



# Nordic Baltic Pilot Project for the Support, Protection, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Women Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation

## Evaluation Report

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## Acknowledgements

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Nordic Baltic Pilot Project for the Support, Protection, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of  
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## Chapter I: Introduction

The Nordic Baltic Pilot Project for the Support, Protection, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Women Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation (the Project) was initiated by the Nordic Baltic Task Force Against Trafficking in Human Beings (the Task Force). The Project was launched in October 2005 for an initial three-year pilot phase, now extended to December 2008. The common language is English. Participating countries are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden. It is coordinated by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and financed by all participating Nordic countries, excepting Denmark<sup>1</sup>. The budget was originally estimated at 1 million Euros, with a commitment by the Baltic countries to ensure continuing financial management of shelters and inter-agency referral systems at the conclusion of the pilot phase.

### *1.1 The Nordic Baltic Task Force Against Trafficking in Human Beings*

There is a history of regional cooperation among the Nordic Baltic States in efforts to combat human trafficking. The Task Force was appointed at political level, chaired by the Swedish State Secretary. Its primary objective was to counteract trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, throughout the region, through: reinforcing already existing networks against trafficking; identifying non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other agencies as key partners; and facilitating coordination of counter-trafficking work. Mechanisms to be used included raising the political profile of the problem and facilitating, coordinating and overseeing work against trafficking in persons. Throughout the currency of its mandate, the emphasis was on practical measures and tangible outcomes. Its mandate expired in August 2006, with a final report noting a number of achievements:

- the political profile of trafficking had been raised in all eight participating countries;
- movement towards a common approach to counter-trafficking in all participating Nordic and Baltic countries had emerged;
- there had been an effective exchange of information to be used as models of 'best practice';
- a bespoke website was a tool and information source;
- the Nordic Baltic Pilot Project was initiated.

### 1.2 Nordic Baltic Pilot Project

The Task Force set two key objectives for the Project.

- to develop a regional programme for the provision of support services to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation;
- to strengthen the gender equality perspective in policies, programmes and anti-trafficking initiatives, especially in victim support services.

In the implementation of the project five core mechanisms are designed to deliver these objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of the funding has been provided by the Swedish government.

- development of a Nordic-Baltic inter-agency network;
- strengthening national networking processes and national inter-agency teams;
- developing and reinforcing safe shelter and assistance programmes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania;
- capacity building and training;
- development of shared resources, common standards and guidelines.

### **1.3 Structure of the Report**

This report comprises an 'after the fact' evaluation, conducted towards the end of the pilot project, and combines process and outcome discussions. Chapter 2 provides some background information on the problem of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. Chapter 3 outlines the evaluation design and implementation, including limitations of the data. Chapter 4 sets out the findings, commencing with brief country profiles, before detailing specific findings in key areas of work. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the Project's achievements, discusses some of the remaining challenges and concludes with guidance for future priorities. A final chapter summarises the main conclusions of the evaluation, details specific recommendations for Project actors, and sets out some final thoughts.

All references in this report to the status of legislation or the overall situation prevailing in each of the participating countries derive solely from information provided by the Project, save for the following chapter.

## Chapter 2: Trafficking in Women for Sexual Exploitation

It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a detailed summary of the, albeit still limited, knowledge base on the nature and extent of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. Some background, however, is necessary to provide a context for the Project and the complexities confronting all participants engaged in counter-trafficking activities.

The Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings (CoE Convention) is the primary regional legal instrument to combat the trade in human beings. However, the internationally accepted definition of trafficking is to be found in the United Nations (UN) Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol). This sets out at article 3a that trafficking in persons shall mean:

*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, 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.*

Under this definition it is clear that human trafficking can be divided into three constituent parts:

- (i) the action of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons;
- (ii) the means employed to do so: threat or use of force, coercion which might include abduction, fraud, or deception, the abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payment or benefits to a person in control of the victim; and
- (iii) the purpose of the action, namely, exploitation which includes, at a minimum, exploiting the prostitution of others, other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or similar practices, or the removal of organs.

Viewed more succinctly, however, trafficking can be described as a process involving the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of human beings.

The significance of international consensus on the legal definition of human trafficking should not be underrated. It enables states with otherwise widely divergent policies and laws to formulate and implement compliant domestic legislation and to assist international efforts in monitoring and combating the problem. However, evidence suggests that the definition is not uniformly understood, incorporated into research or national laws, or systematically applied in either law enforcement or service provision (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2002). These inconsistencies inhibit efforts to estimate the global, regional and national scale of trafficking, since the extent of any problem is in part a function of how it is defined.

