. Professionals in Romania noted that, due to the way in which sex work was regulated in Romania, women remained indebted by accumulating fines, requiring them to continue selling sex to pay debts: '*This vicious circle doesn't allow them to gain employment because all their salary would go towards paying fines. It's impossible to come out of this, and the state does not help you'* (ROM-PR-02); this resonated with other Romanian professionals (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-10, and Larisa); *'women would be fined by police and accumulate an increasingly larger debt, which makes them continue sex work'* (ROM-KI-07). Participants familiar with these issues advocated for legislative change that would either reduce the fines once women quit sex work or enable them to reintegrate into society and the labour market differently (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02). Lobbying was identified as the key means of changing the system to ensure that women could quit sex work if they wanted and have reintegration opportunities:

> One of the girls worked on the street for six years. During that period, she accumulated enormous fines, which she had to pay back when she was hired; it was a court decision. She ended up paying a third of her salary, which would be withheld monthly for decades and obviously does not motivate the girl to become engaged in her job. (ROM-PR-10)
>
> It's not illegal to practice [sex work], the fines are for creating public nuisance [disturbing the public] or something like that. They give them about 500 lei at a time, and about four-five-six police crews come and give them more. The police fine liberally because, depending on how many fines they give, they also get some benefits. Yes, it's silly; somehow, they [police] justify their activity for that day. (ROM-PR-02)

The recurrent fines women received for prostitution resemble debt-bondage with traffickers and reduce women's possibilities for exiting prostitution as the findings show. Despite the legislation, such practices were seen by trafficked women interviewed and professionals as incidents of abuse, portraying discrimination and judgemental attitudes towards sex work. Yet, punitive attitudes towards sex workers were noted in participants' perceptions and are common in the literature (see Chapter 1).

Police forces were also questioned regarding their practices. Practitioners in Romania were more critical of the police and authorities, mentioning examples of violence, police brutality, superior attitudes, and lack of sensitivity towards possible victims (see Chapter 6). Participants, mainly in Romania, spoke extensively about police abuse in cases involving sex work and how that affects trust relationships in the UK and Romania. This was true of both the Romanian and UK police, and participants recounted stories about police behaviours and attitudes that women had shared with them:

> She doesn't cooperate because the police officer doesn't have openness and empathy. He doesn't have to be a bully – if you have a criminal in front of you because then you can be 100 times tougher – but at that moment, you are with a victim and must behave differently.' (ROM-PR-01)

Professionals considered victim blaming in Romania as a significant issue (UK-PR-03; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01), whereby, regardless of the trafficking experience, women were harshly judged, and society would '*point fingers. Oh, this is a prostitute who's come back'* (UK-PR-03). Such examples were common: '*many people in Romania put this label on sexual exploitation, and everything becomes prostitution. This is prostitution, the women want to go, and that's it'* (ROM-PR-08). Participants emphasised the Romanian stigmatisation of sex workers as undesirable and undeserving:

> I've heard official people saying: *well, they're prostitutes*. So, if you are a prostitute, you don't need protection? (...). This is a discourse that I think is quite pervasive and ingrained in the Romanian mindset and that's why I think it's going to be quite difficult to fight trafficking for sexual exploitation because it's kind of seen as acceptable. (ROM-KI-03)

The conflation of sex work with sex trafficking and general stigma towards sex work represented a significant challenge for women post-trafficking, particularly those returning to Romania. Both professionals accounts and women's narratives (see Chapter 4) evidence that they encountered challenges, exclusion, stigma, and blame even when fitting with the image of the 'ideal victim' post-trafficking. Such experiences highlighted the contradictory attitudes towards women before and after sex

work, as professionals discussed that society vilified women in the industry for their involvement, including those who have been trafficked (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09, among others). Moreover, moral, religious and cultural values feed into victim blame. Social attitudes towards trafficking victims in Romania was considered judgmental, lacking in understanding and empathy, and unhelpful for reintegration. Other studies have identified these issues in Romania (Aninoșanu et al., 2016; Bodrogi, 2015; Schwartz & Schwartz, 2019) and other Eastern European countries (Brunovskis, & Surtees, 2013; Ostrovschi et al., 2011), highlighting the negative effects of these common attitudes on survivors. Consequently, the wider community has a role in supporting or undermining women post-trafficking, suggesting that efforts should be taken to educate the general population about trafficking.

Finally, although participants in Romania were more likely to discuss challenges, a few mentioned some good practices and progress in recent years. Participants in the UK too, referred to '*excellent police officers'* (UK-PR-07), and one participant mentioned being *'pleasantly surprised and humbled by what the Romanian authorities were doing'* despite the contextual challenges (UK-KI-02). Those participants who had worked in Romania over 20 years ago and saw the recent changes were similarly impressed, especially because they had witnessed earlier days when 'resources and services were lacking. But now it is different, and we've seen the ongoing progress' (UK-KI-05). Key informants mainly spoke more about the recent changes and changes they were advocating for, such as specific legislation and better networking and collaboration locally and internationally (ROM-KI-01; ROM-KI-05). The changes, therefore, required qualified people who understood the issues and had the will and determination to change. Four of the survivors whose stories are included in Chapter 4 had positive experiences upon return to Romania and were surprised by the changes for the better they encountered.

The Romanian context presented many significant issues, and all participants wondered how the future might look and hoped for improved care for victims, better prevention and prosecution. In contrast, the UK was perceived as an example of good anti-trafficking practices and this is addressed in the following section.

The UK post-trafficking context: positive practice or a hostile environment

The UK perspective: 'Good practices' and approaches for tackling trafficking

Global and gender inequalities underpin trafficking (see Chapter 1). Professional participants observed that traffickers prioritised wealthy countries, such as UK, for providing trafficked women for sex work while recruiting them from poorer regions of Romania (Aronowitz, 2013; Bodrogi, 2015; Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003). The demand and supply of sex workers was mentioned by professionals in both countries, with traffickers driving recruitment and playing a prominent role in it (ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-08; ROM-KI-01; UK-KI-01; UK-PR-08, among others), indicating an awareness of the influence demand in countries, such as the UK, has in the supply chain. However, this issue is less salient for this study's focus on post-trafficking and thus is only briefly acknowledged here.

When it comes to anti-trafficking strategies and approaches, the UK was applauded by participants from both countries (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-02; ROM-KI-03; ROM-KI-05), and this approbation contrasted vividly with their views on Romanian policy and practice. UK participants often referred to the UK perspective to differentiate their approaches from those of other countries (UK-KI-02; UK-KI-06; UK-PR-07). Romanian participants noticed that the UK was very serious and efficient regarding law enforcement in trafficking, and some mentioned that the UK was *'the most efficient state globally for policies and legislation through good practices'* (ROM-KI-05). Similarly, UK participants considered the UK's modern-day slavery legislation positive and innovative. Some (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-02; UK-KI-04) had been directly involved in lobbying and ensuring that the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was approved. A consortium of organisations in the UK had worked closely with government to create the legislation. The changes were necessary, as UK-KI-04 claimed, because there were many issues, laws that were *'out of date'* (UK-KI-02), or *'overlapping'* (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-04)*,* and the new law covered trafficking, slavery, forced or compulsory labour and issues of servitude. Some professionals considered that since the Act was implemented, there was more clarity and understanding of exploitation, and increased ability to identify vulnerable and exploited populations. Some UK participants expressed confidence that victims were now better supported and traffickers were held accountable (UK-KI-02; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-08). Nevertheless, significant research in the UK context suggests that low prosecutions, lack of adequate support and the quality of victim care continue to be problematic (Craig, 2019; Hynes, 2022; Schwarz & Williams-Woods, 2022) and these issues are discussed further below.

A common view amongst participants was that the UK approach was more victim-centred than the Romanian approach, where authorities focused more on convictions rather than '*ensuring that the victims were fine*' (UK-PR-06). Such remarks, especially among participants who made observations on both systems, were common (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-06; ROM-PR-02). Similarly, the services and NGO values in the UK sought to emphasise victim care, which as participants suggested:

> … is about a victim-centred and victim-led approach. It's not about what we want or think is best but understanding what motivates the victim's choices and how we can support them to make the best choices. (UK-PR-02)

While participants' positive perceptions of UK approaches are not always supported by the wider research evidence (Craig, 2019; Hynes, 2022; Schwarz & Williams-Woods, 2022), they show how a hierarchical, UK-centric view of trafficking policy and practice prevailed among participants. For instance, different approaches to consent, confidentiality, and sharing information about cases with other professionals may have shaped views on collaboration between UK and Romania as the findings showed (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-11; ROM-KI-05) and will be discussed in the following sections.

UK participants saw positive aspects of UK policy and practice as linked with their perception of a strong emphasis on prevention, partnership and collaboration between NGOs and state institutions (UK-PR-03; UK-PR-08; UK-KI-01; UK-KI-04, among others). The Romanian participants also commented on the quality of policing and the rapidity of victim identification in the UK, perceiving UK authorities as more vigilant on crime, particularly trafficking, than those in other countries (ROM-PR-11; ROM-PR-12; ROM-KI-06). The speed with which the new legislation was passed was considered to demonstrate an outstanding commitment from both authorities and civil society in the UK and was linked with the excellent collaboration and networks that were observed in the UK (ROM-KI-06), leading to what was perceived as faster and easier to obtain results and changes in the anti-trafficking approaches (ROM-KI-05; ROM-KI-06).

As a Romanian participant remarked, '*the UK legislation favours the investigator more than it does the trafficker. Unfortunately, in Romania, there are still many gaps and a lot to lose*' (ROM-KI-04). The changes in the UK had occurred due to significant investment and '*some massive injections of money and staff, particularly in training*', which were felt to support a better understanding of the phenomenon and better responses from authorities and society (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-02). Other references to good practices included

the impact of the support available and how the support was acknowledged and appreciated by the women; three of the survivors interviewed were also grateful for the services received in the UK (see Chapter 4), only Maia had a negative experience in the UK. Although professional participants judged UK trafficking policy and practice advanced in comparison with the Romanian anti-trafficking landscape, they also identified challenges for their work in the UK.

Challenges with the NRM and the lack of support for survivors

Although the UK was considered by some professionals *'a champion in addressing trafficking and victim care'* (ROM-KI-03, among others), participants also discussed the challenges they faced navigating UK systems and how that affected survivors post-trafficking. Professionals discussed several NRM challenges, with one professional referring to the '*NRM unreliable data'* and the lack of post-NRM knowledge (UK-KI-04). He mentioned the challenges with locating and encouraging possible victims or reported victims to enter the NRM once they have been referred by first responders. The exclusion and scrutiny faced by entrants, the need to prove victimhood, and the system's hostility were other issues in the first stages of entering the NRM. As a participant (UK-PR-12) claimed, *'the legal framework is not very kind. It's not easy for people to apply and get trusted [by authorities]. You are still subjected to rigorous scrutiny because the Home Office operates on an exclusion policy and the so-called hostile environment'*. Moreover, trafficked women did not always understand the NRM's purpose and implications, therefore they were uninterested in entering the NRM (UK-KI-01). Likewise, the women interviewed for this study knew little about the NRM (see Chapter 4) and similar observations were shared by Romanian professionals who worked with repatriated survivors (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; among others).

Other issues mentioned included the time women had to wait for a decision about gaining entry to the NRM and perceived inadequate support afterwards. Survivors were described as frustrated and wanting to leave the system as it did not cater to their post-trafficking needs (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-05; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-04). Some participants in the UK remarked that victims would think that they have to support police investigations if they wanted to access services through the NRM, which represented a barrier since many women did not want to proceed with investigations (UK-PR-03; UK-PR-10; UK-PR-11). Thus, such

misunderstandings and lack of awareness hindered access to support for some trafficked women. Moreover, those critical voices suggested that it was easier to repatriate EU nationals informally without necessarily involving them in the NRM process (UK-PR-11; UK-KI-05; ROM-PR-06, among others). Yet, if survivors remained in the UK and entered the NRM, depending on the location, they would be placed in a *'cheap bed and breakfast and get state benefits'* (UK-KI-04). Yet this was not the case for all the survivors, and especially after Brexit, some noticed that support was even more limited and if they did not enter the NRM or did not have a pre-settled status or their documentation was not in order, it was even more difficult to access support and have no recourse to public funds (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-11; UK-KI-05). Yet, those entering the NRM, were perceived to deal with the limitation of the system and the support packages proved through the NRM:

> It's a long process, and individuals feel they are not fulfilling their promises: *I came out of this. I want this, this, this, this.* The NRM is not responsive at that level—it's a process. So, people get very frustrated, especially trafficked women because they want immediate change in their life. The fact that they are safe is not immediately relevant and noticeable because it doesn't meet the full package. (UK-PR-04)

The 45-day period for reflection and decision was considered too short and needed revisiting (UK-PR-03). Some thought it was inadequate (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-10; UK-PR-11), particularly in cases where women were trafficked and abused for years, thereby requiring a better assessment of the victim's needs. Finally, participants referred to the weaknesses of '*one size fits all'* approaches (UK-KI-04) because victims '*were rushed through the system'* (UK-PR-07) and had insufficient time to recover or develop resilience (UK-PR-07; UK-PR-11; UK-PR-12).

Additionally, some professionals talked about women's dissatisfaction with the daily allowance and services: '*£10 a day for me? What can I do with £10 today? I smoke, so only the cigarettes will be £8 a day*' (UK-PR-03). Service provision was described as minimal and not always holistic, for instance, some NGOs had high caseloads, a lack of specialised support, and high staff turnover. Additionally, a lack of specialised services in the UK for helping Romanian and other international women with mental health needs was mentioned (e.g. therapy and counselling in Romanian language). The prevalence of a Western perspective in mental health services was described as lacking sensitivity towards other countries' cultures and approaches did not necessarily align with the women's experiences: *'The knowledge of therapy is situated in Western culture and that sometimes does not help other people, so it creates a problem.'* (UK-PR-12). Participants in both countries also mentioned issues with the NHS (National Health Service) and what they

considered problematic waiting times for mental health assessments and interventions (UK-PR-12; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-04). In some cases, women waited for over eight months – *'ridiculous waiting lists'* (UK-PR-10) – to receive support, with no interpreters or with *'three-way conversations'* (UK-PR-01). In such instances, there were references to the *'NHS' lack of capacity to deal with this group'* (UK-PR-12). Finally, once women exited the NRM, there were uncertainties about '*what was available for them'* (UK-KI-02), sometimes with no '*real incentive'* afterwards (UK-PR-10). The findings concerning professionals' experience of the NRM pose questions about the extent of support women receive, their prospects and possibilities post-trafficking and the effectiveness of the support received in reducing vulnerability and sustaining recovery.

Participants also mentioned inconsistencies in service provision across the UK, linked with a lack of trafficking-related knowledge in other sectors regarding services and this consequently affected women's trajectories and experiences. A participant (UK-PR-01) called it *'a lottery'*, whereby if a woman was in a particular town or city, she could access better services because some places received more investment than others. Another aspect of inconsistency was how women were moved through different areas: '*So, people are moved to different safe houses and different areas, and there's just no consistency in support. It feels like a rollercoaster'* (UK-PR-02). More flexible provision was required: *'I hope that the support given to women or trafficked people would be more flexible, that government rules about who can access support would be better tailored to each person's situation'* (UK-PR-11). Similarly, UK-PR-09 mentioned the lack of understanding of human trafficking in some sectors, (e.g., housing), which impacted how government agencies delivered and prioritised support.

Finally, some participants argued that the UK government does little to solve NRM issues in terms of engagement, support, and post-NRM support and considered it a *'weakness of the system'* (UK-PR-07; UK-PR-12). Thus, the victim care process was always a '*hot topic'* (UK-PR-04) and efforts to find better solutions were described as limited and superficial (UK-PR-07). Whilst previous sections have highlighted the positive aspects of the new system, there was recognition, by UK participants, that processes could be improved.

Brexit impact on migration and post-trafficking

Professional participants in the UK linked trafficking with migration issues, and what they called '*illegal migration*' (UK-PR-04) or the ease of migrating from Eastern Europe (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-02; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-01). Some participants in the UK talked about the rise of criminality since Romanians started to migrate to the UK (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; UK-KI-04) and expressed preferences for '*closed borders*', which would provide security and control and reduce crime. Nevertheless, the majority did not share such views and were concerned about Brexit and its potential negative impacts on EU nationals. A UK participant (UK-KI-02) identified a conflict of interest regarding who decided the legal status of women post-trafficking:

> There is an absolute conflict of interest there because you've got the Home Office in charge of immigration, making decisions on whether somebody should be treated as an immigration case or as a victim of trafficking. I do think that Brexit hasn't helped in that respect, and it certainly won't help moving forward whether you get dealt with as an immigration case or as a victim of trafficking.

Participants were uncertain about the long-term effects of Brexit on trafficking policy and services but expressed concerns as to whether the same level of services would be available to Romanian women and whether professional collaboration and joint investigations would be undermined (ROM-PR-12; ROM-PR-10; UK-KI-06; UK-PR-02). Women already needed to prove their status to access public services (UK-PR-06) and would also be questioned about immigration crime due to Brexit (UK-KI-02). Those who did not have residential status in the UK would need to return through '*volunteer return schemes*' (UK-PR-05). In fact, some women had already been encouraged to return to Romania, as the following extract shows:

> I've been translating for various places and now because of Brexit and everything, unless women have their settled status, it is difficult to help them access support in this country or the support that is offered is minimal and conditions are not always the best. Many organisations just tell women that: '*You know, there's not much for you here. You could go back though. We could pay for your transport back and it's something rather than nothing.*' (UK-PR-11)

Participants also mentioned that Northern Ireland and ports in Wales and Scotland might become new trafficking hubs post-Brexit, as movement through those places was easier and did permit a degree of flexibility and lack of accountability (UK-KI-03; UK-KI-01; UK-KI-07). Other participants claimed that traffickers would always find ways through gaps in the system and that '*demand and supply would eventually make*' their way through (ROM-KI-02). Hence, Brexit would allow better monitoring of migrants

in the country but only within the UK's jurisdiction. The impact of Brexit on trafficking is still debated (Cockbain et al., 2022; Egwae, 2019).

Other external factors impacting the post-trafficking trajectory

Services and collaboration: Joint investigations versus repatriations

Conflicting approaches to addressing different trafficking elements was identified as another sub-theme. Professionals discussed the approaches adopted by organisations in the UK and Romania, some of which were more paternalistic; for example, enforcing more rigid rules for protection, requiring women to always be in a shelter and restricting women's freedom of movement - especially in Romania (ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-03). Such rules were justified on the basis that they supported women's protection and reduced contact with traffickers. In contrast, some organisations used what they considered more empowering approach where women lived comparatively autonomously and moved freely in or out of the shelter or centre (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-06). While this was considered risky (ROM-PR-08), it emphasised women's capacities and freedoms. However, a Romanian participant criticised such approaches in the UK:

> …there was a lockdown in the UK, and it was very difficult for the people at that shelter to keep the women motivated and care for their mental health because they were locked inside the shelter. Anyway, they thought giving them internet access was a good idea. This led to many difficult situations, including this girl who came into contact with some rather dubious characters. (ROM-KI-03)

Positive experiences of collaboration were linked with joint investigations, although some prosecutions were not completely successful in Romania (as in the Țăndărei case, previously discussed). Participants who worked in policing agreed that such collaborations and relationships were *'successful', 'excellent', 'healthy',* and *'positive'* (UK-KI-05; UK-PR-07; UK-KI-02; ROM-KI-03). They claimed that Romania and the UK were the states co-operating most fully on joint investigations at a European level. These collaborations increased the possibility of identifying victims, handling prosecutions, and acquiring mutual learning between UK and Romanian authorities. Thus, joint investigations were considered extremely important and successful. Another positive aspect of collaboration included networking, field visits, and joint events,

and all participants discussed the beneficial impact of such encounters (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-02; UK-PR-06; ROM-KI-01; ROM-PR-02). The positive impact of these collaborations was thought to increase the likelihood of trafficked women being better supported, but evidence for the link between professional collaboration and positive outcomes for those who use their services is not readily available. Similar gaps in knowledge have been identified within the wider literature. For instance, policing anti-agency and international collaborations are seen as beneficial in ensuring initial removal from trafficking and safeguarding (Pajón & Walsh, 2023); long-term and consistent support for survivors too, was identified in attempts to monitor impact of best practices as a core outcome in a recent study in the UK (MSCOS, 2023[31]; Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023).

The challenges, weaknesses or what was referred to as experiences of negative collaboration were related to repatriation, communication issues, mistrust, and different work approach identified mainly at NGO levels. The UK participants were more reluctant to discuss problems in collaboration. In contrast, Romanian participants spoke about two major issues encountered in their work with UK authorities and organisations: informal repatriations and lack of trust. Most Romanian participants argued that informal repatriations were highly problematic and recounted negative experiences in such cases, these included: inadequate risk assessments; victims returning without comprehensive healthcare checks and placing others at risk; not receiving any pre-departure support; NRM-related misinformation; not informing victims about their rights in the UK; and creating misleading expectations for women (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-11; UK-PR-05, among others). Informal repatriations occurred when victims of trafficking did not want to enter the NRM or receive support: women were returned to Romania with the support of NGOs in the UK, without alerting the Romanian authorities or being linked with NGOs in Romania. Since Romanian NGOs were expected to welcome and support the women, for instance, pick them up from the airport and provide shelter and medical and psychological support, Romanian participants claimed that it would be fair and professional to receive accurate information that would enable a better response to women's needs (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06). They described receiving victims with severe contagious diseases, very poor mental health, addictions, suicidality, or family violence risk, and not having been informed about these vulnerabilities and risks (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-08). '*Women being put on the plane and sent home'* (ROM-KI-03) was

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[31]Modern Slavery Core Outcome Set (MSCOS), https://www.mscos.co.uk/long-term-consistent-support.html

a recurring concern, especially among Romanian respondents in both countries. The following extract highlights this problem and the ensuing risks:

> … we don't have information; they don't exchange information on cases, on what happened and what was done. It works on the principle that *we cannot tell you confidential things…* you send her to us to assist her; you can't withhold information from us, especially such essential information about her condition and psychological health. And yes, we had cases where she had seizures or she wanted to cut her veins, and you sent her home yesterday but didn't tell me that she tried to do this I don't know how many times in the UK. Or you didn't tell me she had a history of drug use. (ROM-PR-04)

Many Romanian participants highlighted UK authorities and NGOs' lack of trust towards their Romanian counterparts. Some gave concrete examples where they had noticed this lack of trust and detailed accounts of their experiences with UK NGOs and authorities that illustrated what was experienced as inadequate (ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-04). A practitioner cited an example of UK NGOs accidentally sending emails discussing whether it was safe to provide information about a case to a Romanian NGO (ROM-PR-04) and questioning the Romanian NGO's integrity and qualification as an NGO. She described these as trust issues: '*It's a mistrust between states, and I wouldn't necessarily say it's an attitude of superiority, but we can say it's sort of that*' (ROM-PR-04). Participants were disturbed by such experiences: '*We kept trying to understand what was happening because, from the very beginning, there was such superiority among our partners in the UK. This superiority—I do not really understand it*' (ROM-PR-06).

Finally, Romanian participants spoke of situations where victims were not informed about their rights and the support available in the UK and were encouraged to return home (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-08). Romanian participants described a lack of transparency and suggested that women were encouraged to return to Romania and to believe it was no longer the UK's responsibility to cater for them; some argued that buying a ticket to the home country was easier and cheaper than supporting victims' integration in the UK (ROM-PR-08). For instance, some noted that Romanians identified as potentially trafficked at airports were often denied entry rather than offered support (UK-KI-05), and a few participants described cases whereby Romanians arriving at the airport were returned home or not allowed to enter the UK as they were considered possible victims of trafficking - highlighting the idea that UK authorities wanted to get rid of vulnerable people as soon as possible and did not care about them or wanted to support them: '*if they wanted to help*' they would allow them to be in the country and ensure they were safe (UK-KI-05). In contrast, UK practitioners had a different story, claiming that women wanted to return and they had to

respect their rights to privacy regarding what they could share with authorities and NGOs in Romania.

Nevertheless, attitudes towards Romanians and prejudices regarding possible victimisation or criminality may inform practices such as airport screening and rapid repatriations. Pickering and Ham (2014) challenge airport screenings as a means of identifying victims, and consider the ideological stance behind the practice, which further stereotypes women, sex work and vulnerability. In the UK context, such attitudes and practices may have been intensified by and following Brexit (addressed in the previous section) and comparisons with border officials' attitudes to and practice with other nationalities[32] indicate a hostility towards migrants from Eastern Europe. In light of UK immigration policies and approaches towards different nationalities, these cases of informal repatriations where survivors' best interests were disregarded highlight the need for policy reform and a better understanding of such attitudes. It also acknowledges how the actions and perceived beliefs of immigration officials affect women's attitudes towards support and engagement with the authorities and services.

Nevertheless, participants in both countries identified the potential for improving collaboration. Increasing communication and trust was seen as most important and might involve getting to know each other better and strengthening cooperation. Both countries were perceived to have already taken steps in this regard with the hope of better future collaboration by '*intensifying dialogue*' (UK-KI-07) and developing '*a more nuanced understanding of each other's context*' (ROM-PR-11; ROM-KI-02).

The 'thin line between trafficking and sex work'

In discussing the impact of trafficking on women, professional participants also noted distinctions between independent involvement in sex work and forced sex work and exploitation, the line between the two was seen to be blurred and left many unanswered questions regarding the impact of the initial experience (UK-PR-10; UK-PR-06; ROM-PR-04). For example, at times, sex work or prostitution was referred to as sex trafficking, and participants when talking about sex work would confuse the distinction between the two. However, some participants were cautious when referring to one or the other. Instead, they emphasised

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[32] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/15/over-60-eu-citizens-stopped-ports-uk-brexit-romanian

the level of independence women might have and how that could quickly vanish within a situation of exploitation. Some spoke about the '*sex work and trafficking spectrum'* (UK-PR-11) and how women could switch from one to another or be permanently in a *'grey area'* between the two (UK-PR-10).