The definitional problem is only one element of the challenge involved, since trafficking is also an illegal and hidden problem. At national level few countries are able to provide accurate and reliable data on trafficking within and across their borders, which in turn makes monitoring trends virtually impossible (Kelly 2002: 19). Accurate and reliable data on the nature and scale of human trafficking are therefore hard to come by and the problems of researching it have

been well documented (see, for example, Di Nicola 2007). However, a well-grounded study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2005) suggests that, at any given time, a minimum of 2.45 million people are trapped in situations of forced labour throughout the world. Of these, some forty three percent are believed to have been trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation, and thirty two percent for other economic exploitation. The remaining twenty five percent are trafficked for mixed or undetermined reasons.

In Europe, the European Commission reported that '120,000 women and children brought illegally into Western Europe seems to be a realistic figure', and that 'it is principally women who are trafficked for prostitution purposes' (European Commission 2001). No information is available as to how this figure was arrived at and it must, therefore, be treated with caution; at the same time when dealing with clandestine populations, what emerges may be 'just the tip of the iceberg' (Di Nicola 2007: 53)

Whilst the absence of accurate and reliable data on the numbers of women trafficked into European sex markets each year is problematic, there is nonetheless strong evidence that trafficking is widespread and that flows have increased over the last decade. This calls for the development and implementation of counter-trafficking measures, with international and regional cooperation vital to the effectiveness of any such measures since there are few, if any, regions of the world which can be described as human traffic-free zones. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2006), virtually all countries are now implicated, as countries of origin, transit or destination, and sometimes as all three. Within Europe, western European countries have been primarily destination countries, although transit routes may take place from one to another. Countries in central and eastern Europe have more complex constellations of origin, transit and destination, as sex markets expand along trafficking routes (Kelly, 2006).

The trade in human beings can be viewed from a variety of vantage points – as a criminal issue, a migration issue, a human rights issue, a gender issue, to name but a few – all of which contribute to a deeper understanding of the problem. However, the specificities of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation require that gender be placed at the forefront. It has to be analysed in the context, not only of a globalised sex industry, but also of the structural and systemic inequalities between women and men, and how these are reflected in the conditions of supply and demand that prevail in a given country or region. Economic transition and post-conflict situations also appear to render women especially vulnerable to trafficking. There is ample evidence in the literature demonstrating that gender inequality plays a key role in creating and maintaining conditions which facilitate the commodification and commercialisation of women and which, in turn, create favourable conditions for the work of human traffickers (see, for example, Kelly 2003, 2005; Pierella 2002; Shelley 2002; Monzini 2005).

Within the Nordic Baltic region (see also Chapter 4), the Nordic countries have tended to be destination countries for women from the Baltic countries (as well as from elsewhere) and, as the previous section shows, there is a history of cooperation in that region and the Palermo Protocol has been widely ratified. However, a number of points are important to note here. The Palermo Protocol does not further define many of its terms, in particular 'sexual exploitation'. As with all international legal instruments, it is a matter for signatories to draft and implement compliant domestic legislation. Different participating countries operate within different legislative frameworks and have a variety of legal and policy approaches to prostitution. Whilst 'sexual exploitation' should not be confined only to the activity of prostitution, in countries which overtly or tacitly condone this aspect of the sex industry, an often misleading dichotomy is



created distinguishing between 'forced' and 'free' prostitution (see, for example, Jeffreys 1997; Kelly and Regan 2000). The ways women enter into the sex trade, and are recruited by traffickers, is better understood as a continuum; with only a tiny minority able to demonstrate an entirely 'free' choice to both enter and remain. Few migrants in foreign sex industries can be said to fit these criteria: they are frequently deceived about the conditions in which they will be required to work (see, Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2002; Kelly 2002; 2005) and subject to forms of debt bondage. These conditions include the number of men they have to service, whether they are required to participate in unsafe and unprotected sexual practices, and how much of their earnings they will be permitted to keep.

New challenges face EU member states or signatories to the Schengen Agreement. So far as the Project is concerned, this involves all participating countries, in particular since the accession of the Baltic countries to the EU. Clearly, open borders facilitate the flow of traffic across countries, however, their existence can also serve to inhibit the detection of trafficked women. Although a woman found by the authorities to be an illegal migrant risks rapid and unceremonious deportation, it can at least serve as an indicator of trafficking to the more enlightened. The problems of identifying victims of trafficking are highlighted within the work of Project and these, and other, issues are discussed further below.