According to participants in both countries, women would create narratives around their exploitation and sex work and did not conceptualise their situation as trafficking. Furthermore, participants argued that many women felt that, whilst human trafficking was one of '*the worst things that could happen in a person's life'*, this did not apply to them (UK-PR-01). Instead, the women would claim, '*this is not my case. I am coming and doing this if I want to. I can stay for a month or two and then go back'* (UK-PR-03). Many participants thought that in these situations, the women themselves did not differentiate between independent sex work and trafficking and considered their situation normal (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-08; UK-PR-08; UK-KI-04; among others). Such ideas were consistent with most participants' view that women either did not know or did not recognise that they were victims (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-03; UK-PR-09; UK-PR-12; ROM-PR-07). Participants considered that the main reasons for women not recognising their vulnerability and victimhood were emotional dissonance and the relationship with the trafficker, learning disabilities or their '*cognitive ability'* (UK-PR-08), the lack of understanding of the notion of trafficking generally (UK-PR-03), or deliberately not acknowledging their position due to shame (UK-PR-02; ROM-PR-02).

For some participants, primarily those from faith-based and abolitionist anti-trafficking organisations, sex work seemed not to be a legitimate option, and regardless of women's stories and choices, they considered it trafficking and exploitation, reinforcing the view that the women did not recognise that they were victims but, in some cases, could not do so due to a lack of understanding of what trafficking means (UK-PR-08; UK-KI-03). Thus, participants' views on the relationship between sex work and sex trafficking were also defined by their attitudes towards sex work. For example, there was a prevalent narrative found in the data of '*a six-year-old or ten-year-old little girl being asked about wanting to be a prostitute'* (UK-KI-05). Participants both in Romania and the UK gave examples of sex work not being actual work or a desirable option:

> If you ask six-year-old girl what she wants to be when she grows up, she will probably say teacher, doctor, ballerina, singer, or anything else. She will not say '*I want to be a prostitute'*. (ROM-PR-10)

Some participants noticed a conflation of sex work and sex trafficking and how easy it was to move from one extreme to the other, misunderstand or misread the actual situation. Participants who worked with sex workers had a more nuanced attitude and affirmed that the distinction was never *'black and white'* (UK-PR-02). They noted that a rigid distinction between sex work and trafficking might affect the women getting support (ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-10; UK-PR-10; UK-PR-06; UK-PR-11). Interestingly, a Romanian practitioner (ROM-PR-10) claimed that those trafficked women who were victims and yet remained in sex work were still blamed and judged by society, while 'ideal victims' had a more positive image. One participant raised the issues of a clear-cut interpretation of situations of trafficking as being nuanced yet, the tendency in policing and care to distinguish between deserving and underserving women based on their independent engagement in sex work was common (UK-PR-10).

In discussing post-trafficking trajectories, participants also addressed prevention of exploitation and sex work. Attitudes towards sex work could influence prevention agendas in both countries, especially among faith-based and abolitionist organisations. Prevention agendas can be shaped by moral panics, political agendas and unrealistic goals as discussed in Chapter 1. Moreover, some professional participants in the UK understood prevention of trafficking as prevention of migration, highlighting the risks Romanian women could face while migrating (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; UK-KI-04). Interestingly, it was notable that such attitudes conflicted with positions they claimed to support, such as non-patriarchal attitudes and gender equality. In some accounts, Romanian women were seen as 'exploited' or 'oppressed' in their country of origin due to gender inequality and roles, while simultaneously, they were not considered capable migrants who could settle and develop in the UK. Such views, resonate widely with the 'white saviour' narratives (Kempadoo, 2015), 'the rescue industry' (Agustin, 2007; Shih, 2018) or 'sex humanitarianism' (Mai, 2014), whereby anti-trafficking becomes a control mechanism for migration, women's sexuality or a sign of moral superiority (see Chapter 1).

This evokes Milivojevic's and Pickering's (2013, p. 595) argument that *'behind supposed intervention to 'rescue the innocents' lies a neo-colonial and punitive, anti-immigration agenda'*. Such analysis raises challenging questions about the UK policy towards trafficked women.

Shaping the future: Policy formation and the lack of survivor involvement

Most knowledge and policy recommendations came from NGOs and showcased trafficked women's accounts, experiences, and needs. NGOs and other actors were described as contributing to policymaking on women's behalf in order to protect their well-being and avoid re-traumatisation. Consequently, the NGOs '*become the voice of the victim'* (UK-KI-06). Such attitudes could be also seen as paternalistic, failing to capture the full range and complexity of lived experiences, especially when agency is not acknowledged (see Chapter 6). Participants highlighted the role of NGOs in policy formation: *'We need the NGOs; they are a big part of this… The NGOs and charities will get a truer account of things and a better understanding of what women need'* (UK-KI-07). The need for anonymity was also mentioned as an explanation for women's lack of involvement and willingness to engage in policymaking and activism:

> … it's very difficult to dialogue with a victim of trafficking, and when they manage to get on the road and start a family, that is their main reaction—to forget and put everything behind them. I don't even think that we would find anyone willing to come forward wholeheartedly. (UK-KI-05)

However, NGOs' participation was also misinterpreted at times, and as a practitioner (ROM-PR-06) mentioned, '*being vocal'* could jeopardise their work with trafficked women. There was also a need to protect themselves and the NGO: *'We cannot afford to believe that everyone who comes to a meeting has good intentions'*. There were issues around vested interests, NGOs with political agendas, and funding challenges, which ultimately impacted the interventions and narratives around trafficking on a larger scale.

Professionals in both countries mentioned national institutions and anti-trafficking agencies as responsible for ensuring cooperation with NGOs and working together to identify the best anti-trafficking solutions. Relatedly, they also recognised and encouraged research and academia as vital actors supporting policy creation (ROM-PR-10; ROM-PR-01; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-06). Some participants discussed civil society's role in policymaking; however, they felt that the issue of trafficking was not always fully understood or prioritised by civil society. The media's positive role in highlighting trafficking and raising awareness was also a means of disseminating case studies that informed policymaking (UK-KI-01; UK-KI-03; UK-PR-08). Participants who belonged to activist groups were more likely to view such case studies positively. In contrast, frontline NGO workers criticised the media's influence on public opinion and policy. However well-intentioned, these participants stated that the media added a degree of moral panic to

trafficking narratives and overlooked the complexities of women's experiences (UK-KI-05; UK-PR-02; ROM-PR-06).

A few participants in both countries mentioned issues with policy and policymakers, referring to NGOs that inaccurately represented trafficking realities (UK-PR-07; UK-PR-10; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09). A typical example represented instances whereby '*NGOs who only do prevention work and want to raise funds, exaggerate trafficking stories or present trafficking differently than it exists, and then later go on to make policy; we then have policies that do not apply to our reality*' (UK-KI-05). For example, Diana talked about sex work in a similar way, and the need for a better understanding of sex workers' reality in order to support them (see Chapter 4).

In terms of women's direct participation in policymaking, participants referenced instances of such participation and its effects on trafficked women. They acknowledged that women's participation was impacted by their context: in the UK, women had more opportunities to be active in survivor-led organisations than in Romania, leading to comparatively higher participation in the UK. However, in Romania, participants generally agreed that women's participation was minimal, if not non-existent, and they described constraints regarding how victim care and women were represented in policymaking. It was interesting to observe how most participants from organisations working in the Romanian public sector were likely to cite some positives around survivors' participation while others from Romania and the UK claimed the opposite. The following example highlights a collective view of participation in Romania: '*Zero. So really, zero. Clearly, the anti-trafficking strategy and all trafficking policies in Romania do not have the victim at their centre, and the victim's voice is non-existent*' (ROM-KI-03). However, some NGOs discussed their strategies for creating survivor networks and similar support groups to enable better participation in the future (ROM-KI-05).

Participants reported positive effects among those who participated, which increased their empowerment, sense of participation and care; such as Ana's example discussed in Chapter 4 – she was glad when NGOs approached her and she was asked to talk to other trafficked women and support them. They also mentioned adverse effects such as re-traumatisation and misperceptions of their stories. Such cases were lessons for NGOs, who had subsequently decided to be very selective when dealing with opportunities for women's participation (including in research, see Chapter 3). In addition, they cited instances where women's participation was not considered because of possible adverse effects being

triggered by their participation. Consequently, trafficked women's role in policymaking remained low, although participants discussed other significant actors.

As noted, data on post-trafficking trajectories and the experiences of trafficked women is gathered with NGOs' support, and those cases continue to be linked with the NGOs concerned. This leaves a gap in the knowledge regarding trafficked women who do not receive assistance (Brunovskies & Surtees, 2007; 2010). Moreover, as noted above, trafficked women themselves are rarely involved in the development of anti-trafficking policy. In most cases, professional participants in this research recognised that women's voices are not necessarily represented by themselves but through others, such as frontline workers and NGO practitioners. Participation in policy is important, especially from a feminist anti-oppressive perspective, as it allows individuals to express themselves, make their experiences valid and ensure participation (Lockyer, 2022). Again, conflations between sex work and sex trafficking were visible in the policy making arena. Some organisations addressed both groups as part of their profile, posing questions as to how sex trafficking policy is correlated with and influenced by attitudes towards and agendas on sex work. These attitudes influence how trafficked women are perceived or how sex workers can be placed in an 'undeserving' category. Finally, although women's participation in policymaking was considered relevant, it was absent in practice; instead NGOs (and their attitudes, ideologies and values) played a crucial role in policymaking, ultimately affecting women's trajectories. It is vital for practitioners and policymakers to question and understand such attitudes as they ultimately shape trafficked women's experiences post-trafficking and acknowledged the importance of survivor participation when relevant. Additionally, as Lockyer (2022) suggests, redefining power and authority structures within anti-trafficking organisations and using the experience of survivors as a focal point can lead to more successful policies and actions.

Covid-19 impact on trafficking and post-trafficking trajectories

COVID-19 constituted another recurring sub-theme in the data. Most participants mentioned their experiences before and after COVID-19 in service provision, repatriation, working conditions, hidden crime, and the effects of lockdowns on trafficked women, notably impacting the entire support system, and anti-trafficking activism. Other examples of disruptions included the inability of police forces involved

in UK investigations to meet victims and survivors; Romanian police forces leaving the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic, which complicated investigations (UK-KI-07); and fewer victim identifications (UK-PR-03; UK-KI-06; ROM-PR-11). Additionally, the extent of exploitation increased, and participants noticed greater violence in trafficking and difficulties in repatriation. A common perception was that the pandemic increased the vulnerability of trafficked women: *'it accentuated and amplified the vulnerability of the victims, as many of them had at least experienced a situation of a state of emergency when the borders were closed'* (ROM-PR-11).

Some victim assistance programmes needed to close or could not function as normal (e.g., prevention work, drop-in sessions, in-person counselling were suspended), which caused concern among participants, especially in Romania. However, professionals mentioned that organisations quickly adapted to the new circumstances and services were delivered online by most sectors and organisations participating in the research, especially in the UK. Participants reported '*remote working*' (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-12) and '*switching to online*' where they could (ROM-PR-02; ROM-KI-03); however, these changes affected the efficacy of the support provided and switching to new methods was described as not always easy for survivors. Those with the most vulnerabilities were vulnerable to being excluded from the most appropriate support, as the service delivery conditions differed. Participants recalled moments when survivors did not have adequate digital skills and equipment to engage with sessions online, which represented a barrier to accessing support (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-07).

Court processes against traffickers became protracted, and convictions and victim identifications decreased. Practitioners also mentioned an increase in highly traumatic episodes, PTSD and negative mental health effects during the pandemic. Women lost work and had many financial challenges, which heightened their vulnerabilities (UK-PR-12). Some participants described the impact of COVID-19 on women's migratory journey: '*pre-COVID, they tended to go back and forth quite a lot. It is a demographic that is quite difficult to track, and we sometimes rely on them returning to us. Now, it is more difficult due to the pandemic*' (UK-PR-10).

Since travelling was limited, participants mentioned that there were very few repatriations in the first year of the pandemic. This increased anxiety among survivors, especially those who wanted to return home who faced additional practical challenges (testing, masks, sanitisers were not always available; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04). A few participants mentioned that lockdowns triggered uncertainty, fear, and isolation and disturbed established routines; moreover, the overall conditions became '*trafficking-like*

circumstances', especially with the intensity of government control. As noted previously (see Chapter 6), practitioners gave examples of women who returned to NGOs after many years due to loss of jobs, when experiencing exploitation or in the case of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Likewise, Larisa, though supported by an NGO, lost her job during the pandemic which intensified her vulnerabilities and obstructed her recovery (see Chapter 4). Lockdowns re-evoked women's trauma and exposed their vulnerabilities:

> During the pandemic, a victim called… she had not spoken to us for about 13 or 14 years. Similarly, another survivor called my colleague, and she needed psychological assistance… Many needed this psychological support. (ROM-PR-01)

While the COVID-19 pandemic brought much uncertainty, participants also pointed out some positives regarding their work and new methods for providing services, such as group chat meetings, group therapy, and online activities, which increased group cohesion and enabled women to feel supported by each other (ROM-PR-02; UK-PR-12). COVID-19 represented yet another factor shaping the post-trafficking experience at the time of this study. Restrictions on social contact, isolation and financial restrictions have been identified as increasing mental health challenges and risks of harm among survivors, sex workers and vulnerable populations (Howard, 2020; Such et al., 2023). The few positive and mainly negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic did influence women's immediate and long-term post-trafficking trajectories.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the macro context in which trafficked women could access support post-trafficking and the collaboration between the UK and Romania as well as the care context, addressing two research questions. It described the major challenges in both contexts and presented the services, trans-national collaboration and other circumstances impacting on post-trafficking journeys such as COVID-19.

It was clear that some instances of practice and policy described by professional participants reflected the view that the Romanian context was problematic or questionable. Cultural stereotypes underpin trafficking at the macro, meso and micro levels. The study also showed that moral judgements, especially those concerning sex work, influence cultural stereotypes, attitudes towards people, culture, and

trafficking. Certain groups can be viewed as highly vulnerable or prone to crime, as in the case of Romanians. Additionally, when people already had prejudices or images about a place, they did not necessarily question those presumptions but generalised them further (e.g. citing ignorance, poverty, criminality). Thus, the lack of trust and the perceived feeling of 'superiority' that Romanian professionals perceived from their UK partners, alluded some commentators to link such attitudes with post-colonialism (ROM-PR-06). Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 1, such debates are often encountered in the Global North versus the Global South when it comes to anti-trafficking.

In Romania, as noted, there were several challenges within the system with potential impact on the post-trafficking trajectories of survivors raising questions about the quality and capacity of support for trafficked women survivors who return to Romania. Similarly, in the UK, there have been consistent efforts to strengthen and adapt responses to trafficking (Barlow, 2023; Craig et al., 2019). Implementation and service provision issues were identified regarding services and service provision such as: access to information post-trafficking regarding rights, lack of specialised services for Romanian women (mental health), insufficient provision of resources during the NRM process, health care services, among others.

In terms of post-trafficking repatriations, it was notable that supporting informal repatriations for Romanian survivors of sex trafficking was perceived as a common yet inadequate practice by Romanian professionals. Such approaches to repatriation, pose questions about the policy drives informing anti-trafficking practices in the UK – are victims' best interests or immigration agendas driving repatriation practices. In terms of collaboration, joint investigations were described as working best between the two countries when police and government authorities joined forces in identification and prosecutions, despite having different approaches to human trafficking/modern slavery. Yet, as the literature suggests policing is not always experienced by trafficking survivors or sex workers as benevolent (Platt et al, 2022; Smith & Mac, 2018). Thus, these findings need to be understood in the context of the research participants, whereby the policing participants and those closely working with the police shared more positive views on policing role in anti-trafficking. Nevertheless, while there were differences between the two countries, and professional participants had different opinions and observations on specific issues, they also recognised the need for mutual understanding and collaboration.

Anti-trafficking rhetoric too, was very much influenced by participants' perceptions and views on sex work, as discussed above. Abolitionist groups, although not the majority, tended to conflate sex trafficking with

sex work and had more paternalistic views regarding the best interests of trafficked women and how women should be supported (to be discussed further in the following chapter). Survivor participation in policymaking was limited or non-existing. The findings suggest the need to strengthen survivors own voices, and survivor-led initiatives, as a means of fully representing women's interests and recognising their agency and strength. Acknowledging the diversity of lived experiences and needs post-trafficking, would allow a more nuanced understanding and approach in both support services and policy-making. Finally, other current global issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to disrupt the recovery process. Thus, the need to develop strategies to support trafficking survivors in light of global crises was emphasised.

Chapter 8. The Long-term post-trafficking trajectories of Romanian women: Professionals' accounts

Chapter aim

This final chapter, reporting findings from interviews with professional participants, presents data on the post-trafficking trajectories of adult Romanian women trafficked for sexual exploitation in the UK. The discussion also draws on the findings from interviews with survivors. The chapter begins with the theme of the difficulties of acquiring information on post-trafficking trajectories in the longer term. It then presents the range of possible trajectories in the UK or Romania. Lastly, it highlights the negative trajectories, the 'vicious circle' and findings concerning what practitioners and key informants considered positive trajectories.

Post-trafficking trajectories: Key themes & sub-themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ 'The one missing puzzle piece'. Decision-making process and lack of knowledge on post-trafficking trajectories
- ❖ Trajectories in the UK: Re-starting life in the destination country
- ❖ Trajectories in Romania: Returning home and unwelcoming communities
- ❖ Post-trafficking trajectories: 'The vicious circle' versus 'success stories'
    - ❖ Vicious circle: In-and-out of exploitation, re-trafficking and becoming trafficker
    - ❖ Normalising sex work: Risks and gains
    - ❖ Positive trajectories: Reintegration and 'normality'

'The one missing puzzle piece': A lack of knowledge on post-trafficking trajectories

The post-trafficking trajectories of Romanian women as described by professional participants were diverse and complex. While the analysis of the interview data found multiple factors shaping the trajectories (e.g., individual, nationality, family, community, laws and legal process, support access, and resources available), a common theme identified was that there was not much knowledge on what happened to trafficking survivors in the long-term. There were notable differences in viewpoints about post-trafficking trajectories, which were influenced by participants' roles, their assumptions based on their experiences and their direct interaction with trafficked women for long periods. Police officers and first responders tended to be involved at the start of the process and were mostly unaware of the outcomes of cases and the later stages of women's journeys. Participants from NGOs or government agencies interacted with women for extended periods but added that Romanian women, due to their EU status, tended '*to move a lot*' (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-06), creating even more significant gaps in what they knew about their trajectories and they raised concerns regarding the risks of re-exploitation and their inability to follow the women throughout their journeys:

> … that's the biggest gap in knowledge across all sectors. We don't know what happens in 10 years for our own cases. But typically, when a case is closed across the UK, that will be the end of our knowledge until they're re-trafficked, and then we see them again. So, there is much room to understand better what happens to the people afterwards. (UK-PR-02)

Women's initial decisions highly influenced their post-trafficking destinations as most participant noted. Some professional participants questioned the level of agency in the initial decision-making processes post-trafficking (UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-05; ROM-KI-01). In addition to decisions regarding their contribution to prosecutions, cooperating with police and entering the NRM, survivors had to decide where they wanted to live and how to continue their lives. All professionals participants considered it of utmost importance that women were aware of the available options after exiting trafficking and what support and possibilities were available in both countries (UK-PR-03; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-08). As noted in Chapter 6, women's decisions were based on needs, fear and prospects (e.g. family, children, and social support) and those who were free to decide tended to return to Romania. A common view among UK interviewees was that Romanian women tended to return to Romania (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; UK-PR-05; UK-PR-09; UK-KI-07): *'they want to go home as quickly as possible, and that is unique'* (UK-PR-02).

However, Romanian professional participants and those Romanians who worked in the UK talked about these decisions as being mainly influenced by NGOs and public authorities in the UK, claiming that women's choices were not necessarily independent (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-10). Instead, they pointed out that most of the time, when the women did want to remain in the UK, they were encouraged or forced to return to Romania as some of them did not have National Insurance numbers, English language skills, resources or connections in the country (UK-PR-03; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-04). The decision-making process for trafficked women appeared complex, and elements outside their control influenced whether they were encouraged to leave the UK as some professionals suggested (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-11).

Some professionals also mentioned that not all trafficked women wanted to receive support: '*most of them rehabilitate on their own, and they don't expect to receive support'* (ROM-PR-11)*. Other cases they'll return and say: <u>Thanks. I'm done now, I'm happy. I don't need anything else</u>.* (UK-PR-02). Most participants linked women's refusal of support with their desire to remain anonymous and hide their experiences as a principal factor (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-04; ROM-PR-03, among others). Although, some acknowledged individual agency (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-04), they also considered that support and guidance were valuable and encouraged women to access their services: *'We are convinced they would succeed without us at some point. If they managed to survive such a situation [trafficking], they would definitely want to succeed and overcome more'* (ROM-PR-04). When women did not engage with services, their reasons for not engaging with support were understood to be multifaced and particular to each situation (see Chapter 6). The level of support required was seen to vary and regardless of participants' location and role, all agreed that post-trafficking support was beneficial. Such attitudes are understandable among those whose business it is to develop and deliver services and professionals can only draw on the experiences of those who use their services. Some professionals found it difficult to contemplate the possibility that trafficked women might flourish without professional assistance and attributed repeat incidents of exploitation to the individual rather than the organisation:

> The causation is complex. So far, all the cases I've had don't necessarily resemble each other. We also have happy cases; we also have cases that do not want to benefit from assistance, although we clearly consider that they have this need. We also have cases that get assistance, but if they don't have the motivation, and they don't find the balance, they get back into exploitative situations. (ROM-PR-03)

Finally, knowledge of women's long-term trajectories was generally limited, particularly once support ended. As professionals remarked, knowledge was unavailable because women did not keep in touch with authorities or NGOs in the longer term. Participants in both countries reflected on the unanswered questions regarding the long-term trajectory and the impact of trafficking on mental and physical health, relationships and family:

> The one missing puzzle piece we don't have is the long-term impact. We can see the recovery phase. We can see the rebuilding phase… But we don't know what the impact will be in 5 or 10, or 15 years… We are yet to find someone who's come through it and 10, 20 years later, come back to tell us. (UK-PR-01)

The post-trafficking trajectory for those women who accessed services was described as complex, with this knowledge based on those who remained in safe houses or accessed other types of support (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-11). A common view was that those who wanted to remain in the UK, not want to engage with a legal process or not in touch with NGOs were '*disappearing from the radar'* (UK-PR-03), while other participants tended to make assumptions about such cases (UK-KI-01; UK-PR-08; ROM-PR-05; ROM-KI-01). In the UK, the NRM process was seen as significant for accessing support, most participants stressed that Romanian women tended to decline the possibility of entering the NRM (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-06; UK-PR-11; UK-KI-04; ROM-KI-03). Those who did enter the NRM were considered to have a similar trajectory with one another during the investigations and reflection period and, based on their decisions to stay in or leave the UK, women would be repatriated to Romania or remain in the UK (as discussed in Chapter 7). The gaps in knowledge concerning longer-term trajectories post-trafficking and professionals' and researchers' reliance on the accounts of those who have accessed services supports the need to involve a wider range of groups in research (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Lockyer, 2022). In particular groups, that are survivor led, so that new models of anti-trafficking work can become more inclusive (Lockyer, 2022).

Trajectories in the UK: Re-starting life in the destination country

Participants found it difficult to estimate the number of trafficked women who remained in the UK, especially after the women lost contact with their organisations. Many UK participants seemed to assume

that trafficked women would prefer to stay in the UK, only a few participants knew women who did so. In general, participants in the UK were speculating when they talked about trafficked women remaining in the UK rather than referring to known cases. They assumed that women would want to remain for economic reasons and used phrases such as *'as far as I know'* (UK-PR-09), '*I would imagine'* (UK-PR-08), *'I would assume'* (UK-KI-01).

Professionals drew a contrast between those who remained in the UK but decided not to accept support and continued sex work and others who moved into activities deemed to be more acceptable by professionals; '*would get used to the English lifestyle'* (ROM-PR-02), '*they work legally'* (ROM-PR-04). Participants were concerned regarding the challenges and risks women might encounter if they were alone and lacked support from a community, organisations or friends (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-08; UK-PR-09; UK-KI-01). And some, considered that women would ultimately remain vulnerable to exploitation: '*I want to stay in the UK. I don't want to do this anymore [sex work]. I don't want your help; I'll sort myself out'*. (UK-PR-03)

Fear was identified as another reason for women to remain in the UK. Professionals observed that trafficked women feared the consequences of returning to Romania for their own and their family's safety, especially if the traffickers were from their communities. Other studies have also identified the fear and repercussions of returning to the country of origin and the potential risks to personal safety, (Bodrogi, 2015; Contreras et al., 2018; Ramaj, 2021). Additionally, most participants mentioned that, given the low numbers of traffickers convicted, the chances of survivors encountering their traffickers in Romania were high (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-06; UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-08, among others). The following examples highlights a common observation:

> She feels that if she goes back to her home country, the people who trafficked her or exploited her may find her and kill her… So this client doesn't want to go back though she has two beautiful children back home, she cannot go back. (UK-PR-09)

As professionals in both countries noticed, fear of returning to Romania was also linked to community attitudes and how the woman would be perceived, their fears of exclusion, shame and discrimination. According to participants, apart from the negative issue of fear, there were positive motivators. Some participants thought that women often felt better assisted and got better support in the UK than they

would have received in Romania, where the services the women needed were much scarcer (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-09; ROM-KI-01).

Some participants gave examples of women obtaining extra qualifications and employment opportunities which made it easier to start a new life in the UK, thus, some decided to remain in the UK to work and support their families. Employment opportunities were seen as necessary to ensure that the migratory experience could continue beyond trafficking (see Diana's story in Chapter 4):

> Their motivation to stay in the Western European country is a financial one, and it depends on the social assistance system there, maybe material benefits and support they can get from the NGOs there. (ROM-PR-10)

The positive stories of those who remained in the UK were characterised by being integrated, employed, and able to support their families at home (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-10). Undoubtedly, the challenges included missing their family and being far from loved ones (UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-10). Interestingly, Romanian professionals perceived those survivors who remained in the UK as more skilled or capable of managing themselves in that society and suggested that the most vulnerable were encouraged by UK authorities to return to Romania, even if they would have preferred to stay in the UK (as noted in the case of Larisa, see Chapter 4). These professionals saw the UK authorities as discriminating against those most vulnerable, seeing them as the '*weak ones'* (ROM-PR-04) or '*weak links'* (ROM-PR-06). Such perceptions were reinforced by other Romanian participants in their observations on informal repatriations discussed in the previous section.

In some professionals' narratives, especially in the UK, women were often seen as victims rather than migrants. Such attitudes affect how people are acknowledged and understood with their vulnerability predominating over their agency (Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; De Angelis, 2016). In the UK context, trafficking discourses are often intertwined with the anti-immigration sentiments and policies (Creighton & Jamal, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2021). Trafficking is often misrepresented in the media and in statements by politicians and may be conflated with other forms of migration and smuggling (Craig, 2019). Against the background of such overlapping discourses, other studies have identified ongoing challenges post-trafficking for those remaining in the destination country due to the lack of long-term services and support (Andreatta, 2015; Craig, 2017). Among the most significant issues identified by existing research are poor services for health and mental health care (Barlow, 2023; Hemmings et al., 2016; Hodges et al., 2023;

Stanley et al., 2016; Westwood et al., 2016), which were discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, other challenges identified in this study were suitable housing; employment opportunities; or difficulties acquiring a sense of belonging to a community (see Chapters 4 and 7). These structural barriers pose questions for trafficked women's capacity for integration and the sufficiency of civil society's efforts to ensure recovery transition post-trafficking in a destination country. Nevertheless, in this study, most participants agreed that little was known about Romanian survivors' lives in the UK and the majority of professional participants considered that most women would return to Romania.

Trajectories in Romania: Returning home and unwelcoming communities

According to most participants, Romanian women generally wanted to return home after trafficking, resonating with three of the survivors interviewed (see Chapter 4). Others said that, since they were Europeans and could travel easily, most decided to return home (UK-PR-04; UK-PR-05; UK-KI-04). This was different from trafficked women of other nationalities as professionals noticed: [trafficked Romanian women] *'just want to go home'* (UK-KI-05). While practitioners considered that these decisions might be necessary, they felt that they were often rushed due to the women's particular needs and circumstances:

> I would have thought that the first option would be the UK and then recover, reflect, spend a few months trying to understand what's going on and decide. But actually, it's the opposite. They decide instantly, and they stick to it. With the Romanian victims, what I found interesting is that every victim we have rescued, every single one of them wanted to return to Romania. (UK-PR-01)

Professionals often referred to the notion of informal repatriation. This type of repatriation would occur when victims *'return via NGO to NGO'* (ROM-KI-05). However, as Romanian participants highlighted, informal repatriation had few advantages. Disadvantages included the lack of time to prepare for return; less opportunity to ensure safety and services are in place; risks of returning to the exploitative situations; not receiving any support; not being in touch with authorities (UK-KI-05; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-09; among others). Those returning informally were perceived to '*fall through the cracks of the system*' (ROM-KI-03) – as previously discussed in Chapter 7.

As participants observed, most of the trafficked women '*just want to forget*' (UK-PR-04) and '*return to their lives*' (ROM-PR-04), with the primary motivation for return being their families. Trafficked women had often left behind children, with participants acknowledging the women's desire to be with their children and families, as '*they haven't seen their families for a long time*' (UK-KI-07), and some would say '*nowhere is better than home*' (ROM-PR-01). Thus, a common view was that women who exited the trafficking experience and wanted to return to Romania were those who had not engaged in sex work before trafficking and had children, families and social support groups at home. This resonated with Ana and Irina's decisions to quickly return home (see Chapter 4).

However, while 'home' exerted a pull for women, professionals talked about 'home' communities as generally problematic since they had not supported women in the first place. Decisions to return home were not always independently made, some of the women who did so were forced by circumstances with the system or personal choices, and thus envisaged continuing their migratory journey elsewhere (as in the cases of Larisa and Diana). As discussed in the previous section, participants remarked that on return to Romania, women tended to hide their stories and wanted to remain anonymous and not engage with other parties who could jeopardise their lives by bringing up their trafficking story. Concerns about women's reputation and safety resonated across many participants' observations: '*I suffered what I suffered, I'm coming here willing to work and change, but I have a request, I don't want the people at home to find out, because I live in a village and people talk*' (ROM-PR-01). Some participants mentioned traditional and Christian values, which would make women fearful of the community finding out about their experiences since they violated these established beliefs and expectations. Anonymity was even more critical if the victim were from rural areas, where people knew each other, and the impact of the community finding out would have been highly damaging: '*the mouth of the village… small world… bad [intentioned] people*' (ROM-PR-02); '*people are talking*' (ROM-PR-09). Women's futures and plans, such as their prospects for marrying and having a family, could be damaged if the trafficking experience affected their image and reputation. Respondents also talked about the women's migratory experience as being ridiculed and stigmatised:

> … their reputation when they do go back, the chances of getting married or being seen as a good woman, as a respectable woman, not having parts of a bad reputation, it's really important for them; we need to protect the reputation and dignity (UK-PR-01)

Participants considered reintegration a challenge, especially when women's experiences were exposed. One participant talked about the lack of support and how women would leave their communities following their return, some would migrate, and some would end up in the same situation of trafficking or would be excluded from the community: *'She will never see her family again. Her family will never talk to her again. She's ostracised by the whole community'* (UK-PR-07).

Many Romanian participants talked about public opinion or described public discourse about victims of trafficking within Romania. Regardless of circumstances, victim blaming was considered a significant issue, adding to broader misconceptions about sex work and sex trafficking. In many instances, participants talked about how the dominant mindset and mentality in Romania would further condemn the women and make them fully responsible for whatever abuse or exploitation they had experienced: '*they are prostitutes who deserved their fate; why are they stupid to go there?' (ROM-KI-01); 'Look also at this stupid one, that's why she was trafficked, and she deserves her fate, that one, smart guy, he made some money'* (ROM-PR-09)*.* Apart from community and family, some Romanian participants raised malpractice issues and victim-blaming within different public sectors in Romania, including schools, health or police settings (ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-06), where victims, or possible victims, were treated with a lack of understanding, abuse and ridicule. One participant gave an example of instances of victim judging, exclusion and oppression from different professionals and within various sectors in Romania:

> Often they send us away from the hospital because *you are from that NGO… take them to another place because you are making our patients sick*. At school as well, *we don't want to accept them because they are with problems.* (ROM-PR-09)

One participant considered it very problematic that in Romania, society could not differentiate between sex work and sex trafficking and all victims were judged (ROM-KI-03). Attitudes towards women who had such experiences were thought to be embedded in such misconceptions and gender inequalities. The women interviewed too, recognised instances of discrimination and stigma attached to their experience (see Chapter 4). Other studies have found that trafficked women who return home to their families and communities of origin often struggle, regardless of the context (Brunovskis, & Surtees, 2013; Contreras et al., 2018; Hodges et al., 2023). As professionals noticed, survivors' experiences were frequently challenged by others' presumptions about their migratory experiences, and survivors often feared what might happen if family or community learned about their past in trafficking, as previously highlighted. Especially in rural areas and small localities, there were issues with confidentiality and the possibility of the community

finding out about survivors' experiences of trafficking. Studies have shown the impact of rural gossip and rumours on the lives of women post-trafficking and such research can be used to assist practitioners to understand women's need for secrecy (Schwartz & Schwartz, 2017), as highlighted by all participants in this study. While gossip is used to socialise and ensure compliance with social norms, spreading private information about individuals can become a damaging tool (Banerjee et al., 2014; Beersma & Van Kleef; 2012). Confidentiality concerning the trafficking experience was therefore crucial.

A common perception among participants in both countries was that the risks of re-trafficking were significant if the women returned to the same community or family. For example, a participant talked about a case of re-trafficking where the victim said that *'the family wanted her to make more money'* and upon return to her home, she was forced to re-enter the sex industry against her will (ROM-PR-05). Other examples participants referred to included cases where the traffickers or the OCGs lived in the same community, village, or city as the victim: *'when you don't have safeguards to protect the victim… you send the survivor into a risk situation, the community she was trafficked from'* (UK-KI-03). Thus, the return to the country of origin involved possible re-victimisation and risks of being re-trafficked or excluded by the community. In addition to a need for witness protection for those women returning home who supported court cases against traffickers, participants considered that there was a need for awareness and education to change attitudes towards trafficked women and trafficking as a phenomenon, so the community and society could better understand women's experiences and treat them with more respect because the women wanted to feel integrated and 'needed community' (UK-PR-05; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-10).

Regardless of the women's locations, the findings showed that most of the known or assumed trajectories were still subject to vulnerabilities and risks, with a significant theme of the 'vicious circle'. Such a picture emerged when the authorities, community and family did not enable recovery and protection. In the literature, the re-trafficking and exploitation of women who return to their community is identified as a frequent experience (Adams, 2011; Bodrogi, 2015; Pascoal, 2020). Bodrogi (2015) suggested that supportive factors (e.g. family, access to services and employment) encourage a positive reintegration into the community of origin. Consequently, in light of the factors which impacted their experiences, participants talked about positive and negative trajectories.

Post-trafficking trajectories: '*The vicious circle*' versus *'success stories'*

Vicious circle: In-and out of exploitation, re-trafficking and becoming trafficker

Participants unanimously agreed that for most trafficked women, the trajectories were not optimistic, with further engagement in sex work post-trafficking included in the spectrum of poor outcomes. Participants referred to such instances as women falling back into destructive behaviours, exploitative situations, '*relapse'* (ROM-PR-03) or situations with '*no exit'* (UK-KI-05). Such instances were linked mostly with high vulnerabilities such as poor mental health, lack of financial independence, lack of support, and long periods of trafficking and exploitation. A common observation was that women who had been involved in sex work or trafficking for a long time lost their confidence and self-esteem, and that exploitation became a lifestyle, from which they could not see an exit or a different way of living (UK-PR-07; UK-PR-09; ROM-PR-02; ROM-KI-03). Alcohol and drug use were seen as characteristic of the post-trafficking period and these were understood as harmful coping mechanisms, '*trying to fill that void'* (UK-PR-01) or representing the need to continue lifestyles of '*emotional addiction, adrenaline, drugs and money*' (ROM-PR-10). Participants identified the damaging impact of high levels of sexual exploitation on future relationships (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-09; ROM-PR-10). Additionally, survivors talked about the damage of trust and insecurities in developing new relationships and intimate relationships (see Chapter 4).

Participants often referred to a vicious circle or cycle. If not addressed, the challenges women encountered post-trafficking were perceived by participants to increase their risks of being re-exploited or re-trafficked as they would be *'targeted by another perpetrator'* (ROM-PR-09), *'it is like an ongoing cycle that will never end'* (UK-PR-09). One UK practitioner mentioned cases where the interconnection of these elements and the financial constraints, for instance, debt-bondage, made it extremely difficult for women to get out of the cycle: *'she can't go to Romania. She feels completely trapped in this cycle... And now she needs to work to make that money. Nobody controls her physically, but her choice has been taken out of her hands'* (UK-PR-10). Thus, '*breaking the circle'* by removing the women from the trafficking situation was the only option participants thought would help women avoid re-trafficking (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-07; UK-PR-11; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-03, among others).

Most participants believed that re-trafficking represented one of the main possible trajectories for women, especially those previously involved in sex work. They felt that women thought it was their choice to continue doing sex work despite still being controlled and exploited. Additionally, contact with the trafficker represented a major issue due to the women's emotional links with them (see Chapter 5). A police officer in Romania talked about a case where a woman came out of trafficking, started studying at law school and then went to visit the trafficker in prison, to their surprise (ROM-KI-04). A practitioner in the UK noticed that women would say, *'in the end, this person [trafficker] gave me more than you are giving me'* (UK-PR-04). Although this position might be understandable from the survivors' perspective, professionals' common perception were that such promises and offers of support women received from traffickers contributed to re-trafficking.

Women's right to free movement as European citizens were seen to increase the likelihood of re-trafficking. Since migration represented a starting point for trafficking, participants considered it a risk for women in the future: '*the right to free movement greatly facilitates re-trafficking. Because if the victim returns to Romania and there is no longer the type of assistance that prevents re-trafficking, they may be re-trafficked the next day or the following week'* (ROM-KI-03). Moreover, unaddressed vulnerabilities were cited as the main reason for re-trafficking: *'If the initial vulnerability that remains even after the trafficking situation, if they are not reduced or diminished, the re-trafficking risks remain* (ROM-PR-10). As noted in Chapter 4, this was Larisa's fear – she might return to sex work due to lack of other employment opportunities, thus, as professionals would have suggested, increasing the risks of possible re-victimisation.

Moving down this path into the sex industry was also understood to create benefits (e.g., access to power, /control) for some women, shifting from exploited to the possible exploiter or at least controller (UK-PR-11; UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-06). This again highlighted the complexities of women's roles and the control mechanisms employed by traffickers as some women would manage others: *'many times we attend premises and there's four women or three women, one of whom is a what we call an Alpha Female. So, she exercises control over the others, and the others wouldn't be able to speak'* (UK-PR-03). Other participants too, mentioned the '*alpha female'* in charge of a brothel or other females, who may have been sex workers or exploited but already had a role in the group or OCG. Later on, that role could have proceeded to become the leader. Such cases were extremely problematic since women had multiple, ambiguous roles in trafficking: *'were not only victims, injured party, but also defendants'* (ROM-PR-11).

Hence, control and coercion were manifested in different ways, whereby, though less common, a trajectory discussed by some participants was the possibility of some victims becoming perpetrators.

The connections with the criminal world, the need to succeed and remove oneself from an exploitative situation, and the need for control and power were the primary motivators for some women to follow this path (ROM-PR-06; UK-PR-11). A Romanian practitioner (ROM-PR-06) linked this transition to the lack of support and claimed that trafficked women who did not receive support were more likely to become perpetrators: *'the victim then turns into the aggressor'* (ROM-PR-06); she felt this strategy was to be expected, a '*defence mechanism'*. For such women, gaining a sense of power and self-esteem was not easy: '*the easiest thing is to go to the other side … to transform yourself little by little, precisely because you see that there is power and you are a powerless person'*; on '*the other side'* they could '*see that there is an awful lot of self-esteem'* (ROM-PR-06).

Other examples were of the women who became '*recruiters'*, a role that did not necessarily place them in a position of exploiter but was still a part of the exploitation network (ROM-PR-01; UK-KI-04). Participants expressed astonishment when they saw such examples as trafficked women marrying their traffickers and becoming trafficking leaders (UK-KI-07). Some mentioned women who married their traffickers after being sexually exploited (UK-KI-04), while others continued as the OCG leader as the traffickers were in prison (ROM-KI-04). Similarly, participants suggested that trafficked women who themselves took on the role of exploiter or continued criminal behaviours, as almost inevitably they had become normalised to such activities (UK-PR-07; UK-KI-04; ROM-PR-02). This may be a means for women to attain a level of control, empowerment, self-esteem, and self-protection and highlights the importance of intersectional approaches to understanding victimisation.

Other studies too, have noted women changing roles or becoming alpha females in their groups: among Nigerian trafficked groups, some women have been identified as 'madams' or pimps (Broad, 2015; Siegel & De Blank, 2010). Such studies emphasise the potential for women to acquire power and control through colluding with their exploiters and benefiting from trafficking. Studies including Romanian nationals also suggest that trafficked women adopting the role of traffickers is not uncommon, with females playing the role of recruiters (Nicolae, 2019; Wijkman & Kleemans, 2019). However, in a study on women perpetrators in the Netherlands, Wijkman and Kleemans (2019) found that only 7.5% of female perpetrators were victims of sexual violence or trafficked before turning into offenders, while the majority of the offenders

were involved in a relationship with the trafficker. These examples indicate again that the line between exploited and exploiter can be thin and women's roles in trafficking can become blurred; some can be both victims and abusers. Similarly, in Maia's case, she was initially charged as being herself in charge of the brothel, although she was trafficked (see Chapter 4). However, despite the blurring of victims' and abusers' roles, women were perceived from the outside as 'deserving' or 'undeserving' victims based on the nature of their involvement with traffickers and the 'ideal victim' image (Fitzgerald, 2018; O'Brien, 2013). Such perceptions become relevant when trafficked women continued engaging in sex work post-trafficking.

Normalising sex work: Risks and gains

Returning to sex work was considered another negative trajectory by most participants. While participants perceived some women to rationally decide to continue practising sex work post-trafficking, other women were seen to resort to it in the face of limited resources and alternatives; they were described as attempting to: *'normalise it and tried to gain as much as possible from it'* (ROM-PR-02). Nevertheless, participants considered that many women would return to sex work after trafficking and, in the course of this, exploitation or re-trafficking could reoccur. Though there were many reasons for women to either return to sex work or *'be pushed back into it'* (ROM-PR-02); most participants highlighted that a key reason why many women would engage in sex work post-trafficking was if they did not have other opportunities (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-07; ROM-PR-08; ROM-KI-03; UK-PR-03; UK-KI-04). Romanian participants tended to speak more about this issue than UK participants. This could reflect their knowledge of those cases that returned to Romania and their work with both victims of trafficking and sex workers, but also attitudes towards sex work criminalisation. Additionally, Romanian participants tended to use the term 'prostitution'[33], and the UK participants mainly but not exclusively, used the term 'sex work'. For example, one participant recalled a conversation with two previously trafficked women at court hearings in Romania; *'both were practising prostitution'* (ROM-PR-07). Moreover, some participants in both countries

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[33] In Romanian, when referring to sex work the term 'prostitution' is mainly used; as well included in the legislation (see Chapter 1).

saw those cases where women did not manage to reintegrate but continued doing sex work as a form of failure (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-05; ROM-PR-09; UK-PR-08; UK-PR-09, among others). On the other hand, the ideal victim, who could get out and create a 'decent life' or the 'success stories', was applauded (UK-KI-03; ROM-PR-05).

A participant highlighted an example where the woman, although initially unprepared to undertake sex work, found a solution by focusing on the gains and reframing or re-thinking the exploitation and the way traffickers treated her and this represented a common observation among participants (UK-KI-04; UK-PR-03; ROM-PR-02). This was reflected too in Maia's case, although she did not see ways out of trafficking, and did not want to be in that situation, she emphasised the financial benefits (see Chapter 4). Similarly, professionals observed that some women, who did not have the necessary skills to manage their employment and migration experience in the destination country, needed someone more skilled and experienced to facilitate their sex work arrangements and practice (e.g., manage websites, renting places, etc) and tended to remain in these relationships and continue working for the trafficker (ROM-PR-04; UK-KI-04; Diana). Such instances were considered to provide examples of successful grooming, as women would not share the negative side of their stories in their communities but instead:

> they would brag about the success of making quick money and helping their boyfriends.. the word of mouth and its deception (…). *I helped my boyfriend, and we're all right. We've made lots of money working in this brothel; within six months, I paid for the stay, and we could go on holidays.* (UK-PR-01)

In questioning women's choices and judgement, some participants implied that women might not understand prostitution as exploitation and think that participating in it was a matter of choice rather than the result of manipulation or grooming (see Chapter 5). Thus, some professionals were unable to acknowledge women's capacity to make choices, regardless of their degree of consent and agency. While there might be varying degrees of choice and collaboration between women and those facilitating their sex work (e.g. pimps, boyfriends etc), some practitioners expressed significant concerns about women's capacity to recognise their exploitation and make decisions as the following example suggests:

> The only thing that you've been exposed to for two years is sex work and you know that you can actually make money in that way. So, *I am going to do that and maybe I need protection or I need someone to help find those clients.* So then you end up in the same exact situation you were abroad, so it's really a breeding factory. (ROM-KI-07)

Some participants considered that the lack of opportunities or economic prospects pushed women towards sex work post-trafficking. Thus, sex work could become a rational choice regarding the costs and benefits compared with other jobs that might be available for women: *'either they are going to enter voluntarily because there are no other opportunities, or what's available is hard work'* (UK-PR-01). Even though participants might disapprove of this choice, some could unpick the rationale behind it. Women could weigh up the costs and risks of the promise of quick money and other material benefits and alongside changes in their values this would often mean that they would fall back into or decide to do sex work as an easy way of making money. As one participant noted, *'but seeing how well they earn from this job [sex work], they would not go to work at McDonald's earning very little* (ROM-KI-04). Once the women began to consider other prospects as limited or even unachievable, it was considered highly likely that they would continue in sex work.

Some participants also noticed that the length of exploitation also impacted women's choices to decide whether or not to continue as sex workers; as noted previously, some were thought to have been both disempowered and made to believe the worst about themselves, leading them to continue this way of life (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-03; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-10). Some participants even claimed that more than half of the women continued to practice prostitution (ROM-PR-04; ROM-PR-02; ROM-PR-09), particularly those who had been exploited for several years and, consequently, had been '*indoctrinated over time and this was the only activity they could do'* (UK-PR-07). Importantly, they noted that even women who had been supported, counselled and benefited from assistance from state institutions and NGOs could return to sex work (ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-07; UK-PR-01; UK-KI-02).

A few participants also mentioned that some women experienced empowerment and gains through independent sex work once it they normalised it (ROM-PR-06; ROM-PR-02; UK-KI-04; UK-PR-10). A participant also mentioned the illusions and hopes that might sustain women in this type of activity (ROM-PR-02). For example, a participant noticed that those who work in escort agencies hoped for a '*saviour'*, a wealthy man who could take care of them (UK-KI-04):

> So at the escort market, £400 an hour; they work the nightclubs and stuff like that. It's still giving half their money to a trafficker, but they live a pretty good lifestyle. And the client base, the businessman, those who got a lot of money, and *I might end up marrying one of these men, get away from all this;* that's the dreams women have. (UK-KI-04)

Some participants understood why women chose sex work when alternative options were limited. Yet, sex work was generally viewed as a negative trajectory by professional participants, and significantly linked to or conflated with sex trafficking in professional participants' accounts. Such conflations are often encountered in anti-trafficking rhetoric (Weitzer, 2015; see Chapter 1). The factors identified and perceived as leading to engagement in sex work were multiple: a combination of circumstances, lack of opportunities available, subjective sense of worth or continuing ambiguous relationships with the traffickers. It can be argued that the women's constrained decisions represent a complex interplay of choice and constraint. This complexity contrasts with the simplified binary picture of negative versus positive routes depicted by some professional participants. Choices and consent have been extensively discussed (Agustin, 2007; Mai, 2014; Doezema, 2002; 2010; Sanders, 2007) with research indicating that although women's decision-making process is complicated, some women maintain independence in sex work (e.g., gaining financial independence, sense of empowerment) and such findings challenge judgmental rhetoric around sex work (see Chapter 1).

Additionally, it was interesting to observe participants' views on sex work and how their values and ideologies seemed to influence the direction of the discussion and the shape of their narratives. Views were not always consistent and some conflicted with observations of other researchers in the field, for instance as Mai (2010) noted, there were examples of professionals referring to women who independently returned to sex work post-trafficking as 're-trafficked'. Participants conveyed various perceptions of sex work, with their stance reflecting their opinions around sex work laws and policy, safety and protection. Whilst trafficking may pose questions around human rights, the findings of this research indicate a conflation between or blurring of sex work and sex trafficking which influences professional practitioners' understanding. Although such perceptions were visible, it is also important to note that professional participants' intentions in supporting trafficked women were genuine and given the multiple challenges they were facing (e.g., demanding and distressing work, under-resourced services, lack of policy support), they remained committed and passionate about their anti-trafficking work.

Positive trajectories: Reintegration, wellbeing and prosperity

What were considered positive trajectories post-trafficking, though limited, provided a space for participants to share stories and 'success cases' with enthusiasm. The first participants interviewed brought up the theme of success, for example: '*most of our stories are success stories*' (ROM-PR-01); '*Amazing success stories of Romanians in this project*' (UK-KI-03). From an early stage, the need to explore perceptions of success became evident and analysis of these accounts explained how participants and trafficked women defined success and what factors they felt led to 'success'. However, there was a distinction between the participants' perceptions of success and what they felt success meant to trafficked women. For instance, what they perceived as a positive trajectory was in some cases 'prescribed' or expected to fit the category of 'success cases'. Success was commonly linked with the NGO's contribution towards the positive changes and what was described as 'success' or a successful intervention and their definitions of positive outcomes. Thus, positive post-trafficking outcomes identified included the absence of exploitation, decreased vulnerability and the ability to work towards overcoming the harmful effects of the trafficking experience, alongside personal and professional achievements.