## Chapter 3: Evaluation Design and Implementation

Following practice in CWASU a multi-methodological approach was adopted, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, and sampling to ensure data was collected from diverse perspectives. Data collection took place between February and July 2008. A particular challenge faced by this project has been the number of stakeholders involved, and that whilst the language used within the Project has been English, once one moves beyond the active partners, abilities to communicate in English were variable, thus limiting engagement with the evaluation. There are also restrictions on what data it is possible to collect when evaluation is undertaken retrospectively rather than following the processes of implementation as they evolve.

### 3.1: The Evaluation Aims

The overall aim of the evaluation is to review the Project's activities, assess the extent to which it has achieved its objectives and, within this, to determine how effective the structures and mechanisms have been, taking account of the fact that the Project is one of several initiatives in the region. The evaluators were also tasked to provide guidance for future developments. Several specific aims develop these central themes.

Evaluate the Project's impact:

- in defining the problem;
- in developing and improving concrete support services to women victims of trafficking;
- in strengthening the gender equality perspective in policies and actions and, more particularly, in building a human rights, victim-centred approach in service provision.

Evaluate the effectiveness of structures and mechanisms:

- in developing and strengthening regional and national inter-agency networks and co-operation;
- in capacity building and training activities

Evaluate the Project in terms of innovation and good practice:

- in developing common standards and guidance, shared resources and in disseminating information

In addition the evaluation was to provide an overview of the Project's achievements and gaps in key areas, especially: inter-agency networking; provision of victim-centred services; resources. This would then lead to guidance for future priorities, including: the remaining and longer term needs of service providers; inter-agency cooperation at national and regional levels; training and resource needs.

### 3.2 Research methodology

The methodological approach comprised four phases – project familiarisation, semi-structured interviews, an online survey and participation in a Project meeting - to be completed over a period of 5 months: this time frame was extended to increase participation rates.

### *Project familiarisation*

To ensure a strong grounding for understanding the project and its implementation, which would also inform the design of research instruments, necessitated a period a familiarisation. EWL provided the initial background documentation and, subsequently, additional key documentation, as the evaluation proceeded. A small number of documents were provided by participants where these were available in English. A full list of the documents reviewed appears at Appendix 1 to this report. A total of 20 key documents, averaging 15-20 pages per document, were read and analysed. Further material from the Project's website was accessed. These provided access to the aims, structures and ways of working, alongside documenting the achievement of some aims, in the form of guidelines. A summary of key Project activities can be found at Appendix 2.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

In-depth interviews provide the depth and reflection in data which is necessary for assessing a complex multi-stranded project. The interview sample comprised a representative of the Swedish Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, key players within EWL and members of the national coordinating teams. The latter were the key implementation mechanism in each participating country. Hence, their experiences and observations were key in understanding regional and local achievements, barriers and change and ongoing challenges. A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including the majority of national coordinating team members. A number were conducted in person at a network meeting in Tallinn; the rest subsequently by telephone. A small number chose to provide written responses to the interview guide for reasons of convenience or language. Whilst all participants were conversant in English, understandably a number felt more able to provide a detailed and considered response in writing. Following CWASU practice the precise method of data collection was adapted to ensure the widest participation.

The interview guide covered the following themes:

- initial understandings of, and aspirations for, the Project;
- perceptions of how it has developed over time;
- structures and mechanisms for implementation;
- regional and national inter-agency networks;
- development and implementation of victim-centred service provision;
- gender equality perspectives in policies and actions;
- provision and allocation of financial and other resources;
- development and implementation of common standards and guidelines;
- gaps in knowledge and resources;
- future developments.

All interviews undertaken were recorded. Key information was transcribed and analysed thematically in terms of the aims of the evaluation. Quotations in this report are from the interviews unless otherwise stated. Whilst the country of origin is noted quotes are not attributed to NGOs or government officials, since that would identify the speaker.

### *Online survey*

In order to reach a wider stakeholder group in each country an online survey was designed – as the most efficient and effective way of reaching this group - focusing on issues similar to those set out above, using a combination of open and closed questions. The national coordinating teams were asked to provide email addresses for individuals or groups involved

with, or with an interest in, the Project. A target of between 15 and 20 per country was set, and contacts were primarily NGO groups, but also included government officials. Here facility with English was undoubtedly a barrier to participation. Additional contact details were provided by EWL.