Prosecutions also represented a success for both practitioners and women. Participants generally agreed that prosecutions positively impacted women's experiences and trajectories (as noted in Chapter 6). Moreover, especially for law enforcement participants, prosecutions commonly meant their work was not in vain but motivated them to continue. Apart from '*justice being done*' (ROM-PR-06) and offenders being imprisoned, successful prosecutions meant that women received some compensation, and, in terms of prevention, they reinforced the message within communities that the crime of trafficking had consequences (UK-KI-02; ROM-KI-07). As noted in Chapter 4, successful prosecutions were positively experienced by the survivors interviewed.

A combination of internal and external factors helped in achieving positive outcomes and trajectories for women. Reintegration, return to normality (ROM-PR-05; ROM-KI-06)*, 'breaking the cycle*' (UK-KI-02), '*getting back on their feet*' (ROM-PR-05), '*reintegrating professionally or socially*' (ROM-PR-03), '*making a fresh start*' (UK-PR-10) were considered to represent positive trajectories. These examples combined a mixture of observations and perceptions of professionals. Additionally, some women were seen as: '*… absolutely flourishing. When you see something done like that, it's just a wonderful story*' (UK-PR-07). The language used to describe positive outcomes was diverse; some concepts were more common than

others. Most participants in both countries often used the word 'reintegration', and NGOs assisted women in reintegrating and finding work opportunities in their communities. For example, a Romanian practitioner described strategies used by his organisation to create economically viable opportunities in rural areas for their beneficiaries to achieve a better standards of living (ROM-PR-01). Other survivors had started projects such as hair salons, restaurants, or even established NGOs to support vulnerable women (UK-KI-05). Since those cases were rare, they represented highlights for practitioners in both countries but were by no means the norm. While women were encouraged to become independent financially, NGOs provided training and work opportunities predominantly in beauty therapy and care (e.g., nail polishing, hairdressing) (UK-PR-01; UK-PR-05; UK-PR-08; UK-PR-12; ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-03; ROM-PR-10; among others), which could be both seen as supporting a consumerist beauty culture, over-sexualisation or commodifying women; additionally, especially in the context of the UK, paradoxically, modern slavery is encountered in these practices, within the premises of nail bars and massage salons (Matolcsi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it could be also argued that trafficked women could engage with themselves through self-care (strengthening their self-image), self-love and acceptance by involvement with the beauty culture. Additionally, the use of these strategies could be influenced by the level of skills and education of the women and also by these being fairly easy skills to learn as one participants suggested (ROM-PR-10).

Positive stories and success were also identified by professionals in those situations where the women could '*fulfil their dreams'* (ROM-PR-01), both professionally and/or by having a family/becoming mothers. For example, participants talked about the importance of being independent financially and NGOs helping women to '*get qualifications and skills'* (UK-PR-07): *'one works in a coffee shop, and she is progressing'* (UK-PR-12) or just '*supporting women to achieve their goals, whatever that might be'* (UK-KI-04). An NGO practitioner in Romania described a case where a woman with a long history of sex work and trafficking decided to get into a routine which was unusual for her (e.g., waking up at 5 am and working a 10-hour low-paid job), highlighting that the survivor said that *'I can no longer live the life I have lived until now'* (ROM-PR-04). According to the respondent, this woman's journey surprisingly changed. Experiencing success increased confidence, and she was able to celebrate and continue with hope and self-trust:

> We had girls who said *my dream was always to fly and says but I flew twice in my life, once I was happy, the second time I didn't feel like flying because I was returning home* [from trafficking]. And she said *I like to fly a lot and I would like to become a flight attendant.* And currently, she works for one of the biggest

European companies as a flight attendant (…). That increases their confidence, and it is very important for them to have success. (ROM-PR-01)

Professionals perceived as another significant achievement for survivors to being able to have families and become mothers, attain stability and status (ROM-PR-12; ROM-KI-01; UK-PR-01; UK-PR-11). The concept of normality and stability achieved via motherhood could arguably be challenged as, although commonly encountered in the data, it was not always clear if it was a perception of professionals or survivors' terminology. However, it was noted in Chapter 4 that Ana expressed similar views and experiences; Irina also valued her family and Diana aspired to creating a family.

The need for a family and family connections was also common across professional participants' interviews. Romanian participants over 50 years old were more inclined to talk about family and motherhood, while UK participants of a similar age talked more about financial independence and professional achievements. Yet, personal achievements such as having family and children were seen as significant and emerged across the data sets in both countries: *'This is a positive case, is good trajectory; she is married, she has a little child* (ROM-KI-04); '*We've also got some good stories; She's still in the UK, got a child, job, and husband. So it's a massively positive one'* (UK-KI-07). As noted above, such aspirations for women were consistent with women's own accounts (see Chapter 4).

Developing trust and trusting relationships with the women was another factor participants considered essential for a successful case. For some participants from both countries, familiarity, closeness with the women, trust, and connection represented a vital sign of change and success (ROM-PR-01; ROM-PR-04, ROM-PR-11; UK-PR-02; UK-PR-11). As one Romanian NGO staff member noted: '*we have as concrete results, how many girls we see and how many stable and consolidated relationships we have with them*' (ROM-PR-02). Developing trust and openness with the NGO staff who supported them were seen to represent a part of the women's transformation. Several professional participants commented that at the end of the process, women would feel *'like at home'* with the NGO staff (ROM-PR-01). Furthermore, participants talked about their strategies for encouraging women to remain in touch, which they saw as another sign of success, although in most cases, the women did not remain connected with the NGOs. Finally, a Romanian practitioner talked about the feedback they received from women and how they gauged success, as *'what the beneficiary felt, her satisfaction with the program and her life'* (ROM-PR-06). She then concluded that if the women were happy with the service, they would stay in touch with the

NGO and '*people who left the program call us to tell us how they do it is an indicator of success; to visit us, introduce us to new family members, share the joys with us*'. Similarly, the women interviewed expressed positive feedback about the services received and discussed the benefits of support (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, it could also be argued that since women were recruited via NGOs, there could have been a sense of responsibility or obligation to comment positively.

Participants in both countries regarded positive post-trafficking experiences and trajectories as highly valuable for their practice. Though these positive outcomes were differently defined and had various implications, a common point was reducing or decreasing vulnerability and the risk of re-exploitation, along with recovery and continuing life despite the experience of trafficking and its effects. These positive trajectories, as described by both survivors and professionals, although representing a minority of cases, concentrated on recovery, stability, building families, security and financial independence. While some professional participants offered accounts of successful projects or outcomes, some set in Romania, seemed idealised, especially when looking at the context (e.g., women starting agricultural businesses or caring for cattle). Successful cases were rare and were highlights for practitioners in both countries, with some having the status of aspirational or affirmation stories contributing to maintaining a positive picture of their work (or perhaps making their work manageable). Moreover, success was linked to the expectations professional participants had for women and reflected assumptions about women's roles and condition in society, although these were possibly not always in line with what women wanted. In the Romanian context, cultural and gendered norms around family and children are likely to have shaped such thinking for both professionals and survivors.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data on the post-trafficking trajectories of Romanian trafficked women in the contexts of the UK and Romania. Most journeys were described as negative and were characterised by re-exploitation or risks. Finally, the chapter examined the few positive or successful stories post-trafficking, noting their salience for research participants.

The data analysed indicated that most trafficked women were considered likely to return to Romania, whilst the few who remained in the UK were judged fortunate in having access to resources and a new life. However, evidence of their trajectories in the UK is limited to NGO reports and as Hynes and colleagues' (2019) study demonstrates, there are significant challenges in the UK in accessing and including victims and survivors in research. Nevertheless, women's experiences and trajectories post-trafficking were more complex and nuanced than suggested by a simple 'good' or 'bad' trajectory, and their vulnerabilities, needs and resources, together with wider systems, forged their journeys. While professionals who worked in victim care had knowledge based on their experience, other professional participants made assumptions about what could happen to the women post-trafficking. This second group highlighted a polarisation between what was considered 'a good' versus 'a bad' trajectory, with limited trajectories 'in-between'. Yet, it was also generally agreed by all professional participants that there is a lack of knowledge of victims' longer-term post-trafficking experiences.

Most professional participants agreed that after exiting, unless survivors received proper support and resources were available and accessed, women tended to remain vulnerable to trafficking or trapped within a so-called 'vicious circle'. While trafficked women's narratives still resonated with such descriptions, it was clear that their accounts were complex. Indeed, vulnerabilities remained, exacerbated by the trafficking experience (e.g., mental health, relationships, qualification and work prospects). Some of the women participating in this study encountered risks or negative experiences post-trafficking and there was a constant fight to 'carry on with life' (Maia, Larisa). Such observations resonate with research findings on the challenges after trafficking, highlighted by Bodrogi (2015), Brunovskis & Surtees (2013), Hynes et al. (2019) and Pascoal (2020), who emphasise that challenges such as stigma, exclusion and lack of financial opportunities restrict recovery. Moreover, survivors might experience success in one area of their life, yet other aspects were noted once again as posing risk of being trafficked (e.g., lack of employment, Larisa); (e.g., traffickers being free, Maia).

It was evident that many professional participants had specific expectations regarding what women should be doing and what they needed in post-trafficking support, or 'what is best for the other', suggesting attitudes that could be patronising and paternalistic (Bernstein, 2010; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Doezema, 2001; Shin et al., 2022). While the context of care can support such ideas and perceptions, it does not always align with an individual's rights to self-determination or expressions of agency and freedom. These attitudes were particularly evident in regard to women's involvement in sex work post-

trafficking. Other studies have encountered similar attitudes in anti-trafficking and post-trafficking services, especially within faith-based organisations (Campbell & Zimmerman, 2014; Lewis et al., 2020; Lonergan et al., 2021). Similarly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, anti-trafficking practices in the UK especially informal returns to Romania – raise questions concerning how women's best interests, their agency and the limited availability of support in the Romanian context can be reconciled.

Some of the of the survivors' 'stories' do not fit the prescribed narratives of trafficking (as in the case of Diana, see Chapter 4), especially when stories were collected from those women who received support (see also Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; 2010). Unanswered questions remain regarding the full range of possible trajectories and research can only aim to explore and bring new knowledge in that regard. However, constructing trajectories in a binary manner reduces the potential for acknowledging the complexity and the broader systems which influence the women's opportunities, decisions and, ultimately, their journeys. The findings confirmed such arguments, especially the cases of Diana and Maia (see Chapter 4), which showed determination, agency and acknowledgement of their inner strengths before and after trafficking. This picture conflicted with how some professional participants described trafficked women and their post-trafficking trajectories. Finally, as noted, professionals perceived that those women who had more external support and inner resources managed to gain independence, financial independence and succeed in their goals (regardless of what those were) quicker and presumably more positive post-trafficking trajectories.

Chapter 9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This study aimed to provide an understanding of the views and experiences of sex trafficking survivors by exploring the post-trafficking trajectories of adult Romanian women subjected to sex trafficking in the UK. I have used a feminist approach to the research, emphasising the complexity of women's strengths and agency in addition to their vulnerabilities; the voices of trafficked women were captured and their views were synthesised with those of professional participants. Their post-trafficking trajectories occur within the wider context of the UK and Romania, the influences of those around them and sex trafficking and sex work debates. In this regard, the ecological model proved helpful for conceptualising women's experiences, alongside an exploration of the impact of victim care practice, policy and wider systems at the micro, meso and macro levels.

A feminist approach has allowed me to identify the knowledge added to the study through my own positionality, with this bringing value to the exploration of the social and cultural context in which trafficking occurs in Romania. Additionally, my Romanian identity allowed me access to valuable contacts and networks in Romanian and to conduct interviews in the participants' first language. This research contributes to a better understanding of the post-trafficking trajectories of adult Romanian women who have been exploited in the UK and remain in the UK, or return to Romania, by answering the following questions:

- What are the particularities of adult female Romanian sex trafficking cases in the UK?
- What are the post-trafficking trajectories, journeys, and possibilities for adult Romanian women who are trafficked in the UK?
- What factors are perceived to increase the possible re-victimisation and resilience of adult Romanian trafficked women who are trafficked in the UK?
- How is the current wellbeing of survivors experienced in relation to the meanings given to their post-trafficking experiences?
- What is the nature of the collaboration between the UK and Romania that addresses sex trafficking?

- What are the differences and similarities regarding care and access to care post-trafficking in both countries?

By exploring these areas of trafficked women's trajectories, the research has enhanced knowledge regarding effective support and prevention of trafficking re-victimisation. The study drew on the experiences and perspectives of five adult Romanian female sex trafficking survivors (four returned to Romania and one returned to the UK), together with those of practitioners and other relevant key informants in the UK and Romania (a total of 38 professional participants). Their experiences and observations have been analysed, synthesised and are summarised below as key findings. The findings have implications for the anti-trafficking sector and are translated into recommendations for victim care practice, interventions and policymaking nationally (in the UK and Romania) and internationally when addressing collaborations between states. I emphasise contributions to knowledge and offer suggestions for further research, before reflecting upon the research journey.

Summary of key research findings

The research exposes the complexities of post-trafficking trajectories and survivors' journeys in and out of trafficking, as well as the multiple systems contributing to their recovery and restarting their lives after trafficking. The theoretical framework of this research enabled relevant systems influencing women's journeys to be identified, as their experiences did not happen in a vacuum but were shaped by their ecosystem and their interactions with it. The literature showed that the lenses through which we explore and perceive trafficking raise questions and may make for biases regarding women's roles and expressed agency (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; Doezema, 2010). Thus, in this study, I aimed to acknowledge varying perceptions and understandings of trafficking and post-trafficking and create a balance of views which included recognition of both vulnerabilities and women's agency and strength. Notably, since trafficking is a highly adverse experience with multiple negative effects on trafficked women, it is important to acknowledge the commitment and positive intentions of both practitioners and researchers in the field. Yet, some representations of post-trafficking and trafficking experiences appeared subject to biases and particular agendas that are reflective of the discourses which can act to police or control sex work, migration and women's sexuality (Hoefinger, 2016; Milivojevic & Pickering, 2013; Weitzer, 2007; see Chapter 1). This research attempted to maintain a focus on both vulnerabilities and agency, thus

constructing a nuanced way of looking at trafficking, while exploring the possibility of establishing a framework to better reflect the range of outcomes for victims of human trafficking supported in the UK and those who may choose to return to Romania.

Research which includes survivors of sex trafficking is difficult to conduct and limited (Hynes et al. 2019). Therefore, the strength of this study rests on the accounts of trafficked women, which although limited in number, provide depth to the knowledge of post-trafficking trajectories and unique accounts of their experiences. On the other hand, the research offers breadth through the wider perspectives of professional participants in both countries who bring extensive experience acquired over time through work with many Romanian sex trafficking survivors. The study combined bottom-up and top-down approaches and drew from multiple perspectives in the UK and Romania. This approach also sheds light on anti-trafficking initiatives undertaken in partnership between the two countries and fills gaps regarding the practice and process of such collaborations, that ultimately impact on post-trafficking journeys and outcomes. Furthermore, although human trafficking is often regarded as a linear process, in this research it was notable that the complex nature of human trafficking is dependent upon context and time of occurrence. As Cockbain et al. (2022) suggest, it is critical to acknowledge and consider the connections that exist inside the trafficking process as well as the reality that particular activities do in fact take place in particular locations at particular times. In line with the aim and research questions of this study, key findings are presented below:

Particularities of Romanian cases of sex trafficking in the UK

Key themes identified in both survivors' and professionals' accounts included the multiple individual and contextual vulnerabilities of women trafficked from Romania, the role of migration within the context of the EU, belonging to the Roma ethnic group, the role of Romanian women in society and the 'loverboy' method of recruitment. This group of vulnerabilities are similar to those of other trafficked women and are often encountered in the literature on sex trafficking, particularly that in respect of Eastern Europe (Lăzăroiu & Alexandru, 2003; Ostrovschi et al., 2011; Pascoal, 2016; 2020; Roth & Laszlo, 2023). The continuity of such themes raises questions about the ongoing and unchanged vulnerabilities for trafficked women in Romania. The wider contextual vulnerabilities identified reflect the country's historical, economic and political development, highlighting barriers to accessing financial stability and growth, similar to those found in other countries of origin for trafficking and as opposed to the Western world

(Bales, 2007; Petrunov, 2011; Tverdova, 2011). This context stimulates the push and pull factors leading to migration before trafficking. Thus, in Romania, migration was depicted as a 'cultural' phenomenon.

Romania's position in the EU, its political and social development, and the role of migration for its citizens needs consideration. For example, being an EU citizen allows more flexibility before and after trafficking and this was flagged as particularly relevant to Romanian sex trafficking cases by professional participants. As noted in other studies (Cockbain et al., 2019; 2022), free movement rights enabled Romanians (along with other EU nationals) to enter the UK legally and voluntarily in search of employment. For Romanians, migration occurs in a transparent form, is legal and based on an expression of agency regarding initial migratory journeys. It could be argued that Romania's position in the EU facilitates migration, while simultaneously placing vulnerable groups at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

Belonging to the Roma ethnic minority brought additional challenges and risks regarding trafficking, affecting both the trafficked and their traffickers. This study has not been able to identify the frequency with which Roma ethnicity is found among Romanian traffickers and trafficked women, yet the perception that Roma-Romanians were more likely to be part of the exploitation (both as victims and exploiters/traffickers) was overwhelmingly common among professional participants. Moreover, professionals' references to the 'other' in this context and a differentiation based on ethnicity between Romanians and Roma-Romanians appeared at times to be loaded with prejudice and racist elements, with the potential to further deepen the inequality gap and exclusion of Roma populations. Studies on discrimination against Roma Romanians in the UK (Breazu et al., 2023; Leggio, 2019), or those that report Romanians' perceptions of themselves being associated with Roma (Wemyss & Cassidy, 2017), highlight the negative impacts of such discrimination on the individual and the wider Romanian community. The implications of discrimination, exclusion and racism encountered both at practice level and at the societal level, are likely to impact on the way in which trafficking from this group is addressed at a macro level and how Roma women experience trafficking and service responses.

Professional participants in this study described some aspects of Romanian cultural life as 'inappropriate', and as contributing to gender inequalities and inequitable treatment of women in Romanian society. Such perceptions were rooted in survivors' and professionals' experiences and observations and are equally well-established in the literature on domestic violence in Romania (Antal et al., 2011; Hogaș, 2010; Roth, 2020). While such observations are shaped by wider cultural values and expectations, in this research in,

it was clear that Romanian survivors were also overwhelmingly portrayed through the lens of vulnerability and victimisation. Thus, despite the traditional positioning of women in society, the trafficked women participating in the study clearly demonstrated aspects of independence and repositioned themselves in the sphere of power. Additionally, what was described by professional participants as the most common recruitment method – the 'loverboy' approach - was underpinned by participants' views that women's needs and social roles led them into abusive relationships, once again portraying women as highly vulnerable. However, the reality was perceived as much more complex, especially when acknowledging the relationship between domestic abuse, trafficking and exploitation and professionals' attitudes towards women's decisions in relation to 'love', 'relationships', 'risk-taking' and 'migration' – which were seen as commonly undermining women's capacity for agency (see Chapter 5). I argued that whilst recognising these vulnerabilities and characteristics of Romanian cases, a nuanced understanding of these elements allows also for threads of agency and strengths in Romanian women's decisions and actions to be acknowledged. These indications of agency and strength (e.g., willingness to take risks, migrate for work, determination to succeed, among others; see survivors' accounts, Chapter 4, and Chapter 6), could be harnessed to build recovery or resilience, or used in trafficking prevention work and campaigns. Finally, the interdependent relationship between women, their environment, and their intersecting roles and experiences, which were perceived to render them susceptible to trafficking, could be addressed at all the levels of their systems (micro, meso and macro) and used to inform both prevention and victim-care post-trafficking. For instance, community vulnerabilities such as poverty, criminality and lack of opportunities for financial endeavours (as noted in Maya's case) could be further addressed by authorities in relation to education (youth), social work (community work) and finally, economic development in the region.

Post-trafficking trajectories

This study has begun the task of illuminating post-trafficking trajectories yet much remains unclear due to the limited information resulting from low rates of victim/survivor engagement with legal or support agencies. In a context of limited knowledge about outcomes, trajectories were identified by professional participants as more likely to be negative than positive. Those negatives were perceived as taking a re-victimisation route or as the 'vicious cycle', which included being re-trafficked, becoming a trafficker/ a member of OCGs or a sex worker. While re-victimisation in trafficking is not uncommon (Bodrogi, 2015; Lee, 2011; Worden, 2018), questions around the wider prospect of a negative trajectory and the binaries

used by professionals to describe post-trafficking trajectories highlighted the risks of adopting simplistic explanations of complex issues. Strategies to reduce re-victimisation identified by professional participants included the provision of personalised support and addressing issues such as financial independence and stability. As noted in Chapter 4, survivors' experiences resonated with those of professionals regarding successful strategies and support post-trafficking, and they also had similar views of what constituted a positive trajectory (e.g., lack of exploitation, financial and physical security, meaningful connections).

As demonstrated by the survivors' accounts included in this study, trafficked women's positions could change post-trafficking, together with their needs, realisations and opportunities, yet most professionals viewed post-trafficking trajectories negatively, especially if they included engagement in sex work. Other studies have suggested that moralistic views of sex work, restrictions on women's independence and paternalistic attitudes can deepen such perceptions (Agustin, 2007; Smith & Mac, 2018). Simultaneously, such perceptions could also be understood as being rooted in an ethos of care and concerns about reduction of harm and further risks of exploitation, women's multiple vulnerabilities and additional vulnerabilities as a consequence of trafficking. For instance, survivors interviewed acknowledged possible risks which could lead to their own re-victimisation and so the perpetuation of the vicious cycle (see Larisa and Maia's stories, Chapter 4). Finally, becoming perpetrators represented the apogee of a negative trajectory for the women, as harm was inflicted on others, suggesting a change in motivation and a lack of consideration regarding the impact of trafficking on other women.

Positive post-trafficking trajectories or 'success stories', although considered rare, were understood by both professionals and survivors to involve rebuilding lives by becoming financially independent, creating a family or becoming mothers. As noted in Chapter 3, the survivors participating in this study were identified and contacted by organisations, with it being recognised that the trajectories identified may not reflect those of women who do not access or engage with such organisations/professionals. Thus, reducing generalisability. Although common points were identified in this research under this umbrella, defining a 'positive trajectory' or 'success' is bound to the context and particular cases. Interestingly, positive outcomes post-trafficking were understood to be linked to third sector interventions: this view was found in accounts of both professional and survivor participants – most of whom either worked in or received services from the third sector. As discussed previously (see Chapter 3), the sample of survivors in this study was limited to those who accessed services: further research and engagement with trafficking

survivors who have not used NGO support would add valuable contributions to the knowledge on support and post-trafficking trajectories. Few criticisms of the work of the third sector in the post-trafficking sphere were voiced by participants in this study

In terms of location, it was not clear where women's post-trafficking trajectories might end (in the UK, Romania or other places), yet participants in this study tended to suggest that trafficked women mainly returned to Romania. There is no precise data available regarding final destinations due to several limitations (e.g., informal repatriations, lack of engagement with authorities, further migration), but this study provides new insight into the challenges of identifying the pathways of trafficked Romanian women especially in areas where knowledge gaps persist (e.g., informal repatriations, collaborations, engagement with authorities and services). As presented in Chapters 7 and 8, Romanian participants did not consider informal repatriations from the UK to be 'good practice', especially when high vulnerability persisted and victims were not adequately supported. Such comments highlighted a lack of trust in the collaboration between the two countries. On the other hand, UK professionals understood informal repatriations as meeting concerns about safeguarding and confidentiality, and respecting survivors' desires to remain anonymous. More insight into the issue of informal repatriations and their impact on trafficking survivors' trajectories would be valuable as, to the writer's knowledge, no relevant studies have been conducted in this respect. Finally, this study highlighted the limited knowledge available on post-trafficking trajectories and the binaries that characterise available accounts of these trajectories.

Factors perceived to increase re-victimisation

These were numerous: some were connected with the lack of support from family/exploitative families, community or civil society, local links with traffickers, a lack of financial opportunities, previous vulnerabilities and vulnerabilities resulting from trafficking (e.g., health or mental health issues, the secrecy and stigma surrounding the experience). Moreover, it was considered that returning to the same situation without support represented a significant challenge for women, while for some, although supported, they could still face risk of re-victimisation.

As several studies show, support post-trafficking is crucial for recovery from the experience (Bodrogi, 2015; Loomba, 2017; Pascoal, 2020; Twigg, 2017), and recent ongoing studies suggest that the need for security and financial security, skills and housing are among the main preoccupations of survivors (Paphitis

& Jannesari, 2023). Although professional participants suggested that some survivors were able to move forward on their own, the survivors interviewed emphasised the benefits of accessing support within their journeys. However, it is relevant that all survivors interviewed were recruited via NGOs providing support. Additionally, some of the factors that affect women's recovery cannot be addressed solely by them or by practitioners, as structural shifts such as state commitment to successful prosecutions of traffickers, training and employment opportunities are required at the meso (e.g., community) and macro levels (e.g., civil society, governance). Consequently, the systems posing risks to survivors illustrate larger issues within their communities and in the wider civil society, re-emphasising the contextual vulnerabilities which might negatively affect their post-trafficking trajectories.

The trafficking experience was considered to revolve around the notion of trust; Romanian women's trust had been exploited and misused, and they were left with a lack of trust both towards authorities and others, which decreased the likelihood of them engaging with authorities and support services, testifying against their traffickers, and forming relationships post-trafficking. Furthermore, this absence of trust could deepen as women experienced a decline in self-trust, self-esteem, and self-worth. Recognising the significance of trust is a valuable step towards providing effective support for women who have experienced trafficking. Interestingly, trust was mainly highlighted by professionals in relation to women's engagement with police and other social services, suggesting that the lack of trust represented an impediment to engagement. Yet, as other studies have shown, inadequate policing practices (Alexander, 2013; Hanks, 2021; Smith & Mac, 2018), an absence of support or support that fails to meet women's needs (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Laurie & Richardson, 2021), or match their perceptions of their own needs (Agustin, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; 2016; Mai, 2010; Smith & Mac, 2018), might also contribute to resistance in engaging with these services. Such experiences were also described by the survivors interviewed, suggesting that trust can be perceived and understood differently from different perspectives. Addressing the 'attitudes of superiority' and improving cultural competence when working with Romanian survivors, particularly Roma survivors (see Chapter 5), could assist with the development of trust between this group and practitioners, increasing engagement with support and services available.

Factors perceived to increase resilience

Professionals interviewed considered that resilience resided in the individual, and was connected to women's inner strength, agency, determination and social capital. Interestingly, faith or religious adherence represented a strength for women and was identified by both survivors themselves and professionals, although there are wider questions as to whether faith encourages a degree of passivity and coercion (in promoting concepts of sacrifice, destiny, fate) (Heil, 2017; Ikeora, 2016) or active expression of agency and resistance (Ginesini, 2018; Knight et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2014).

Achieving financial stability meant that the some of the initial factors leading to trafficking were addressed, reducing vulnerabilities and subsequent re-victimisation. Other studies too, have emphasised the necessity of financial stability for trafficking survivors (Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023). Similarly, services which focus on employment and skills development were considered valuable by both professionals and survivors, who recognised how such factors contribute to increasing resilience, recovery and independence.

Both survivors themselves and professionals identified motherhood and children as highly relevant for keeping women motivated, increasing their strength and determination to recover and fight adverse trafficking outcomes. While this is supported by studies that have explored the motivations of those trafficked into domestic servitude (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; Silvey, 2006), it is contested by other studies (Pascoal, 2020) that identify motherhood as generating more gendered risks of exploitation and pressure on the women as breadwinners. Thus, having 'something worth fighting for' or make 'sacrifice' could be understood as both an impediment to well-being and as representing a significant motivator and activator of resilience. This study found that the trafficked women interviewed interpreted their experiences of motherhood in a positive light, emphasising the importance of motherhood in their personal journeys. Although this might not be true for all trafficked women, we must acknowledge the potential for differences in meanings and realities.

While not consistently the case, supportive families, too, were considered by professionals and survivors who experienced such support (see Chapter 4) to have potential to play a crucial role in recovery and regaining stability post-trafficking. Finally, services, NGOs and accessible resources were deemed valuable irrespective of personal resources. At a macro level, victim care policies, legal systems, and successful prosecutions were seen as instrumental in restoring external care and fostering women's trust in authorities. The survivors interviewed confirmed the benefits, positive impact and importance of

prosecutions in their cases, suggesting they could contribute to an increase in trust and confidence both in themselves and in the authorities (see Chapter 4). Professional participants identified women's strong wills and their determination, stressing the importance of those working with trafficked women providing the opportunity for women to recognise their own strength and ability to change their trajectories.

Romania's multiple and complex issues

If not adequately addressed, social and economic factors in Romania will continue to increase vulnerability to trafficking. As the findings in Chapter 7 showed, reducing contextual vulnerabilities through investment in education, infrastructure and employment or financial opportunities would provide central stimulants for reducing migration and risks of trafficking, especially among 'at risk' populations (e.g., Roma, poor and remote communities). People migrate for various reasons, and as discussed in Chapter 5, in Romania, motivations mainly concern acquiring jobs and financial resources more readily available across borders. Other features, such as migration hubs or transnational connection to the destination country, help to facilitate and normalise migration (Angouri et al., 2020; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Mîndrican & Matei, 2023). At the same time, migration requires courage, social capital and social imperatives which do not rely solely on vulnerabilities. Moreover, many Romanian migrants have specific goals or objectives when migrating, with some groups (especially the highly skilled) aiming to remain in the destination country (Anghel et al., 2017). For others, the decision to return, though in some cases oriented to their country of origin, is still complex and changeable (Hinks & Davis, 2015; Roman & Goschin, 2012). Such descriptions resonate with those of the trafficked women in this study (see Chapter 4) who expressed desires to return to Romania post-trafficking or migrate again. Thus, focusing on reducing migration or migration for those at risk as suggested by UK participants would not necessarily represent a solution to trafficking. As some Romanian participants suggested (see Chapter 7), prevention should be targeted at a deeper level, with emphasis on developing the economy and infrastructure that would ultimately increase employment opportunities and reduce vulnerability to trafficking – by addressing contextual vulnerabilities.

The ongoing transition from communism to democracy and democratic values necessitates change at all levels, including the political sphere, where the prevalence of corruption is seen to have an impact on trafficking. The values of the communist era (see Chapter 1) have also influenced contemporary Romania (Boia, 2012; Herghea, 2008; Mai, 2010). Professional participants (see Chapter 7) referred to the

'communist hangover' and identified corruption, nepotism, and the illusion of a 'functioning' system dominating Romanian culture. In addition, national development has been unequal, as seen in the undeveloped areas of education, economic development, and disparities in rural-urban service delivery and welfare. This heightens the risks of trafficking in rural and disadvantaged parts of Romania.

Moreover, it was clear that Romania's victim protection and victim care were still limited to a few NGOs with inadequate support from government (see Chapter 7). Social services in Romania were heavily criticised by both Romanian and UK professionals interviewed (see Chapter 7), especially childcare and protection services and the failure to tackle the risks for young women living in or leaving the care system. These claims need to be further investigated as they highlight gaps in the system and have been previously raised in the Romania context (Butler & Gheorghiu, 2010; Şoş & Hărăguş, 2013). Victim blaming too, was perceived as prevalent in Romania, leading to stigmatising and blaming of trafficked women, irrespective of their situations and stories. Attitudinal changes and non-judgemental and empathic responses towards trafficked women can enhance their prospects of successful reintegration and alleviate mental health issues (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012; Ramaj, 2023; Richardson & Laurie, 2019). Building awareness at community and societal levels regarding the complexities of trafficking could reduce the negative impact of stigma, exclusion and lack of community support upon recovery and reintegration of trafficked women.

The UK's responses to trafficking require further attention

Although participants considered that significant political and economic resources were allocated to combating trafficking, there remain deficiencies in the implementation of anti-trafficking and victim-care measures in response to Romanian victims/survivors in the UK. When looking at services targeting this specific group, concerns were raised around the lack of specialised services (e.g., health and mental health, housing, interpreters – see Chapter 7) and the levels of cultural awareness and sensitivity to understanding Romanian women's trafficked experiences and pre-trafficking contexts. The findings suggest that service provision could be tailored to specific needs of survivors when required and resonate with research that highlights similar NRM challenges that trafficking survivors encounter (Craig, 2017; Craig et al., 2019; Gaitis, 2021; Findlay, 2022). Furthermore, the practice and processes of informal repatriations can be interpreted as an unwillingness to assume responsibility for victims who wish to stay in the UK and raises questions about the direction of the anti-trafficking work in the UK. As the findings reported in Chapters

4, 7 and 8 suggest, in some cases, women may have been coerced to return to their home country, with disregard for the risks they faced, and with a policy message that shifted the blame for trafficking to the 'home' government. Thus, better understanding of repatriations is required, with particular focus given to the best interests and safety of survivors who return to their country of origin.

Similarly, four UK professionals advocated for closed borders as a means of preventing and reducing trafficking, drawing on anti-trafficking discourses fuelled by anti-immigration sentiment or a hostile environment as previously discussed. This reinforces points made in Chapter 1 around how moral panics regarding migration, sex work and 'the other' surface. In turn, (see Chapter 1), moral panics about women's migration and the risks of trafficking posed by migration inform anti-trafficking policies and become a form of migration control. Similarly, current political developments focused on migration in the UK which allegedly aim to create safer migration routes and reduce exploitation[34] are open to questions and criticisms concerning their actual political agenda, claims of efficiency and risks posed to asylum seekers and trafficking victims (Amnesty International, 2022; Haynes, 2023).

Finally, the responsibility for addressing trafficking and providing support for victims and survivors needs to be multi-agency, with destination and origin countries working collaboratively to disrupt trafficking activity.

The relationship between the UK and Romania

Generally, this was perceived positively by professionals in both the UK and Romania, particularly in the domain of law enforcement with stories of collaboration and joint investigations celebrated as successes. On the other hand, Romanian professionals discussed issues related to NGO collaboration, identifying a lack of trust and attitudes of superiority from UK partners which fed a lack of understanding between the countries. Such attitudes could also infiltrate services and responses to trafficked women and their journeys. Being perceived as inferior and experiencing prejudice and the ensuing mistrust can compromise engagement with authorities and interactions with services for trafficked women and create challenges for international collaboration and joint initiatives between the two states.

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[34] The Nationality and Borders Act 2022, with reference to nationality, asylum, immigration, victims of slavery and human trafficking. (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-nationality-and-borders-bill)

The practice of informal repatriations from the UK was singled out for negative comment by Romanian professionals. The case of Larisa (see Chapter 4) illustrated professional perceptions that UK authorities and NGOs tended to support and encourage informal repatriations, which as the findings showed, were not always in the best interest of survivors, especially when survivors were under pressure to return to Romania (see Chapter 7). This practice raises questions around the policy agendas that underpin anti-trafficking work in the UK, especially in light of the current immigration narratives, migration policies and an anti-immigration sentiment (Creighton & Jamal, 2022). Such perceptions were encountered among UK professionals who saw migrant Romanian women and survivors as 'passive' and lacking agency, drawing on stereotypes of the 'good' and 'bad' migrant (Anderson, 2013). Similarly, Romanian professionals noticed a binary view of what constituted a good or a bad migrant post-trafficking, making links with informal repatriations; whereby more skilled survivors were likely to be encouraged to remain in the UK, compared to those deemed vulnerable or unskilled. These views draw on concepts of what Andreson (2013) referred to as the 'bad economic migrants', low-skilled and not necessarily able to contribute to a well-functioning society, with direct repercussion on immigration policy and narratives. Thus, the underlying perceptions of deserving and underserving migrants seems to be dictated by whether an individual is considered an 'active member of society'. This link between financially contributing to a host country and being identified as a 'deserving' survivors needs to be explored further, particularly in the context of informal repatriations.

Additionally, analysis also identified what could be perceived as hostile and dehumanising attitudes from some of the professionals, with regard to attitudes to the 'other', racism, positionality or a perceived 'Western superiority'. Such attitudes were perceived to increase a lack of trust between the two counties and undermine collaboration. Both policy and practice need to acknowledge cultural, developmental and contextual differences between the two countries and identify where friction might appear and impact engagement, repatriations and collaboration between both trafficked women and authorities and between professionals in both countries. The extent to which UK and Romanian professionals fully understand one another's cultural expectations and legal systems impacts on collaboration and without this foundation, a shared vision as to how best to jointly support trafficking survivors is unlike to occur.

Finally, regardless of the level at which solutions are sought, collaboration needs to occur throughout all stages of a trafficking journey, with it being particularly important during the post-trafficking stage (see Chapter 7). As noted in this study, although joint police investigations between the UK and Romanian

police were described as working well, there were several issues regarding repatriations and post-trafficking support for survivors, which need to be addressed jointly considering survivors' best interests, together with a deeper understanding of their contexts and cultural differences. For instance, more work needs to occur during the post-trafficking phase to ensure decision-making processes are multi-agency and collaborative, with the voce of the women being part of these processes both individually and also at a higher level. Thus creating opportunities for victim/survivors voices to contribute to the debates regarding anti-trafficking, might be a means of identifying ways in which survivors' best interests can be addressed.

Viewing trafficking women through the lenses of vulnerability or agency

The question of which lens is selected appears to be dependent on broader attitudes towards sex work, ideologies and morals – abolitionist positions versus more liberal stances – in addition to the lived experience of trafficking. Thus, different representations of what trafficking is or is not, and whether women are purely vulnerable and lack agency, or are ideal victims emerge. This study indicates that the social construct of victimisation is not always consistent with the complexity of women's experiences, as women exhibited varying levels of agency, which were influenced by their individual resources and capabilities. This spectrum of passivity to active agency has been recognised in previous research by De Angelis (2015) and Cojocaru (2016), among others. Yet, in all stages of their trafficking journeys, women showed signs of agency and strength, although not consistently recognised by professional participants. Given the intricate and interrelated nature of the relationship between sex work and sex trafficking, it is important to be attentive to the perspectives that contribute to these discussions, particularly in a context where sex trafficking and sex work are often conflated. Cojocaru (2015) argues that acknowledging agency, even if limited, is crucial to avoid oversimplifying the narratives of trafficking and to move beyond prescribed discourses. Promoting recognition of agency in the policy and practice response to trafficking could facilitate effective victim support and interventions.

Predominant and feminist debates around sex trafficking and sex work shape policy and practice. Abolitionist and prohibiting perspectives portray women as 'in need of salvation', reduce their sense of agency, infantilising them under the umbrella of salvation and rescue (Hoefinger, 2016; Kempadoo, 2015). In addition to law enforcement interventions that involve 'the rescue of victims', the decision-making of

survivors plays a significant role in determining the particular trajectories they pursue. This is particularly true regarding instances of autonomous escape or gradual reintegration into alternative roles, as evidenced by women's narratives captured by this study (see Chapter 4). Their escape routes were often constructed through a combination of the individual women's choices/actions and police/others' interventions. The politics of sex trafficking, or the politics of vulnerability, reduce women to their victimisation. Despite facing significant challenges and adverse experiences which should not be overlooked, the analysis of women's accounts demonstrated resistance, agency, and perseverance in forging new paths forward. Acknowledging these aspects of their experience, takes us a step forward away from the politics of rescue into what McGrath & Watson (2018, p. 29) refer to as the politics of solidarity, whereby efforts should focus on *'alternative practices and alternative imaginaries'.*

This study has shown that both individual and contextual vulnerabilities impacted women's decision-making processes regarding their choices and how they exercised them. It was clear that some professional participants did not acknowledge women's choices, but rather adopted moral and ideological views that focused on assumptions of ideal victimhood and omitted those nuances of the experiences of trafficked women which differed from mainstream narratives. Definitions of victimhood and questions such as who confers victimhood when the *'victim is not aware of [their] victimhood'* (UK-PR-08) remain relevant, given the complexity of women's roles and the blurred lines between sex work and sex trafficking. In this study, survivors (all of whom were recruited via NGOs and had experienced police investigations of trafficking) recognised themselves as victims of a crime, so resonating with the accounts of most professional participants in both countries. While survivors' accounts and those supporting them provided evidence of the contextual vulnerability that led to their victimization (see Chapter 4 and 5), these accounts also testified to their agency in regaining independence and increasing resilience, similar to the accounts provided by other international studies (Brunovkis & Surtes, 2008; Cojocaru, 2015; FitzGerald, 2018). As this and other studies (De Angelis, 2016; Cojocaru, 2015) show, women's agency is often present to different degrees during the various stages of trafficking, particularly in the initial stages, and at exit (as shown in Chapter 4, attempted or actual escapes). This research suggests that practitioners and policymakers need to recognise women's agency, courage, and confidence in the early stages of migration, despite their accompanying vulnerabilities, and understand how these elements interact and may benefit the post-trafficking journey, particularly recovery.

Practice and policy recommendations: Interventions and victim care

In line with the analysis of the research findings and their interpretation, the following recommendations can be identified for victim care practice and those delivering interventions. These are relevant for a range of professionals in both the UK and Romania: the police and other criminal justice professionals, those working in immigration and border forces, those employed in health and public health services and for social workers, both those working in childcare services and those who are employed in NGOs delivering support and advocacy to trafficked people.

Prevention campaigns are valuable but are most likely to be relevant when they are tailored to the public they are addressing (O'Brian, 2016) and offer solutions to issues the community faces. Yet, an extensive body of knowledge identifies the negative effects and hidden agendas of some prevention campaigns addressing trafficking, highlighting their limitations such as re-introducing moral panics (Kempadoo, 2015; Hill, 2011; Weitzer, 2007), distorting the trafficking and exploitation reality through 'sex humanitarianism', the rescue industry and images of ideal victims (Forringer-Beal, 2022; Mai et al., 2022; Hoefinger, 2016; O'Brien, 2013). Thus, I argue that anti-trafficking prevention strategies and the media should focus on more nuanced approaches to trafficking stories to effectively raise awareness. For example, portraying women in a more complex way, whereby agency, women's determination and resources can be also recognised as opposed to focusing solely on vulnerability. Therefore, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on such initiatives. Additionally, prevention campaigns in schools should be accompanied by implementing real-life solutions in young people's communities (e.g., investments in community development; entrepreneurship and creativity; emotional intelligence and relationships) together with efforts to reduce school dropouts. Supporting such developments at a community level would ensure that young people would increase their awareness of the risks of trafficking while simultaneously finding employment and education opportunities in their own locations. Finally, it is essential to ensure that young people in vulnerable situations (e.g., those in poor communities, Roma children, children in childcare services, especially those looked after by the State) are presented with real solutions to the problems they experience in their communities and are empowered to make more informed decisions, as well as informed of their rights and ways in which to respond when threatened with or experiencing trafficking. This last initiative is one that could be adopted by both teachers and social workers.

Moreover, professional perceptions of the high risks of trafficking with poor outcomes for children in care in Romania reflect the large body of evidence reporting adverse outcomes in adult life for children who have been 'looked after' (Sacker et al., 2021). Such claims should be further investigated and addressed with recommendations for Romanian social services policy and practice.

Protection and victim care for trafficking survivors should be accompanied by victim/witness protection especially for those survivors who engage in a legal process against traffickers in Romania; as it stands, professionals considered witness protection inadequate, thus posing risks to survivors' security and safety (see Chapter 6 and 7). Interventions, victim care and resources need to be tailored to survivors' needs both in the UK and Romania (see Chapter 8). Investing more in human resources (training staff, police officers, other actors regarding trafficking), ensuring proper material, educational and employment opportunities for survivors returned to Romania represent some of major considerations regarding victim care. Both social services and NGOs were considered to be lacking sufficient resources to address trafficking, suggesting an exploration of these sectors to identify what resources may be required.

In the UK, challenges with NRM procedures and their implementation highlighted by participants in this study could be further addressed through policies for improving victim care for survivors remaining in the UK: limited resources were available to support victim/survivors of sex trafficking, support/therapy in the Romanian language was described as particularly hard to access (see Chapter 7). Moreover, training and a better understanding of trafficking, migration law, and regulations among service providers, including local authorities, social work, and social services, would help to ensure a better understanding of survivors' contexts and needs (see Chapter 7). Such developments would increase trust and facilitate the engagement of trafficked women with authorities and social service providers. Authorities and social care providers need to reflect on how service provision is developed and delivered to ensure it is accessible to trafficked women.

Better support from NGOs to assist women to secure employment is needed in order to secure women's transition to independence post-trafficking. Although efforts are made in this respect, for example in Chapter 6, NGO staff described working with employers to secure employment opportunities for survivors, it seemed that trafficked women were limited to training for low paid jobs. More collaboration with work agencies, job recruiters and industries might increase the chances for a wider range of employment opportunities. Moreover, support with employment would recognise women's agency and promote their

awareness of it in the recovery period: trafficked women's experience of vulnerability and agency can be affected by their context and the type of resources and support available.

Responses to trafficking should aim in the first instance at increasing trust between communities and authorities, by providing examples of prosecutions, proper victim protection and adequate anti-trafficking responses. On the other hand, law enforcement practices which are perceived negatively have repercussions for the trust and engagement of victims and possible victims of trafficking. In terms of policing, in Romania, it was suggested that there are still instances of corruption that foster a negative perception of the Romanian police and consequently decrease the chances of victims/survivors' engagement. Police attitudes that are non-judgemental, and convey empathy, honesty, and recognition of women's autonomy (for example, in exercising independent choice to enter sex work) might foster trust in law enforcement (see Chapter 6). Moreover, as noted in this research, policing discourses tended to position trafficked women in a passive role with the police assuming the role of 'rescuer'. Challenging such stereotypes and perceptions might allow the recognition of trafficked women's various forms of agentic expression. A shift in attitudes and understandings of trafficking and survivors' experiences might be achieved through education and training among police forces in both countries.

Finally, in both countries, respectful and culturally sensitive treatment for both Romanians and Roma Romanians needs to be promoted. This study found that discriminating attitudes, stigma and racism could affect both groups, especially Roma Romanians. Thus, cultural awareness delivered through training might support a better understanding of the needs and particularities of these groups (e.g., Romanians, Roma Romanians) in both contexts.

Policy and law shape how trafficking and sex work are addressed and understood. The conflation of sex work and sex trafficking in policy debates can reinforce salvation and sex humanitarianism narratives concerning who ideal victims are and what is unacceptable. Thus, discussions around re-trafficking and re-victimisation can omit consideration of the independent choices women might make. As Mai (2010) suggested, women might not necessarily be re-trafficked but might change their positions on sex work. Chapter 6 and 8 of this thesis found that moralistic views were more visible among participants from NGOs whose work was strongly informed by abolitionist, faith-based ideologies. At organisational and individual practitioner levels, awareness of these attitudes could be developed through training and exposure to

challenging research. This could allow flexibility in approaches towards victim care, prevention and inclusion of trafficked women in service development and policymaking.

Policy conceptualisations of trafficking have direct impact on societal attitudes and perspectives (e.g., victim blame, sex work attitudes and anti-trafficking investment) as well as on the service and policing response. In Romania, it was clear that reforms need to take place to support the decriminalisation of sex work. This was particularly evident in respect of the fines sex workers receive which paradoxically keep them in debt bondage to the state, reducing possibilities for following different routes or reintegrating into different workplaces if they decided to leave sex work. Although the current Romanian context in terms of cultural, societal and religious values might not align with calls for decriminalisation, steps towards better understanding of sex workers' context and needs might reduce the risks of abuse and exploitation (by traffickers, clients or authorities) while simultaneously acknowledging their independence and right to self-determination. The practice of 'fines' appeared to be linked with police brutality and punitive attitudes towards sex workers in Romania, and these may include trafficking victims. These attitudes further exacerbate the lack of trust trafficked women have towards authorities and others. Thus, clarifying policy and taking steps towards decriminalising sex work in Romania would allow a wider range of women subjected to sexual exploitation to come forward and possibly support both investigations and policymaking; moreover, it would provide a safer environment for sex workers overall (Amnesty International, 2017; Brooks-Gordon et al., 2021; Smith & Mac, 2018; SexWorkCall Romania, 2019). Yet, although such recommendations are supported both by the wider literature and this research, a step-by-step process towards decriminalisation of sex work in Romania might prioritise reducing or eliminating fines for sex workers and generally increasing safety among sex workers. Moreover, allowing open conversations about sex work and sexuality, gender inequality, and gendered norms and attitudes towards sex workers might also be among the first steps to be considered by authorities and society in this regard.

The police need to approach victim protection of trafficked women seriously: a failure to do so may further damage women's self-image, undermine prosecution as well as decreasing the accessibility of support post-trafficking. Prosecutions were found to be highly relevant for strengthening women's trust in authorities and ensuring a sense of fairness as well as sending a message to their community and to OCGs regarding the consequences of trafficking. In the UK setting, it is essential to acknowledge the need for better services and improved repatriation practices to ensure that women do not return to exploitative situations. Finally, professional participants emphasised the limited inclusion of women in policymaking.

Enhanced inclusion via research and participation in policymaking could significantly assist and empower those survivors who are willing to engage in these processes. Similarly, engagement in the policy sphere could foster trust – a central theme throughout this research, evident at all levels of the eco-system – by allowing trafficked women to become actors in developing anti-trafficking policies and ensuring that their voices and needs are reflected in policymaking.

Theoretical Implications and further research

Even when researched, post-trafficking trajectories still remain 'a missing puzzle piece' (UK-PR-01). While this study highlights important issues and potential best practices, caution should be exercised in extrapolating the experiences of these women to the broader population, as this research may have excluded those who do not engage with authorities, support, and research. In that regard, the study's scope is restricted to women who receive assistance and there is a dearth of information on the extended post-trafficking experiences of victims. As highlighted below, considerable resources and access to relevant networks would be required for further research with larger samples of trafficked women drawn from different areas.

The ecological framework employed in this research supports the understanding of sex trafficking trajectories in their context while acknowledging the wider systems impacting survivors' journeys. Addressing the interconnections and interplay of the ecological system has contributed to understanding areas of tension between those factors that support survivors post-trafficking and those where risks are encountered (see Chapter 7). This research has benefited from bringing an ecological approach to the study of trafficking and that approach is recommended for further research.

Longitudinal and participatory studies on post-trafficking trajectories could benefit both trafficked women and knowledge development. Including a participatory element, whereby trafficked women would assume the researcher role, could provide the trafficked women themselves with new skills, assist recruitment and facilitate their empowerment. Participatory studies undertaken to date in the UK, such as the Modern Slavery Core Outcomes Project (MSCOS) (Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023), undertaken in collaboration with survivor-led organisations, survivors and a wider spectrum of stakeholders, service providers and experts, suggest areas where service delivery or victim care could be improved. The

research (Paphitis & Jannesari, 2023) offers examples of good practice in the area of research with trafficking survivors which could be used to fill in gaps around survivor research in other contexts. Although such research might be restricted by women's willingness to participate in this way, it could assist women in terms of financial benefits and, depending on the topic, potential therapeutic benefits. Longitudinal studies too, are limited in the trafficking field especially with regard to the Romanian context. Yet, existing studies undertaken in different contexts could inform a framework for identifying good practice and gaps in longitudinal studies and survivor experiences (Clay-Warner et al., 2021; Cook et al., 2021; Cordisco Tsai et al., 2020; Miles et al., 2021). As demonstrated by this PhD study, the trafficking journey does not always take a linear route and allowing experiences over longer periods of time to be studied would increase knowledge of different spheres of women's lives post-trafficking. Both supportive and risk factors could be examined across the eco-system. Thus, inspired by this research, future studies could usefully explore in-depth the following topics:

Relationships and roles post-trafficking: Intimate relationships are often central to the trafficking experience and the role played by love before and after trafficking, as well as capacity to engage in committed/romantic relationships post-trafficking merits further study. Family roles, too, especially the role of motherhood, represent relevant areas with the transition to and impact of motherhood positively experienced by trafficked women (especially around children born while trafficked or as a result of trafficking). There would be value in studying family involvement in trafficking or sex work, with a focus on mothers who introduce their daughters to sex work and changes in perceived vulnerability to sex trafficking due to exposure to the experiences of a family member. Such knowledge could assist in developing interventions that approach trafficked women as mothers and address their children.

The role of culture and sub-cultures in trafficking: In this research, professionals perceived that there was a relationship between ethnic minority identity (Roma) and trafficking both regarding trafficked women and traffickers. An in-depth exploration of the relationship between culture and membership of excluded groups and being trafficked or trafficking would allow a better understanding of preventive measures and promote targeted support for trafficking victims and survivors. Further, research on the concept of 'otherness' as applied to trafficked people could explore their own understanding of this as experienced in both the origin and destination countries, and how this contributes to trafficking and post-trafficking experiences.

The community's role in supporting trafficked women: Popular attitudes towards sex workers and sex trafficked women may impact on women's recovery and reintegration. Although communities can play a crucial role in individuals' lives through the support they may provide – such as a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose – they also pose risks for trafficked women upon return. The prejudices and blaming attitudes of communities or civil society regarding trafficking and sex work oppress trafficked women further. Increased understanding of the existing conceptions and attitudes towards trafficking in communities of origin could inform the development of anti-trafficking prevention and intervention strategies tailored to the needs of specific communities which would promote awareness and understanding of women's trafficking trajectories.

Dissemination and early impact

To date, this research has been disseminated at the local level in the UK and more widely at international conferences addressing social work practice, domestic violence and research ethics. These conferences have included: Research Ethics Conference 2021; Challenging Assumptions about Human Trafficking, 2021; 'Against all odds, a social Europe is possible where no one is left behind, and European Social Work Conference, 2023; with these opportunities allowing me to reflect upon audience feedback and ensure the research remains relevant and focused.

The Romanian Embassy in the UK extended an invitation to present at and contribute to a round table in an event organised on the 18th of October - Anti-Slavery Day -focusing on human trafficking between the UK and Romania. The presentation was considered valuable and provided depth and new perspectives on the information shared by police and NGOs in the field. Following this event, I was invited by the Metropolitan Police Romanian Association to support them with training on human trafficking and modern-day slavery, especially in relation to my research and policing recommendations. Finally, I have disseminated key points from my research via a domestic violence course organised by a Romanian organisation in the UK aimed at training Romanian women and volunteers who might undertake work in their communities with vulnerable Romanian women. These early outputs, together with the positive feedback received following the training and other events, indicated the practical value of this project.

Reflections on the research journey and concluding remarks

I received a rejection email in the first month of my PhD, from an NGO invited to take part in the study, which made me ask questions of myself and my supervisory team regarding the purpose of this work. Reflecting on that email a few years later, I understand where the challenge came from, the ethical questions around survivor participation in research, and concerns about resources which could fund services for survivors and instead are allocated to research. Nevertheless, through my own journey and encounters with a range of NGOs and survivors, I recognise the value of this project and its potential in adding to knowledge on trafficking, especially in the context of UK-Romanian settings and relationships. The research contributes to filling the large gap in knowledge around post-trafficking trajectories for Romanian women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

My understanding of the phenomena has changed since the study began, with the literature review, interactions with trafficked women and the anti-trafficking sector expanding my awareness of sex trafficking and the complex nature of individual journeys. I have focused on the construction of the phenomenon of trafficking, what it involves, how it affects those directly impacted by it and how it is discussed and presented. As a result, I have encountered key underlying ideologies and discourses and how they shape the understanding of trafficking. I have also increased my awareness of the permanent fight led by feminist groups and others highly involved in this topic and the hidden political agendas as well as the dominant assumptions about 'the other' (in this case, trafficked women and Romanian migrant women). Equipped with this new understanding, I have aimed to present women's voices and knowledge generated on sex trafficking faithfully. Hopefully, this research adds a layer to the understanding of the reality of the trafficking of Romanian women, with all its complexities. While more remains to be learnt, this study represents a tribute to the strength and courage of survivors who raised their voices and shared their stories as they experienced them.

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WHO: https://www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/populations/sex-workers

Appendices

Appendix 1. Organisations that contributed to the study[35]

No	Organisation	Place	Type of activities
1	ADPARE (Association for the Development of Alternative Practices for Education and Reintegration)	ROM	Victim care (case management), shelter, legal support, accommodation, material support, counselling and psychotherapy, social, medical, educational and professional assistance and repatriation support. Secular NGO. Retrieved from: https://adpare.eu/en/
2	ANITP (National Agency Against Trafficking in Human Beings)	ROM	Part of Ministry of International Affairs. Evaluates and monitors at national level the activity in the anti-trafficking field developed by public institutions and NGOs (assistance to victims, judicial procedures etc). Supports repatriations, helpline, prevention campaigns and the National Strategy against trafficking and its action plan. Retrieved from: https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/english/
3	Basis Yorkshire	UK	Supports indoor and street sex workers and young people who are sexually exploited or adult exploitation. Overall services: sexual health and safe sex practices, health and wellbeing support, legal and rights advice, referrals for social services, advocacy and lobbying for sex workers rights and addressing violence against sex workers, among others). Secular NGO. Retrieved from: https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/
4	DIICOT (Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism, police) Romania	ROM	Law enforcement agency of the Romanian government responsible for investigating and prosecuting organized crime, drug trafficking, cybercrime, financial crimes, and terrorism-related offences. Retrieved from: https://www.diicot.ro/
5	ECLER (European Centre for Legal Education and Research)	ROM	Promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law through research, advocacy and training; anti-trafficking advocacy. Secular.
6	FREE, Romania	ROM	Victim support and services for trafficked women and sex workers: shelter, material, phycological, educational support; outreach and support sex workers, prevention and awareness sex trafficking. Faith-based sex trafficking and sex work abolitionist. Retrieved from: https://asociatiafree.org/free/
7	Friendship Foundation	UK	Prevention and awareness sex trafficking; advocacy. Faith-based sex trafficking and sex work abolitionist.
8	Generatie Tanara (Young Generation)	ROM	Support for vulnerable children and adults to prevent human trafficking and domestic violence. Working with Roma communities, unaccompanied minores, migrants and refugees. Services: shelter human trafficking victims; education,

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[35] Some of the organisations support various types of groups; in these descriptions I focus on services and work that addresses trafficking.

			awareness campaigns, community work in poor areas; support and victim care – referrals to social services. Secular. Retrieved from: https://www.generatietanara.ro/
9	Greater Manchester Police	UK	Police specialist unit focused on human trafficking and modern slavery.
10	Healing Rooms Betania (Christian Centre Betania Association)	ROM	Victim care for sex trafficking victims and sex workers; shelter and services for victims (psychological, health, material, educational and professional support). Prevention and awareness sex trafficking; advocacy; supporting vulnerable communities through various programs. Faith-based sex trafficking and sex work abolitionist.
11	Heaven of Light	UK	Community prevention and awareness sex trafficking; advocacy. Faith-based sex trafficking and sex work abolitionist.
12	Human Trafficking Foundation	UK	Advocacy, lobbying and policymaking regarding trafficking and modern exploitation. Retrieved from: https://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/
13	IJM (International Justice Mission)	ROM	Advocacy, lobbying and policy influence; shelter and services for trafficked individuals including victim care and legal support. Anti-trafficking abolitionist and faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.ijm.org/stories/location/romania
14	IOM (International Organisation of Migration)	ROM	Focus on the Sustainable Development Goals and migration. In Romania, international collaborations, advocacy regarding migration and human trafficking. Former organisation supporting international repatriations of trafficked people, referrals and monitoring victim care. Retrieved from: https://romania.iom.int/
15	Justice and Care	ROM	Victim care support and advocacy; psychological, material, legal support for trafficking victims. Secular. Retrieved from: https://justiceandcare.org/what-we-do/romania/
16	Justice and Care	UK	Victim care support and advocacy; psychological, material, legal support for trafficking victims. Secular. Retrieved from: https://justiceandcare.org/
17	MASH (Manchester Action on Street Health)	UK	Supporting sex workers – health, safety and emotional wellbeing through outreach and drop-in centre. Secular. Retrieved from: https://mash.org.uk/
18	Medaille Trust	UK	Prevention and awareness; protection and victim care (safehouses and after care services) among others. Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.medaille-trust.org.uk/
19	Micu Bogdan	ROM	Victim care trafficked individuals (protection, shelters and after care services), awareness campaigns. Secular. Retrieve from: https://fundatiamicubogdan.ro/
20	NIA, Ending Violence against Women and Girls	UK	Services around sexual violence and abuse, domestic abuse and prostitution (helpline, counselling, advocacy, refugees, independent domestic violence advocacy, outreach, advocacy among others). Secular. Retrieved from: https://niaendingviolence.org.uk/
21	PanLancashire/PLASP; Lancashire Constabulary	UK	Anti-trafficking partnership; training, policy and procedures, faith, victim support and awareness.

22	People to People	ROM	Education, anti-trafficking, community development and humanitarian work. Victim care, housing, services on mental health, medical, legal, material, educational and professional, repatriations, awareness campaigns. Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.people2people.ro/
23	Pro Prietenia (Pro-Friendship)	ROM	Prevention and awareness sex trafficking; advocacy. Faith-based sex trafficking and sex work abolitionist.
24	Reaching Out	ROM	Anti-trafficking (prevention, awareness); victim-care (shelters, psychological, medial, educational, professional, legal support). Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.reachingout.ro/
25	Revive UK	UK	Support for migrants, refugees and trafficked individuals. Referrals, immigration advice, mental health support, drop-in sessions; advocacy. Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.revive-uk.org/
26	Romanian Embassy, UK	UK	Diplomatic mission abroad.
27	SCTP (Service for Tackling Trafficking, Police)	ROM	Police specialist unit focused on human trafficking and modern slavery.
28	SJOG (St. John of God Hospitaller Services)	UK	Support and hospitality for trafficking and modern slavery survivors; health, wellbeing, referrals, shelter. Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://sjog.uk/
29	Policy Consultancy	UK	Consultancy, international capacity building, training on human trafficking and modern slavery. Secular.
30	Stop the Traffik	UK	Prevention and anti-trafficking awareness, advocacy and lobbying trafficking and modern slavery. Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.stopthetraffik.org/
31	The Salvation Army	UK	Specialised support and protection for adults survivors of modern slavery. First responders and referrals to other NGOs. Faith-based. Retrieved from: https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/modern-slavery
32	Translation company	UK	Translation and interpretation services, working with police forces in the North-West England supporting cases of trafficking, exploitation and domestic violence.

Appendix 2. Ethical approval UCLan (University of Central Lancashire)

22 June 2020

Nicky Stanley / Ileana-Maria Turda
School of Social Work, Care and Community
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Nicky / Ileana-Maria

Re: BAHSS Ethics Review Panel Application
Unique Reference Number: BAHSS2 0077

The BAHSS Ethics Review Panel has granted approval of your proposal application 'Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK'. Approval is granted up to the end of project date.*

It is your responsibility to ensure that

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved by, the Ethics Review Panel
- you notify EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to the Ethics Review Panel
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (existing paperwork can be used for this purpose e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available, use the e-Ethics Closure Report pro forma).

Yours sincerely

Richard Davies
Deputy Vice-Chair
BAHSS Ethics Review Panel

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed and necessary approvals gained as a result.

Michael Ojo
Impact Measurement Specialist

Tel: 020 7367 4858
Email: Michael.Ojo@salvationarmy.org.uk

Date: 13 October 2020.

Ileana-Maria Turda
Cc: Professor Nick Stanley
School of Social Work, Care and Community,
University of Central Lancashire.

Dear Ileana-Maria

Title of Project: Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK
Ref Number: RCC-EAN201014

Following your application for ethics approval, it is with great pleasure that I would like to inform you that your application for ethical approval has been granted **unconditional approval** by the Ethics Subgroup of the Research Coordinating Council of The Salvation Army. You may now proceed with your research (See new approval number above).

I would be grateful if you would confirm receipt of this approval notification by return email. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. The Ethics Subgroup wishes you success in your research.

Kind regards

Michael Ojo
Impact Measurement Specialist,
Lead of the Ethics Subgroup of the Research Coordinating Council

Appendix 4.1. Practitioner interview guide / diagram

Interview Guide Diagram - Practitioners: Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK

uclan
University of Central Lancashire

[2]**Practitioner Experience:**
Learnings: practice, policies
Challenges providing support

[2]**Particularities of RO cases:**
Working with RO victims
Collaboration UK – RO prevention;
services; support)

[7]**Meanings & trajectories**
Values and change in perception
Perception on sex work

[1]**Background:**
Age/Gender/Education/Formation
Organization & background
HT experience (time)

[3]**Trajectories RO cases:**
Post-trafficking routes/journeys
Possibilities for survivors

[6]**Resources & Strengths:**
Resilience, agency and strengths

[4]**Services & Care**
Observations – practice and success

[5]**Needs. Risks. Vulnerability:**
Vulnerability variations
Risk of re-trafficking

Thank you for your precious time and willingness to participate!

Appendix 4.2. Practitioner interview guide

Interview Guide for Practitioners - Version Number: 04-09/2020

Background Information and Profession

1. Age range 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59 and so on?
2. Could you tell me briefly about your educational & professional background?
3. How long have you been working for the organisation? – in the role related to HT
   - Prompts: What is your role within the organization? job title/what do you do in providing support? (some of these are not asked/known beforehand).
4. For how long have you been working in the field of HT?
   - Prompts: What were your motivations/interest in working in the field?

Services and Care

5. What are the principles/values which guide your work with victims/survivors? (follow-up question before focusing on the RO cases)

Particularities of Romanian cases of sex trafficking in the UK

6. Could you share a bit about your experience in working with Romanian victims/survivors of sex trafficking

who have been exploited in the UK?

7. Have you noticed specific differences or characteristic of Romanian cases trafficked in the UK in comparison with other nationalities? Can you give examples? (what are your observations?)
8. Characteristics OR the profile of Romanian victims of sex trafficking
9. Can you tell me about any specific aspects/particularities of Romanian cases?
   - Prompts: victims' background/recruitment methods/ exit/ escape? (from your observations)
10. What factors influence whether a woman remains in the UK or returns to Romania?
    - Prompts: How much choice do they have?
    - What are your observations on their decision-making process / motivation and circumstance before they decide?
11. For those who return; how does the process of repatriation and reintegration looks like from their view? And yours observations?
    - Prompts post-trafficking: Interaction between victims and authorities?
    - How do UK authorities see Romanian victims / or Romanians in general?
    - What are the perceptions, or the image Romanian women general? what about other actors (NGOs, practitioners, policy makers, general public)?
12. What are your observations and experience about the collaboration between UK and RO in addressing trafficking?
    - effective? what type of relationships/collaborative working practices would be useful?

Needs, Vulnerabilities and Risks

13. In your view, which term is more appropriate to use victim / survivor? and why?
14. Are all women who experienced sex trafficking equally vulnerable? Can you describe any variations in vulnerability?
15. Do women see themselves as victims? (or to what extent do they see themselves as victims?)
16. From your experience, what are the most common needs and vulnerabilities of victims/survivors once they have been trafficked?
17. What are your observations of these need/ vulnerabilities and their impact over time? – reference to the long-term trajectory
18. What can you tell me about the circumstances of women' lives post-trafficking, while deciding to stay in the UK or return to Romania?
19. In your experience, what are the long-term trajectories and journeys of victims/ survivors? What are the paths and possibilities for them? (both from observations and also your thoughts about it)
20. Do you encounter cases that involve women being re-trafficked?
    21. If so, what risk factors are associated with these cases and how are they managed?
22. How do you see the risk of re-trafficking in general? And what are the factors involved?
23. Once support has been offered, does your organisation maintain contact with the women so their progress can be monitored?
    24. If so, how is this done? / If not, why not? – highlight knowledge on post-trafficking trajectories

Meanings, vision and trajectories

25. From your observations and interactions with victims/survivors, how do they make sense of, or understand

their trafficking experiences?

26. How does their understanding of past events impact on their present and plans or vision for future?
27. From your observations, what can you share about the values women have and how these have been shaped by their experiences?
28. What are your observations when it comes to women's perceptions of sex work before and after trafficking?
    - Prompts: Observations in the possibility of engaging in sex work after trafficking.
29. What about your own perception of sex work?
30. What are your observations on victims' perception about migration before and after trafficking?

Resources, strengths and agency

31. Could you tell me about the resources and strengths women who have been trafficked for sex work possess?
    - Prompts: Observed factors increase their resilience? or vulnerability?
32. Have you witnessed situations/moments that demonstrated their resilience or showed agency?
    33. If so, how was it manifested?
34. Could you share any examples from both trafficking / post-trafficking periods where women describe feeling empowered, independent and strong? Or showing agency?
35. How effective do you think the services offered are in terms of supporting victims/survivors of sex trafficking?
    - Prompts: results over time or progress of their wellbeing? How do women respond to the support offered from you?
    - Prompts: (developed after initial interviews/could be discussed at earlier stanges) How does success look like? What is success for you when you work with a trafficking case? How would you define or describe it?

General experience in working with RO victims/survivors of sex trafficking

36. What have you learnt about practice / polices around trafficking? – and in relation to Romania/or UK?
37. What are the main challenges in providing services to victims of sex trafficking? – and in relation to Romania/or UK?
    - Prompts: What helps in dealing with these challenges? What are the possibilities for improvement?
38. What are your hopes for the future in addressing sex trafficking?

Are there any things you would like to share, suggestions or something I should have asked you? Or any other aspects triggered by the interviewed?

Thank you for your precious time and willingness to participate!

Appendix 5.1. Key informant interview guide /diagram

Interview Guide. Key informants: Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK
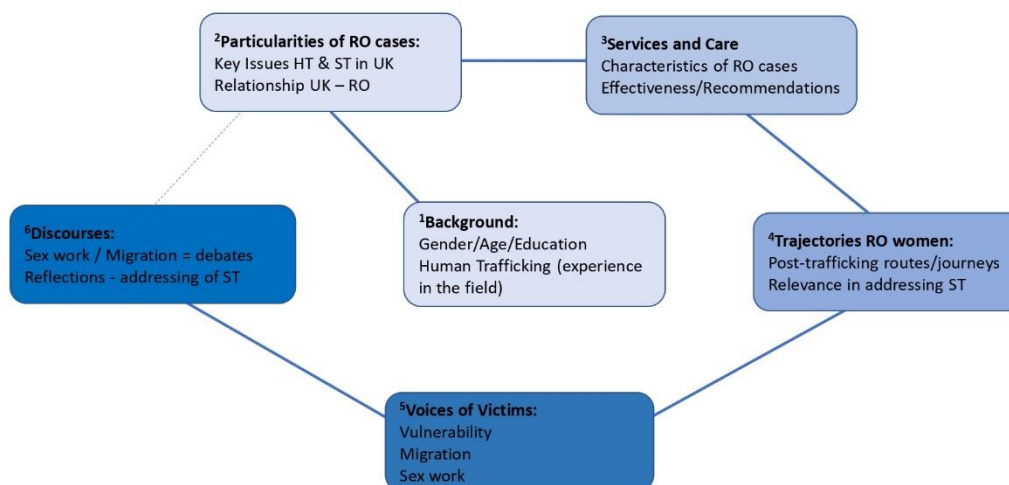
Thank you for your time and participation!

Appendix 5.2. Key informant interview guide

Interview Guide for Key informants (stakeholders, experts: government officials, law enforcement, policymakers, academics, campaigners)

Version: 02-09/2020

A. Background information and experience in working in human trafficking

1. Age range – between 20-29 30-39, 40-49 etc
2. Briefly, could you tell me about your educational and professional background?
3. What is your current job title? / role since when do you work on this role and in the organization?
   - your main responsibilities in this role
4. For how long have you been working now in the field of human trafficking?
5. What were your motivations for and interests in working in the field of human trafficking?

B.UK and Romania relationship – sex trafficking

6. What comes to your mind when you think about the relationship between the UK and Romanian on trafficking? (especially sex trafficking)
   - <u>Prompts:</u> What are the most urgent issues?
   - How are these issues currently addressed by policy and practice?
   - Or how can these be best addressed from your point of view?

7. How would you describe the relationships or collaboration between the UK and Romania in identifying and preventing sex trafficking?
8. Could you tell me about your work experience with sex trafficking and Romanian cases (based on specific role)
9. Are there any differences or specific characteristic of Romanian cases trafficked in the UK in comparison with other nationalities? Can you give examples / elaborate on this?
   - Prompts: Are there any aspects regarding the profile of the victims and traffickers which you could mention?

C. Services and care for victims and particularities of Romanian cases of sex trafficking

10. What can you tell me about the long-term trajectories of Romanian victims/ survivors?
    - What are the post-trafficking possibilities for them? (thinking / knowing)
11. How effective do you think the services offered to Romanian female victims of sex trafficking are in the Romania?
12. What are the main challenges concerning service provision to female Romanian victims of sex trafficking?
13. What would be your recommendations for improving these services?
14. How is the risk of being re-trafficked in general / RO cases?
15. What about the possibility to migrate or engage in sex work post trafficking?
    16. What about support and services?
    17. Factors which contribute to increasing resilience; express agency.
    18. Factors which contribute to revictimization/ increasing vulnerabilities

D. Voices of victims and discourses

19. Who do you think are the most relevant actors in policymaking and why?
20. To what extent are the voices of victims considered and reflected in policymaking?
21. To what extent do you think that survivors of sex trafficking should be understood and treated as vulnerable victims or as migrants capable of making decisions?
    - Prompts: Reference to their vulnerability – to the term victim / survivor (terminology) / What makes you say that?
22. Do debates around sex work influence policy on sex trafficking in your view? If so, how?
    - Prompts: current issues, re: Covid, Brexit
23. What are your hopes for the future in addressing sex trafficking in the UK/RO? (Or general?)

Are there any things you would like to share, suggestions or any other thoughts triggered by these questions?

Thank you for your precious time and willingness to participate!

Appendix 6.1. Survivor interview guide /diagram

Interview Guide. Survivors: Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK

²Post-trafficking experience :
Decision to remain in the UK/RO
Organizations and support accessed
Differences UK / RO support
Supportive factors

⁴Strentghs & Resilience
Values and strengths
Resilience and agency
Hopes and plans for future

¹Introduction:
Age/Education/Formation
Living arrangements
Family and relationship
Community (positive/negative aspects)

²Needs and resources:
Present situation and needs
Resources & support (NGOs, family, community etc)

³Meaning:
Perceptions on migration
Perceptions on sex work
Vision on live post-trafficking

Thank you very much for your time and participation!

Appendix 6.2. Survivor interview guide

Interview guide for adult female Romanian survivors of sex trafficking in the UK - Version: V 3 - 10.2020

Introduction

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?
   - How old are you?
   - Education and work currently
2. Where do you live at the moment? (rural/urban) / Your living arrangements at the moment?
3. What is your relationship status at the moment?
4. Can you describe your family? (Family members/children etc)
5. Can you describe the place in you come from in Romania/your hometown and community?
   - <u>Prompts:</u> What are the positive aspects that come to your mind, in relation to your community/hometown? What about the negative ones?

Post-trafficking Experience

6. Could you tell me about your experiences since you left the situation where you were being trafficked?

- Prompts: How long has it been since?
7. Can you tell me about your life after trafficking? (whatever you feel like sharing)
8. What were the circumstances and reasons for you staying in the UK/ returning to Romania?
    - Prompts: How free did you feel in deciding that? What influenced your decision?
9. Which services/organisations did you access?
    - What was helpful?
    - What could be improved?
    - What else was needed?
    - Where there others involved in the process of support? (e.g., translators/interpreters; different staff etc). How did you find their participation?
10. How did you feel about the support you received?
11. How did you find the interaction with the police in the UK/and in or Romania? (depending on the circumstances)
    - What worked well?
    - What could be improved?
12. How do you see the differences between the UK in Romania in the way trafficking is addressed and survivors supported?
13. Do you know about the NRM (National Referral Mechanism)? What was your experience with it / NRM?
14. What about support from your family/friends/community? Are you able to talk to any of them about your experiences?

Needs and Vulnerabilities

15. Where do you stand now in life? How is your life at the moment?
16. What are your main needs at the moment?
17. How could those needs best be met?
18. How could your current situation be improved?
19. Where do you find help when you need it? (Prompts: workers, friends, neighbours, family)
20. What is helpful when you are feeling unwell?

Meaning

21. What were your expectations when you decided to migrate?
22. Have your thoughts about sex work changed following your experience of being trafficked? If so, how?
23. How did the trafficking experience change your relationships? (with family, partner, friends, community?)
24. What does it mean to you to be a survivor of trafficking?

25. How do you look at life following your experiences of being trafficked? What has changed; or in what way?

Strengths and Resources

26. Can you tell me about your values and the things which matter to you in life?
27. What comes to mind when you think about your strengths and resources?
28. What do you think are your biggest strengths? E.g., what makes you feel strong, independent and empowered?
29. Could you share something about the moments when you feel strong, empowered and independent?
30. Did you have any of these feelings during your trafficking experience?
31. What gives you hope in general and how could it be increased?
32. What are your plans and aspirations for the future?

Are there any things you would like to share, suggestions or any other aspects triggered by the interviewed?

Thank you for your precious time and willingness to participate!

Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK

Participant Number:
Version number & date: 02-07/2020
Research ethics approval number: BAHSS2 0077
Title of the research project: Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK
Name of researcher(s): Prof. Nicky Stanley, PhD Fellow. Ileana-Maria Turda

Please read this consent form and the information sheet about the research study. Place a '**X**' in the boxes to indicate '**YES**' if you agree to the following statements:

	X
I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated ……………… for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that taking part in the study involves taking part in a one-to-one interview, where information will be recorded for the purpose of capturing the information	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and I can withdraw my data up to two weeks after the interview took place without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer questions.	
I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time prior to two weeks after data was collected. I understand that following two weeks after the interview took place, I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.	
I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire.	
I understand that signed consent forms and recordings will be retained in secure and protected servers and locked cupboards at University of Central Lancashire and will be accessed only by the research student until September 2025, when under GDPR regulations personal data will be destroyed.	
I have requested that my support staff will join me during the interview, and I agree with this.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	
For support staff only: I consent with the recording of the meeting. (otherwise, reply with N/A)	

_____ _____ _____
Participant name   Date   Signature

_____ _____ _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

Principal Investigator	**Student Investigator**
Prof. Nicky Stanley, NStanley@uclan.ac.uk	Ileana-Maria Turda, ITurda2@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix 7.2. Consent forms professional participants

Participation Consent Form

> **Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK**

Participant Number:
Version number & date: 02-07/2020
Research ethics approval number: BAHSS2 0077
Title of the research project: Post-trafficking trajectories and experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK
Name of researcher(s): Prof. Nicky Stanley, PhD Fellow. Ileana-Maria Turda

Please read this consent form and the information sheet about the research study. Place a '**X**' in the boxes to indicate '**YES**' if you agree to the following statements:

	X
I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated ……………… for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that taking part in the study involves taking part in a one-to-one interview, where information will be recorded for the purpose of capturing the information	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and I can withdraw my data up to two weeks after the interview took place without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer questions.	
I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time prior to two weeks after data was collected. I understand that following two weeks after the interview took place, I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.	
I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire.	
I understand that signed consent forms and recordings will be retained in secure and protected servers and looked cupboards at University of Central Lancashire and will be accessed only by the research student until September 2025, when under GDPR regulations personal data will be destroyed.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____ _____ _____
Participant name   Date   Signature

_____ _____ _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

<div align="center">

Principal Investigator   **Student Investigator**
Prof. Nicky Stanley, NStanley@uclan.ac.uk   Ileana-Maria Turda, ITurda2@uclan.ac.uk

</div>

Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK

Interview Debrief

Participant Number: **Version Number:** 01-07/2020

Thank you for taking part in this research project. I will use your interview, and other interviews, to help deepen the knowledge on the experiences of Romanian women trafficked and sexually exploited in the UK. We hope that the findings from the research will contribute to increasing the safety and wellbeing of survivors of trafficking.

Right to Withdraw:

If you decide that you do not want your interview to be included in the final report, you have up to two weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw your responses. After this time, your responses will be included in the final report. Under no circumstances, data which could lead to your identification will be utilised in the report.

To withdraw your responses, **please email Ileana-Maria Turda** (iturda2@uclan.ac.uk) and **quote your participant number** that is the number written on the top of this sheet. If you withdraw from the research, **your responses will not be included in the final analysis**. You can do this without needing to explain your reasons.

Contact details:

If you would like more information about the research project, or have further questions, please contact either:

Ileana-Maria Turda (Researcher): ITurda2@uclan.ac.uk

OR

Prof. Nicky Stanley (Principal Investigator): NStanley@uclan.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, you can email the University Office for Ethics at EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk

If you need further support or assistance, please contact one of following organisations:

Organisations and Services in the UK / Helplines	Organisations and Services in Romania /Helplines
National Modern Slavery Helpline - 0800 121 700	**ANITP** – 0800 800 678 (country level) Agenția Națională împotriva traficului de persoane
Stop the Traffik – (+44) 020 7921 4251	**Asociația ADPARE** +40 21 253 2904, București
Salvation Army – (+44) 0300 303 8151 (all UK regions)	**Asociația FREE** +40 767 055520, București
Hope for Justice – (+44) 0300 008 8000 (Manchester)	**Fundația People to People** +40 359 411700, Oradea
City Hearts – (+44) 0151 3292949 (Liverpool)	**Generația tânără Timișoara** +40 256282 320
Justice and Care – (+44) 0203 959 2580 (London)	**Fundația Micu Bogdan** +4- 368 453781, Brașov

Appendix 9.1. Coding framework / NVivo survivors

Codes\\1. Profile survivors

Name	Description
Entry	This refers to how women entered sex trafficking, describing all the elements of recruitment and entry.
Family connection	This related to family involvement in recruitment for trafficking or situations where women were forced by family members to prostitute.
Lover - partner	This relates to situations where women were recruited or forced by partners/lovers/boyfriends to engage in sex work or were sold by them.
Own entry sex work	Situations where women entered independently in sex work and ended up trafficked or exploited.
Work opportunity	This related to women's independent migration for work; recruitment via 'work agency' or work opportunity which turned out to be trafficking.
Family	This refers to the actual family or origin or constituted family of the women and how they described it.
Children	Women's children and their relationship with them; living with them or not and other characteristics about their children.
Institutionalized or in care (foster)	This refers to women who were institutionalised as children (orphanages), foster care or living with extended family and not with their family of origin.
Parents	This refers to women's parents and their relationship; if they are in contact and what type of relationship they have.
Partner	This relates to women's current situation regarding their status (partnership/husband/etc) and characteristics of their relationship.
Sex work	This refers to sex work before trafficking or women's opinions regarding sex work prior trafficking.
Independent	Women who entered in sex work independently.
Previous involvement	Women who were previously sex workers before being trafficked.

Codes\\2. Trafficking experience

Name	Description
Client	This refers to instances when women talked about clients and their roles in trafficking, covering areas of numbers of clients, stories around clients or demand for sex work.
Help	Indicates situations where clients helped women exit trafficking.
Exit	This refers to the methods of exit, individuals involved and the process of exiting trafficking.
Escape	This refers to women exiting on their own, the process and the stories of independent exit.
Police escape	Situations where women were supported or exited due to police interventions.
Personal experiences in trafficking	Stories or episodes which were relevant for the women to share or impacted them during trafficking.
Discrimination	Situations where women felt discriminated while being in trafficking, either due to their role or nationality.

Name	Description
Health impact	The effect of trafficking on their physical health and stories of women being ill; their health needs during trafficking.
Need for pimp	Situations where women in convoluted situations of sex work – trafficking discussed the need of a pimp or male protection due to risks encountered and lack of knowledge of sex work world.
No documents	This refers of situations when women's documents were taken by traffickers.
Over-eating and self-care	Examples of decay, lack of self-care and other examples which showcased the challenges of self-care during trafficking, including nutrition.
Suicide	Extreme situation where women spoke about suicide during trafficking.
Traffickers	This refers to all instances where women talked about their traffickers and traffickers in general, highlighting the characteristics, methods of recruitment etc.
Loverboy	This refers to the recruitment and exploitation by a partner/boyfriend with the intention of trafficking; the relationship, love and implications.
Coercion	This refers to discussion about the coercion, manipulation and other tactics used by traffickers to keep women in trafficking.
Money	Talking about money in trafficking and especially the money traffickers were making by exploiting women.
Violence	This refers to all types of violence that women described induced by traffickers.

Codes\\3. Post-trafficking experiences

Name	Description
Avoiding terminology	This refers to instances when women avoid the terminology of trafficking, sex work, prostitution, trafficker, pimp, rape and sexual violence generally.
Community issues	This refers to instances when women spoke about their community upon return to their country of origin or in the UK and the challenges they had with communities in general due to trafficking.
COVID-19	Situations post-trafficking which were affected by COVID-19 pandemic, repatriations, loss of job etc.
Differences RO-UK support	This refers to how women described the initial support received in the UK and Romania and the differences in terms of approaches, attitudes, services as experienced.
Family	Women spoke about their families upon return to Romania, discussing the issues they encountered, or contrary being supported by family or creating their own new families.
Family doesn't know	This refers to family not knowing about the trafficking experience.
Friends	This refers to women's social connections, friends and close people after trafficking.
Health	This refers to their physical health post-trafficking and how it was affected or what steps they took regarding their health.
Immediately after exit	This describes instances immediately after exiting trafficking, regarding interaction with authorities, support received, emotional and physical wellbeing, needs etc.
Justice process	This refers to the justice process after trafficking.
Location after trafficking	The locations after trafficking and implications.
Decision to return to RO	The decision making to return to Romania and the process of returning.

Name	Description
Didn't want to return to RO	The instances when women did not want to return to Romania but they were coerced by the circumstances.
Return to UK	This refers to situations where women decided to return to the UK after trafficking.
Mental Health	This refers to the mental health and wellbeing post-trafficking.
Anxiety	This refers to women's anxiety post-trafficking regarding their lives and future.
Depression	Depression and episodes of depression post-trafficking.
Fear	The fear women experience post-trafficking in relation to many aspects of their life, traffickers, revenge, men, etc.
PTSD	This refers to episodes of PTSD where explicitly discussed.
Suicide	This refers to women speaking about suicide post-trafficking.
NRM	Women's knowledge and experience with NRM post-trafficking.
Police	This refers to interactions with police post-trafficking, during investigations.
Police RO	Women talking about their experiences with Romanian police, issues and good practices.
Police UK	This refers to interactions with police in the UK post-trafficking.
Pregnancy in OR from trafficking	Women talked about being pregnant during trafficking or as a result of trafficking and all the implications.
Repatriation	This refers to the process of repatriation as experienced by women.
Formal	Instances of formal repatriations and experiences.
Immediate repatriation	Women who were repatriated within days after trafficking on their own wish.
Return on their own	This refers to women who returned to Romania on their own, without being in touch with authorities.
Supporting factors	This describes the supporting factors after trafficking related to external factors.
Family and Children	Family and children described as supporting factors.
Friends	This refers to the support from friends, emotional, financial etc.
NGOs	The support got through NGOs in different areas (e.g., housing, material, psychological, employment).
Professionals	This refers specifically at individuals in NGOs, police who have been extremely important for the women post-trafficking in terms of support.
Work and employment	This relates to work after trafficking, the steps towards employment and financial independence, and aspirations for work.
Unemployment	Situations where women were unemployed post-trafficking and the implications of it.

Codes\\4. Needs and Vulnerability

Name	Description
Abuse	This refers to the abuse endured in trafficking and the impact on their current wellbeing post-trafficking.
Current needs	This refers to women talks about their current needs at the moment of the interview.
Children	Needs related to their children or desire/wish to have children.

Name	Description
Housing	Need for housing.
Meaningful activities	Need for meaningful activities apart from just working.
Recovery	Need for continuous mental health recovery.
To have a family	Need to have a family – constructed family.
Work	Need for work and financial independence.
Mental Health	Needs related to their mental health and support for recovery.
Social Support	This refers to the need for social support, community and friends – belonging, peer support.
Vulnerability	This refers to ongoing vulnerabilities post-trafficking as discussed by the women.
Prostitution	Prostitution was discussed as a vulnerability due to lack of work, which could bring forth possible exploitation.
Suicide	This refers to extreme mental health when women spoke about their suicide thoughts and situations which might trigger that.
Unemployment	The challenges of being unemployed which increase women's vulnerabilities and affect wellbeing and mental health.

Codes\\5. Strength and Resilience

Name	Description
Agency	This refers to situations where women spoke about agency in terms of their experiences, decision making, determination and independence or free choices.
after trafficking	Situations where women were able to experience agency after trafficking.
in trafficking	Situations where women experienced agency in trafficking, or in exiting trafficking.
Gratefulness	The attitude of gratefulness was considered a strength.
Hope	This refers to the hope women had and how it impacted on their strength.
No addictions	The fact that women were not addicted to substances was presented as a strength.
Resources	This refers to external resources which support women post-trafficking.
Children	Children seen as something worth fighting for, increasing motivation for recovery and bring meaning post-trafficking. Referred to as 'my strength'.
Faith / God	This refers to the role of faith, God or religion in women's lives and considered a resources.
Family and partner	Family and partners as increasing women's strength, support, love, belonging and care.
Friends	This refers to friends who are close to women and supported them post-trafficking.
Humour	This refers to the role played by humour in women's lives and how it helps them deal with current challenges.
NGOs	The support received from NGOs considered as a great resource.
Social Services	Support received from social services as a resource.
Success - strength	Achieving success represents a strength and increases women's self confidence and wellbeing (e.g., education, work, family).
Justice process	Winning the process against traffickers considered a success, liberation, success and strength.

Name	Description
Values and Strengths	The way in which women described their values and strengths.
Character	This refers to women's character considered a strength, regarding their way of acting, mental strength.
Courage	This refers to courage and how women discuss their courage as both a strength and value.
Determination	The role of determination in recovery post-trafficking; having gone through the experience and becoming stronger.
Family and children	Family and children regarded as values and symbols of strength.
Health	Being in good health described as a strength and something that women value.
Self-care	The ability to be aware of own persona and be responsible for their self-care, doing steps in ensuring self-care.
Self-reliant	The fact that women saw themselves as self-reliant was considered a strength and value; as in not relying on others, being victimised or seen as needy.
Wise	Gaining wisdom and being able to use lessons from the past in their current life, in relation to trust and decision-making.

Codes\\6. Meaning of the experience

Name	Description
Advising other women	This refers to the desire to support other women post-trafficking and ensure that they are able to provide advice to women who might be going through something similar.
Perception on migration	How migration perspectives changed after trafficking and how they feel about migration.
More caution	This refers to women being more cautious when migrating, although they might still do it.
Wants to migrate	This refers to the desire to migrate.
Perception on sex work	This refers to women's views on sex work generally, the idea for more awareness regarding sex work reality, women's needs in sex work.
Legalise	Women who spoke about legalisation and benefits for the women.
Plans and aspirations	This refers to women's plans post-trafficking, things they want to achieve and hopes for future.
Children	This refers to women wanting to have children or wishing their children would be growing up as 'good adults'.
Family	The desire to have a family and plans around it.
Own home	The plan to have own home.
Work	The needs for good work and aspirations related to financial stability.
Vision of life post-trafficking	This refers to how women saw life post-trafficking and what were the major changes regarding their vision about life.
Content before	The realisation that life was good before and woman was content.
Irreversible harm	The experience caused irreversible harm and women saw it as something that would stay with them forever.
Maturity and wisdom	Things women realised after trafficking and considered important in terms of how they see life.

Name	Description
Relationship impact	This refers to instances when women discussed the issues with relationships and trust and how it brings new insight into looking at people around them.

Appendix 9.2. Coding framework examples / NVivo professional participants

This includes examples of coding not the complete coding framework for professional participants, as I followed the process of identifying various main themes and sub-themes.

Codes\\3. RO trafficked women profile

Name	Description
Entry trafficking	This refers to the type of recruitment or circumstances which led to trafficking.
1. Micro - Individual - Personal	Individual factors which led to trafficking.
Aspiration for a better life	Need for improving their status and have a good or better life in terms of resources and access to 'things', work. Achieved through migration.
Emotional needs	This refers to instances when women's emotional needs were perceived as leading to trafficking; emotional connection to trafficker, emotional instability.
Independent entry	This refers to women who independently enter sex work and end up trafficked; or independent migration which leads to trafficking – not being coerced initially.
Poverty	Poverty as in lack of financial means, employment possibilities and financial independence.
Previous sex work involvement	This refers to women who were initially sex workers in Romania and ended up trafficked.
2. Meso - Networks and Others	This refers to the meso level of the women and other who influenced trafficking.
Criminal Networks	The criminal networks who are engaged in trafficking and responsible for recruitment and exploitation.
Family involvement	Situations when family is involved in the recruitment or exploitation.
Partner and Loverboy	When the person is lured, groomed and lastly coerced by a supposed boyfriend. He can take part in the whole process of trafficking or exploitation or just the recruitment period.
3. Macro - System	This refers to macro factors which influence risks for trafficking.
Lack of opportunities	Lack of investments in the area, no work or other opportunities – linked with government issues and lack of development/poverty of regions in Romania.
Exit - trafficking	This refers to how women exited trafficking.
Escape individual	Situations where women exited alone, escaped the trafficking situation by running off or similar situations of independent exit.
Police interventions	Also refers to examples of being 'saved' or 'rescued by police', or police raids.
Image of RO and RO women in the UK	This refers to how Romanian women are regarded in the UK; refers to stereotypes and public perception (e.g., exotic, exocentric; beautiful women; unique).
Particularities of RO cases	Specific characteristics or particularities of Romanian cases trafficked in the UK in comparison with women of other nationality.
EU nationals	Belonging to EU; the advantages of and disadvantages in relation to women's possibilities to access support and be repatriated.
Want to return to RO	The majority want to return to Romania post-trafficking, as opposed to women of other nationalities.

Name	Description
Profile of RO trafficked women	Characteristics and the profile of Romanian women, general features noticed by participants.
Abuse experiences family	Previous abuse (any type of abuse) experienced in the family, disorganized families or families at risk.
Age - young	Younger victims in comparison with other women (different nationalities).
Agency	Romanian women come in the UK with a degree of agency in the initial stage of migration as opposed to others.
Disability	Cases of Romanian trafficked women who had disabilities (cognitive/mental) or low intellectual ability and were considered easier to exploit.
Ethnicity Roma	This refers to the Romanian women belonging to the Roma ethnic group.
Former institutionalized children	Women who were formerly institutionalised or came from orphanages – spent time of their lives in child protection care in Romania.
Low education and literacy	This refers to the low level of education and literacy of the women.
Rural	This refers to the residence or location of origin of the women – as rural – with its implications.
Socio-economic background	This refers to the lower socio-economic status of the women; linked to poverty and lack of development.

Codes\\7.1. Women's Needs, Vulnerabilities Post-trafficking

Name	Description
Control mechanisms impact	The negative impact of the control and implications on women's mental health and wellbeing post-trafficking.
Factors which increase vulnerability or re-victimisation	This refers to factors which contribute to possible re-victimisation or risk factors.
Addictions	Addiction to substances makes women more vulnerable to re-victimisation.
Community as a risk	This refers to the community of origin as representing a risk for re-victimisation; thus women returning to their communities are at risk.
Contact with traffickers	Women being in touch with traffickers, especially if they were emotionally connected/or in a relationship, poses risks to re-victimisation.
Family as risk	This represents cases where women were trafficked by family or where family was a risk to their trafficking and thus returning or being in touch with the family increases the risks of re-victimisation.
Financial responsibilities	This refers to the financial responsibilities women have towards their families or children at home. Women as main or only breadwinners; where family relies on them.
Homelessness	Situations where women remain without hosing increases the risk to re-victimisation.
Lack of social support	The lack of social support and positive connections with others considered a risk for possible re-victimisation.
Multiple vulnerabilities	Situation when women have multiple vulnerabilities which are not addressed increases the risk of re-victimisation.
Not accessing support	If women don't access support from authorities, NGOs etc, is considered a factor that increases risks to re-victimisation.
Variations in vulnerability	This refers to factors which impact vulnerability and its degree.

Name	Description
Age	Age or young age is considered to pose greater vulnerabilities; for example women over 30 were considered less vulnerable compared to those under 25 years old.
Education	The lack of education or level of education impacts the level of vulnerability.
Not accessing services	This refers to reducing vulnerability through services, thus those who access any type of support decrease their vulnerabilities as opposed to those who do not access services.
Period of trafficking	The period in trafficking, as in long or short (long duration in terms of time/months/years) increases vulnerabilities; the less time spent in trafficking the best for recovery.
Vulnerabilities and Needs Post-trafficking	This refers to the most important needs and vulnerabilities in initial stages post-trafficking.
Addictions	This refers to women who became addicted to substances during trafficking and the need to address their addictions.
Community	This refers to women who want and need community as part of their recovery.
Family re-connection	The need to re-connect with their families, especially their children.
Financial Independence	This refers to the need for financial independence.
Health	Health needs post-trafficking in terms of physical health.
Housing	This refers to the need for housing especially if women cannot return to their family or initial situation pre-trafficking.
Insecurity and fear	This adds to the mental health challenges post-trafficking and especially the fear for their security due to traffickers influences; need for protection and security.
Love and connection	The need for love and connection, partnership and belonging.
Low literacy and language	Challenges of not speaking English and not having education, especially for those who want to remain in the UK.
Mental health long-term	This refers to the mental health needs of women post-trafficking and the need for adequate support and mental health services.
Trauma and PTSD	This refers to PTSD, its effects and the implications of these for the women.
Pregnancies	Pregnancies due to trafficking and the implications of it.
Self-esteem	The issues around low self-esteem and the need to address this for good outcomes and recovery post-trafficking.
Sexual health issues	This refers to the sexual health post-trafficking and the illness or injuries which affect women's reproductive system; cases of infertility or other STIs (sexually transmitted infections).
Tattoo	This refers to women who have been 'branded' with tattoos by their traffickers and the need to remove these, or re-shape them, re-create a new story around the tattoos/change the narrative.
Women's perception of victimhood	This refers to how women perceive their own victimhood and their acknowledgement of being victims of trafficking.
Don't know the term	This refers to cases which do not understand the term of victim of trafficking.
Don't recognise themselves as victims	This refers to those women who do not recognise themselves as victims of this crime due to several reasons.
Recognise as victims	This refers to women who recognise themselves as victims of a crime.

Codes\\7.2. Women's Agency, Strengths, and Resilience

Name	Description
Agency	This refers to women's perceived agency.
Drugs	How drugs can give the impression of agency – under the influence of drugs; how it affects agency. Referred to also as 'false agency'.
Examples after trafficking	This refers to specific examples which showcase women's agency after trafficking.
Examples in trafficking	This refers to specific examples which showcase women's agency in trafficking; through self-protection and collaboration with traffickers; planning and making their way out.
No agency	This refers to participants not acknowledging signs of agency in women's journey and give examples of such instances.
Signs of agency	This refers to signs of agency along their journey in and after trafficking, through the choices they make and how they act upon them.
Children	This refers to children considered as a resource for women in their recovery.
Factors which increase resilience, resources and strengths	This refers to factors which increase women's resilience; a variety of resources and strengths.
Accessing Services	Services and support were seen as increasing women's resilience and recovery post-trafficking.
Acknowledge their strength	When professionals acknowledge women's strength was considered a factor which supports women in re-evaluating their own strengths and contributing to resilience.
Adverse situations	This refers to previous adverse situations which make women stronger and thus stimulate resilience.
Affection and love	Receive love and affections (family, partners) increase resilience.
Children and Family	Children and family, especially if they have good relationships, represents a resource and supports women; increases resilience.
Courage	Recognising women's courage and decision-making in migration and steps in their journeys.
Develop skills and education	This refers to women receiving education or skills which would increase their changes of getting good work and thus, supports recovery process.
Hope	The hope perceived as a strength, motivating women and supporting them in their journey.
No addictions	The fact that women do not have addictions is considered a strength.
Determination and hardworking	The determination supports resilience and women's possibility to recover.
God, faith	This refers to God, faith and religion and how these positively impact women's journey and increases their resilience.
Independent	As trying to make it on their own, not accepting support etc.
No strength	This refers to lack of strength, inner strength.
Sense of community	Sense of community increasing resilience, when communities are supportive and refers to different types of communities women are part to.
Social support	This refers to access to social support that women have and the positive impact of that on their recovery; increasing resilience.
Strength	This refers to inner strength; positive outcome and supportive factor for recovery.
Survival	This refers to women's fight for survival, highlighting strength and determination.

Codes\\7.3. Women's Trajectories and Possibilities Post-trafficking

Name	Description
Decision-making process	This refers to women's decision making-process regarding the location post-trafficking.
Being influenced by other parties	When women are influences by NGOs, authorities or others in regard to their decision; was not considered an independent decision.
Personal decision	Women independently deciding where they want to be post-trafficking, expressing agency.
Post-trafficking trajectories	This refers to the post-trafficking trajectories as observed by professionals.
Becoming trafficker/exploiter	This refers to instances when women become part of the trafficking group; recruits or exploits other women.
Continue on their own with no support	This refers to the cases who do not engage with authorities or support; women continue on their own with no support from others.
Gap in knowledge	This refers to the gaps in knowledge regarding the post-trafficking trajectories due to women's lack of engagement with authorities, support being terminated, need for privacy, independence etc.
Migrate	Women migrating after exiting trafficking, thus not much knowledge about their trajectories.
Negative experiences	This refers to the negative experiences post-trafficking, living in fear, difficulties with reintegration and moving on etc.
Positive experiences	This refers to positive experiences, whereby women are able to recover and continue their lives on a 'positive' way.
Secrecy of the experience	The experience remains a secret and never comes up; Cover up stories for the experience and it's later shared with the community and others.
Vicious Cycle and Circle	This refers to the situations of revictimisation whereby women would be trapped in the 'vicious cycle or circle' and shortly after exiting would be again at risk of exploitation or encounter themselves in similar exploitative circumstances.
Remain in the UK	Cases which remain in the UK post-trafficking.
Better support	Better support offered in the UK and access to services.
Fear to return	This refers to fear to return to Romania and being forced to remain in the UK although that would have not been their choice.
Financially better	This refers to women who decide to remain in the UK due to financial opportunities and continue their migratory journey.
Repatriation	This refers to the repatriation process between the two countries.
Informal reparations	This refers to cases which are not going through the formal route of repatriation, officials in Romania not being aware of these cases.
Need for a common understanding	This refers to methods through which could reduce misunderstandings and inconsistences in the processes of support during repatriations.
Negative experience	Talking about negative experiences both professionals and women had with repatriations due to lack of shared information or other reasons.
No support for leaving	Related to women not receiving support during repatriation, in terms of materials goods, information etc.
No updates for NGOs in home country	This refers to challenges of repatriations when professionals did not receive information about cases that were supposed to be repatriated.
Positive experiences	Positive experiences of repatriations as experienced by professionals and women.

Name	Description
The need for collaboration	This refers to the need for collaboration in ensuring repatriations occur under the best circumstances and women are not at risk.
Re-trafficking	This refers to situations when women are re-trafficked or re-victimised.
Connection with traffickers	Based on the continuous connection with the trafficker; relationship with them.
Discovered as being re-trafficked	This refers to cases of trafficking that are discovered to be re-trafficked already in the initial police investigation.
Not common	This refers to those participants who considered that re-trafficking is not very common, with only a few cases possibly being re-trafficked.
Very common	This refers to cases of those participants who suggest that re-trafficking is very common and a very likely trajectory.
Return to RO	This refers to women returning to Romania post-trafficking due to different reasons and motivations.
Go back to their lives	Women who want to return to their previous lives.
Return to family	Women who want to return due to their families or children.
Running from the exploitative situation	Women decide to return to Romania in the attempt to 'run from the exploitative situation' and find safety at home.
Sex work and Prostitution	This refers to women who continue doing sex work after trafficking independently.
Don't engage	Women do not engage in sex work post-trafficking.
Normalise Sex Work	Women engage and normalise sex work; get used to the lifestyle, the gains of it.

Codes\\8. Participant as informant

Name	Description
Connection to Romania	Any type of previous connection, being in Romania previously, working or visiting. More specific of having been in Romania not necessarily working with Romanians. It was always observed as an important thing in terms of deeper knowledge of the context and the implications brought by this: triggering motivation, increasing empathy etc.
Connection to UK	Participants in RO who worked closely with UK or have been working partially in the UK (joint case investigations, embassy, NGO visits).
Impact of the interview	How the interview impacted the participant; feedback and other observations regarding the importance of the research.
Motivations	Why they were first interested in working/activating in this area, their motivations and interest.
Awareness of HT	Being aware of trafficking as first instance of wanting to get involved; awareness of the phenomenon as a trigger for their interest in the field.
Developed through work, education and skill	Motivation and interest developed and grew either thorough education and work in the area and it increased as they learned more about the phenomenon.
Faith and Spiritual	Faith and spiritual dimension triggers motivation for working in this area (Christian values/background).
Meeting survivors	Personal encounters with survivors.
Passion	Motivation developed through passion for something (related or not to trafficking).

Name	Description
Personal experience	Different experiences with the phenomenon which brought interest and motivation (awareness, education, proximity to others who worked in the field).
Support the vulnerable	Personal need (supporting others, fulfilment, changing mentalities etc)
Sex work perception respondent	Participant's views on sex work (general).
Decriminalise	This refers to full decriminalisation of sex work (selling and buying sex work).
Exploitative	Suggests that all types of sex work are exploitative in nature, driven by inequality and lack of opportunities.
Independent	Recognises women's independent entry into sex work as a possibility. Non-judgemental attitude towards people practicing sex work.
Legalise	This refers to participants who advocate for sex work legalisation.
Narrative 'young girl will not aspire to be a sex worker'	This refers to the recurring story used in the anti-trafficking activism to highlight that sex work is 'unnatural' phenomenon to human nature.
Nordic model	This refers to the discussion of the Nordic/Swedish model as an example which is agreeable to participants.

Appendix 10.1. Example of thematic framework survivors

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Background and vulnerability before trafficking	Context and multiple vulnerabilities
2. Trafficking episode and experience	Violence, manipulation and love
	The impact of exploitation
	Exiting
	Agency
3. Post-trafficking: vulnerabilities, needs and resources	Challenges of reintegration/post-trafficking
	Inner strength and agency
	External resources
4. Meaning of the experience	Impact, meaning and vision

Key themes from survivors' interviews

❖ Desires to better one's life through migration, in light of vulnerability, poorly informed decisions and traffickers

❖ Violence and manipulation experienced in trafficking and exploitative 'love relationships'

❖ Negative impact of exploitation and exiting the trafficking situation

❖ Post-trafficking trajectories faced with challenges of reintegration. Finding 'peace' and safety

❖ Inner strengths and supportive others. 'What keeps me going'

❖ Meaning of the experience. Realising 'what changed' and 'what matters'

Appendix 10.2 Example of thematic framework professional participants

Meta Themes	Themes	Sub-Themes
The pre-trafficking context	Multiple vulnerabilities	Individual risks and vulnerabilities
		Contextual vulnerabilities
	Culture and sub-cultures	'The other'
		Culture of migration
		Roma ethnicity
	Journey to exploitation	Traffickers. Individuals and OCGs
		Loverboy recruitment
		Entry. Vulnerability and agency
	Trafficking context	Sex trafficking and sex work
		Trafficking cases and exploitation
The post-trafficking context	Exiting trafficking	Rescued, saved or escaped
		First contact with authorities. Mistrust
	Short- and long-term impact	Needs and vulnerabilities
		Mental health
		Perceptions of life after trafficking
	Agency, strengths and resilience	Inner strength
		Children and family
		External resources. Services and Justice
The external systems – Macro level	Attitudes - sex work and trafficking	Demand and clients
		Lack of trafficking awareness in society
	Romania context	Multiple systemic issues
		Prostitution in Romania – fines
		Țăndărei case
		Good practices in Romania
	The UK context	Good practices in UK
		Issues in the UK, approach, services
		Migration and Brexit
	External factors	Collaboration Romania – UK
		Trafficked women's involvement in policymaking
		COVID-19 impact
The long-term post-trafficking trajectory	Lack of knowledge post-trafficking	
	Post-trafficking trajectories	Vicious circle: re-trafficking, becoming trafficker
		Normalising sex work
		Reintegration and normality

Key themes and sub-themes from professionals' interviews

Particularities of Romanian cases: Key themes from professionals' interviews

❖ Multiple individual and contextual vulnerabilities

❖ A culture of migration: From Romania to the West

❖ Roma ethnicity. Vulnerability and additional risks to trafficking

❖ The traffickers: organised crime groups (OCGs) and 'loverboys'

❖ External (UK) and internal (Romania) expressions and perceptions of 'otherness'

Vulnerability, Resources and Agency: Key themes and sub-themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ Exiting as the first step of the post-trafficking trajectory. Factors supporting exit
    - ❖ Trust and mistrust post-trafficking: implications for engagement and accessing support
- ❖ The aftermath of trafficking: negative short-and long-term impact on women
    - ❖ Needs and vulnerabilities post-trafficking: Safety, mental health and financial security
    - ❖ Perceptions of life after trafficking: Changes in meanings and attitudes
- ❖ Beyond victimhood and vulnerability: Agency, Strengths and Resilience
    - ❖ Inner strength, agency and faith as resources
    - ❖ External resources and support: Children, family, services and justice

The external systems shaping post-trafficking: Key themes & sub-themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ The Romanian context impacting post-trafficking: multiple systemic issues
    - ❖ The consequences of corruption, lack of political will and accountability
    - ❖ 'No turning back from prostitution' (regardless of trafficking)
- ❖ The UK context impacting post-trafficking: positive practice or a hostile environment
    - ❖ The UK perspective: 'Good practices' and approaches for tackling trafficking
    - ❖ Challenges with the NRM and the lack of support for survivors
    - ❖ Brexit impact on migration and post-trafficking
- ❖ Other external factors impacting the post-trafficking trajectory
    - ❖ Services and collaboration: Joint investigations versus repatriations
    - ❖ The trafficking narrative and the 'thin line between trafficking and sex work'
    - ❖ Shaping the future: Policy formation and the lack of survivor involvement
    - ❖ Covid-19 impact on trafficking and post-trafficking trajectories

Post-trafficking trajectories: Key themes & sub-themes from professionals' interviews

- ❖ 'The one missing puzzle piece'. Decision-making process and lack of knowledge on post-trafficking trajectories
- ❖ Trajectories in the UK: Re-starting life in the destination country
- ❖ Trajectories in Romania: Returning home and unwelcoming communities

❖ Post-trafficking trajectories: 'The vicious circle' versus 'success stories'

   ❖ Vicious circle: In-and-out of exploitation, re-trafficking and becoming trafficker

   ❖ Normalising sex work: Risks and gains

   ❖ Positive trajectories: Reintegration and 'normality'

Appendix 11. 'Manele' songs (original and translation)

Adi Mocanu – Escorta	Adi Mocanu – The escort
Stau ma uit pe internet si vad anuntul tau	I'm looking on the internet and I see your ad
Si ma minti ca esti cuminte, doamna de birou	And you lie to me that you are good, office lady
Le spui la parinti acasa ca lucrezi ospatarita	You tell your parents at home that you work as a waitress
Dar de fapt esti o pornista, una de-aia masochista.	But in fact you are a porn star, a masochist.
Pozezi in fata cuminte, iubire	You pose as the good girl, my love
Dar esti escorta sub acoperire	But you are an undercover escort
Ziua cuminte si nu iesi din casa	During the day well behaved and don't leave the house
Noaptea esti moarta de beata sub masa.	At night you are dead drunk under the table.
Le spui la parintii tai sa nu te deranjeze	You tell your parents not to disturb you
Ca nu vrei ca seful tau sa te concedieze	That you don't want your boss to fire you
Dar de fapt serviciul tau e interzis minorilor	But in fact your service is prohibited for minors
Dupa ora doispe noaptea, oferi servicii domnilor.	After two o'clock at night, offering services to gentlemen.
Meseria ce o practici nu-i din obligatii	The job you practice is not out of obligation
A inceput sa iti placa tot mai mult barbatii	You started to like men more and more
Esti ca Maria Tereza, a devenit o placere	You are like Maria Teresa, it has become a pleasure
Nu te mai saturi deloc, corpul tau tot mai mult cere.	You don't get full anymore, your body demands more and more.
Nu te mai feri de mine, ca nu are rost	Don't run away from me anymore, it's pointless
Stie toate lumea, faci servicii contra cost	Everyone knows, you provide services for a fee
Nu lucrezi ospatarita, cum ai spus la inceput	You don't work as a waitress, as you said at the beginning
Scrie clar pe internet ca esti escorta de lux.	Write clearly on the Internet that you are a luxury escort.
Retrieved from : https://www.versuri.ro/versuri/dani-mocanu-escorta/	

Adi Mocanu – Proxenet	Adi Mocanu – Pimp
Cu siguranţă n-aţi uitat, dragii mei,	Surely you have not forgotten, my dears,
Că eu, Dani Mocanu, am fost acuzat pentru spălare de bani, trafic de persoane, proxenetism, constituirea unui grup infracţional, etc, etc, etc.. În fine. Am melodia asta de la mine pentru toţi interlopii care au ştiut să ţină steagul sus până la capăt.	That I, Dani Mocanu, was accused of money laundering, human trafficking, pimping, forming a criminal group, etc., etc., etc.. Finally. I have this song from me for all the underworlders who knew how to keep the flag up until the end.
În urmă cu un an, m-aţi închis pe nedrept,	A year ago, you imprisoned me unjustly,
Şi am fost acuzat că sunt proxenet.	And I was accused of being a pimp.
Şi m-au dat în primire prietenii cei mai buni,	And my best friends gave me up,
Dar am venit acasă doar după două luni.	But I came home only after two months.
Eu nu sunt proxenet	I'm not a pimp
M-aţi închis pe nedrept,	You have imprisoned me unjustly,
De eram vinovat	I was guilty
Îmi luam mare mandat.	I am taking a big mandate.
Când m-am întors acasă,	When i got back home
Toţi îmi râdeau pervers,	Everyone was laughing at me perversely,
Şi m-au întrebat toţi cât am plătit să ies.	And they all asked me how much I paid to go out.
Am ieşit pe dreptate, şpagă nu am dat	I came out with justice, I didn't give a bribe
Am plătit doar 40 000 la avocat.	I only paid 40,000 to the lawyer.

Adi Mocanu – Curwa (Curva)	Adi Mocanu – The whore
O curwa daca-ti iei, s-o tii in locul ei	A whore if you take, keep her in her place
Sa n-o lasi sa gandeasca, sa-i pui stop la idei	Don't let her think, stop her ideas
Sa nu ii dai valoare decat ca la un caine	Don't give her too much value, just as to a dog
N-o duce la restaurant, tine-o in cas' pe paine.	Don't take her to the restaurant, keep her in the house with bread
Ca o masina de pe net, asa te-am cumparat	Like a car from the internet, that's how I bought you
Erai lovita peste tot si eu te-am reparat	You were hit (beaten) everywhere and I repaired you
Am schimbat tot la tine sa te pot scoate pe strada	I changed everything on you so I can take you on the street
Ti-am pus jante si te-am tunat ca sa te fac de prada	I put wheels and tunned you to make you able to 'parade'
Dupa ce ti-am dat kilometrajul inapoi	After you dropped up your mileage
Imi spui ca e mai bine acuma sa renunti la noi	You tell me it's better to give up on us
Imi spui ca strainii se poarta cu tine mai frumos	You tell me that strangers are treating you nicer
Si vrei sa lasi in urma ta trecutul tau jegos	And you want to leave behind your dirty past
Ce repede te-ai smecherit cand ai vazut valuta	You quickly became cooler when you saw the currency
Ai inceput usor sa-mi spui ca te simti folosita	You slowly told me that you felt used
Ai inceput sa ridici tonul, sa-mi faci numai cearta	You started to raise the tone, to make troubles
Ma mir de tot c-ai fost o terminata	I'm surprised that you've been over
Adresa ta din buletin e de la fundul hartii	Your address from the ID is from the bottom of the map
Te-am luat si te-am pus la masa cu toti mafiotii	I took you to the table with all the mobsters (mafia)
Te-am prezentat, nevasta mea, si toti ti-au dat valoare	I introduced you, my wife, and everyone appreciated you
Acum vrei sa renunti la tot ca simti ca esti prea mare	Now you want to give up everything, you feel you are too big
De maine, inapoi la tara cu vacile	From tomorrow, back to the village with the cows
Retrieved from: https://www.versuri.online/dani-mocanu-curwa-versuri-manele.html	

Appendix 12. Anti-trafficking campaigns Romania and Loverboy

Translation: *Love shouldn't transform you into a slave! How far would you go for your boyfriend/lover?*

Retrieved from:
https://www.pressalert.ro/2016/08/tineri-dintr-un-centru-de-plasament-din-timis-informati-despre-cum-sa-nu-cada-prada-traficului-de-persoane-cum-functioneza-metoda-lover-boy-cazul-victimelor-exploatate-sexual/print-5/

Translation: *Because successful people are not always what they seem. The National Agency Against Trafficking in Human Beings informs you about the recruitment method 'loverboy'*

Retrieved from: https://www.abnews.ro/metoda-loverboy-atentionare-a-agentiei-nationale-impotriva-traficului-de-persoane/

Translation: *Loverboy. The most known method of recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings.*

Do you want to fulfill your dreams?

DO NOT trust in the promises of a 'loverboy'!

Retrieved from ANITP Facebook page:
https://m.facebook.com/ANITPROMANIA/photos/a.10151289262218410/10159100081943410/?type=3&_rdr

Translation: *'Loverboy' is the method through which girls are lured into exploitation by a 'perfect' lover.*

Retrieved from ANITP Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=555017206664717&set=pb.100064693268061.-2207520000.&type=3

Appendix 13.1. Information Sheet Survivors

Information Sheet Participants - Survivors

Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK

Information Sheet

Participant Number: _____   **Version Number:** 01-07/2020

You are being invited to participate in a research study which is part of a PhD at the University of Central Lancashire, UK, with the title *Post-Trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK*. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask for more information or for clarification at iturda2@uclan.ac.uk. You should only take part if you wish to do so. I know how busy practitioners are and sparing some of your valuable time to assist with this study is very much appreciated. Thank you for reading this!

Background: Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is currently a topic of much interest in the UK and globally. It raises important questions of justice, human rights, as well as the adverse impact on victims. Romania is a key country of origin for trafficking to the UK, with Romanian women often being trafficked into the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Understandings around this process are limited, so this research aims to increase knowledge by exploring the experiences of survivors and the role organisations play in identifying and managing such cases.

This research aims to explore the post-trafficking experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK, both those who remain in the UK and those who return to Romania. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with Romanian female survivors of sex trafficking in the UK, practitioners and relevant key informants (campaigners, academics and policymakers) in the UK and Romania. This will provide a deeper understanding of the post-trafficking journeys of survivors, with the focus on vulnerability, risk, resilience and agency, allowing support needs and preventive measures to be highlighted.

Why have I been invited to take part? You have been invited to take part in the study due to your experience and expertise on the topic. Several organisations who are offering services and supporting trafficking survivors have agreed to participate in the research and are assisting by contacting and referring relevant participants.

Do I have to take part? Participation in the study is voluntary and it is your choice whether to take part or not. Throughout the study, you will have the right to stop the interview and withdraw your responses up to two weeks after the interview has taken place. Additional information about this is included in the debriefing sheet.

What will happen if I take part? If you decide to take part in the study, the researcher will contact you to arrange an interview at a time/date/location that is suitable for you. Preferred locations are workplaces, organisation office or premises, ensuring privacy during the interview. The interview will take between 40 minutes to 1 hour and involve you answering questions about your experience around trafficking. You will be given a consent form to sign before

the interview and once it is signed the interview can begin. If for any reason you need a supporting staff to be present with you during the interview, this will be possible. You will need to mention it to the staff who is contacting you, and arrangements will be made accordingly. With your permission and consent, the interview will be recorded to capture all the information provided and avoid mistakes.

How will my data be used? All data will be held anonymously, your name will not appear in any reports, publications or other outputs. Your data will be stored securely, compiling with personal data protection regulation (GDPR). The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The University privacy notice for research participants can be found on the attached link https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below:

How will my data be collected?	Face to face interview and recorded if agreed. Alternatively, interviews will take place over online platforms (Microsoft Teams, Skype, Phone).
How will my data be stored?	All data will be stored according to UCLan Data Storage and Protection Policy and the latest GDPR guidelines.
How long will my data be stored for?	The data will be stored for 5 years after collection.
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	Audio recordings and transcripts will be used only on UCLan secure and password protected devices, and files will be password protected. Data will be anonymised from the beginning, ensuring the participant cannot be identified. Paper information will be stored in locked cabinets in Eden Building, only accessible to the researcher.
Will my data be anonymised?	Each set of data will receive a number file and will be anonymised, only by the researcher will have access to it.
How will my data be used?	The data will refer to experiences and knowledge in relation to trafficking and will be analysed in order to identify particularities of Romanian cases of trafficking.
Who will have access to my data?	The student researcher will have access to the raw data and the research team will have access to transcripts.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	Data collected will not be used for future research projects.
How will my data be destroyed?	Data will be destroyed after 5 years from collection. Paper documents will be disposed by using UCLan's confidential waste service. Electronic data will be destroyed using advice from UCLan ICT department.

Are there any risks in taking part? The interviews are not intended to cause you any harm or distress. However, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, you may feel uncomfortable during the interview. If this happens, please let the interviewer know and the interview can be stopped. At the end of the interview, additional information around further support will be provided both verbally and on the debrief sheet. The interview and the information share will be confidential and not shared with any other parties. However, in case information with potential to harm

participant or others will be disclosed, this will be shared with the organisations involved or other save guarding parties.

Are there any benefits from taking part? Personal benefits include making an input to knowledge and having your views and voice considered. More widely, you will be contributing to knowledge designed to increase the safety and wellbeing of survivors of trafficking. You will receive a voucher of £20 (or Romanian equivalent) as an appreciation of your time and trouble in participating.

What will happen to the results of the study? The results will be shared with the organisations involved; therefore, participants will have access to findings. Results from the research will be presented in the PhD thesis, shared in conference presentations, published in peer reviewed journals and presented to relevant stakeholders. Participants in the research will not be identified from the results.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem? Please feel free to contact Prof. Nicky Stanley, (+44) 2177289 3655. If you remain unhappy, or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with, then please contact the Research Governance Unit at OfficerForEthics@uclan.ac.uk.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

For any further questions, contact details of investigatory team:

Principal Investigator: prof. Nicky Stanley	Student Investigator: Ileana-Maria Turda
University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK	University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK
(+44) 2177289 3655, NStanley@uclan.ac.uk	(+44) 177289 6293, ITurda2@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix 13.2. Information and Debrief Sheet Practitioners and Key Informants

Information Sheet Participants: Practitioners/Key Informants

Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK

Information Sheet

Participant Number: _____ **Version Number**: 01-07/2020

You are being invited to participate in a research study which is part of a PhD at the University of Central Lancashire, UK, with the title *Post-Trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK*. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask for more information or for clarification at iturda2@uclan.ac.uk. You should only take part if you wish to do so. I know how busy practitioners are and sparing some of your valuable time to assist with this study is very much appreciated. Thank you for reading this!

Background: Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is currently a topic of much interest in the UK and globally. It raises important questions of justice, human rights, as well as the adverse impact on victims. Romania is a key country of origin for trafficking to the UK, with Romanian women often being trafficked into the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Understandings around this process are limited, so this research aims to increase knowledge by exploring the experiences of survivors and the role organisations play in identifying and managing such cases.

This research aims to explore the post-trafficking experiences of sexually exploited Romanian women in the UK, both those who remain in the UK and those who return to Romania. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with Romanian female survivors of sex trafficking in the UK, practitioners and relevant key informants (campaigners, academics and policymakers) in the UK and Romania. This will provide a deeper understanding of the post-trafficking journeys of survivors, with the focus on vulnerability, risk, resilience and agency, allowing support needs and preventive measures to be highlighted.

Why have I been invited to take part? You have been invited to take part in the study due to your experience and expertise on the topic. Several organisations who are offering services and supporting trafficking survivors have agreed to participate in the research and have recommended practitioners/professionals whose expertise is relevant for the study.

Do I have to take part? Participation in the study is voluntary and it is your choice whether to take part or not. Throughout the study, you will have the right to stop the interview and withdraw your responses up to two weeks after the interview has taken place. Additional information about this is included in the debriefing sheet.

What will happen if I take part? If you decide to take part in the study, the researcher will contact you to arrange an interview at a time/date/location that is suitable for you. Preferred locations are workplaces, organisation office or premises, ensuring privacy during the interview. The interview will take between 40 minutes to 1 hour and involve you answering questions about your experience around trafficking. You will be given a consent form to sign before the

interview and once it is signed the interview can begin. With your permission and consent, the interview will be recorded to capture all the information provided and avoid mistakes.

How will my data be used? All data will be held anonymously, your name will not be recorded or appear in any reports, publications or other outputs. Therefore, it will be impossible for you to be identified within the final reports. Similarly, specific information which could lead to your identification will not be used in any reports. Your data will be stored securely, compiling with personal data protection regulation (GDPR).

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The University privacy notice for research participants can be found on the attached link https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

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How will my data be used?	The data will refer to experiences and knowledge in relation to trafficking and will be analysed in order to identify particularities of Romanian cases of trafficking.
Who will have access to my data?	The student researcher will have access to the raw data and the research team will have access to transcripts.
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Are there any benefits from taking part? Personal benefits include making an input to knowledge and having your views and voice considered. You will also be contributing to knowledge designed to increase the safety and wellbeing of survivors of trafficking. Practitioners will not receive any payment / incentive for taking part.

What will happen to the results of the study? The results will be shared with the organisations involved; therefore, participants will have access to findings. Results from the research will be presented in the PhD thesis, shared in conference presentations, published in peer reviewed journals and presented to relevant stakeholders. Participants in the research will not be identified from the results.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem? Please feel free to contact Prof. Nicky Stanley, (+44) 2177289 3655. If you remain unhappy, or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with, then please contact the Research Governance Unit at OfficerForEthics@uclan.ac.uk.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

For any further questions, contact details of investigatory team:

Principal Investigator: Prof. Nicky Stanley	**Student Investigator:** Ileana-Maria Turda
University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK	University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK
(+44) 2177289 3655, NStanley@uclan.ac.uk	(+44) 177289 6293, ITurda2@uclan.ac.uk

Debriefing Sheet Participants: Practitioners / Key Informants

Post-trafficking Trajectories and Experiences of Sexually Exploited Romanian Women in the UK

Interview Debrief

Participant Number: _____   **Version Number**: 02-07/2020

Thank you for taking part in this research project. I will use your interview, and other interviews, to help deepen the knowledge on the experiences of Romanian women trafficked and sexually exploited in the UK. We hope that the findings from the research will contribute to increasing the safety and wellbeing of survivors of trafficking.

Right to Withdraw.

If you decide that you do not want your interview to be included in the final report, you have up to two weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw your responses. After this time, your responses will be included in the final report.

To withdraw your responses, **please email Ileana-Maria Turda** (iturda2@uclan.ac.uk) and **quote your participant number** that is then number written on the top of this sheet and the consent form. If you withdraw from the research, **your responses will not be included in the final analysis**. You can do this without needing to explain your reasons.

Contact details.

If you would like more information about the research project, or have further questions, please contact either:

Ileana-Maria Turda (Researcher): ITurda2@uclan.ac.uk

OR

Prof. Nicky Stanley (Principal Investigator): NStanley@uclan.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, you can email the University Ethics Office: EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk

If the interview created emotional distress or any disturbance, please don't hesitate to further discuss with your supervisor or designated staff from your organisation.