The purpose of the survey was to canvass a wider and more diverse range of views. To rely only on the troikas would risk not learning about the wider impact of the Project, especially with respect to inter-agency networking, training, promotion of human rights and a gender perspective, and capacity building. A total of 215 contacts were sent the link to the online site where the questionnaire was hosted; 49 survey responses were received. Whilst a 23 per cent response rate is relatively low, there were multiple barriers to participation including facility with English, stable web access and time. Almost fifty responses was considered an achievement, offering a far wider assessment of the project.

When the questionnaire responses were analysed, however, it transpired that only 15 of the 49 had completed the questionnaire: for the majority the only information recorded was that on the first page where participants identified their country and position. Since CWASU has used online surveys many times, including with an international target group, this prompted concerns that there may have been a fault in the software. The company, however, confirmed that there was no flaw or other error in the software, suggesting that the difficulties lay elsewhere. We do not know why so many failed to complete more than the first page – yet a proportion completed the whole survey. The contribution of the survey data is, therefore, unfortunately limited but can nevertheless be used for illustrative purposes.

#### *Participation in the Nordic Baltic network meeting*

This was the last of the regional network meetings during the pilot phase of the Project, taking place in May 2008; providing an opportunity for national coordinating teams to report on the situation within their respective countries, and to discuss priorities for the future development of the Project. The meeting was held in Tallinn, Estonia, and was attended by one of the evaluators. Both the content of formal sessions and informal discussions added to the evaluation data.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter is presented in five sections: the first presents country profiles for the participating countries covering brief details of current situations and counter-trafficking responses; sections 2, 3 and 4 present the findings of the evaluation according to the specific aims set out at 3.1 above. Section 2 considers the impact of the Project in defining the problem, in developing and improving concrete support services to women VOTs, and in strengthening the gender equality perspective; section 3 examines the structures and mechanisms of the Project and assesses their effectiveness in developing and strengthening regional and national inter-agency networks and cooperation, and in capacity building and training activities; section 4 looks at innovation and good practice in developing common standards and guidance and in disseminating information. The chapter concludes with consideration of the role of EWL as coordinator of the Project.

### 4.1 Country Profiles

A brief overview of the pertinent circumstances prevailing in each of the participating countries contextualises the work of the Project. The Baltic countries are presented first.

#### Estonia

Estonia is considered primarily to be a country of origin from which women are trafficked abroad to European countries, including Finland, Sweden, and Norway. To a lesser extent it is also a country of transit and destination for women from Russia, Latvia and Lithuania.

In terms of prostitution legislation, neither the sale nor purchase of sex is prohibited, although the exploitation of prostitution through pimping and running brothels is illegal. With respect to trafficking, Estonia has ratified the Palermo Protocol and the government adopted a National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings in January 2006 focusing on prevention, victim protection, prosecution and reporting. A national data base was also established to provide data on the scale of the problem.

The Estonian Women's Shelters Union is responsible for coordinating the national assistance programme for women victims of trafficking (VOTs) and shelters were opened in 2007 in Tallinn, Tortu and in the North-East of the country. A national hotline operates.

Both the Action Plan and the shelters post-date the Project.

#### Latvia

Latvia is also deemed to be primarily a source country from which women are trafficked to a variety of other states, including the Nordic countries. It is also, to a lesser extent, a destination country and 'Marta' (see below) has provided assistance and support services to Asian women trafficked into the country.

Prostitution legislation is more regulatory: brothels are regulated and restricted to designated areas; fines can be imposed on sellers and buyers of sex outside of these areas. Latvia has ratified both the Palermo Protocol and the CoE Convention.

A National Programme for Prevention of Human Trafficking was adopted for the period 2004-2008, focused on improving legislation, rehabilitating victims of trafficking and raising awareness. Progress has been hampered by budgetary constraints.

RWS 'Marta' coordinates the provision of support and assistance services to women victims of trafficking, working with professionals, state and municipality institutions and other NGOs and INGOs, notably IOM, in return and integration programmes.

#### Lithuania

Lithuania is deemed a source, transit and destination country, with women being trafficked out to a number of countries, including Denmark and Norway.

The prostitution legislation is more restrictive with pimping and running of brothels prohibited, alongside a number of other activities associated with prostitution. It is an administrative offence to engage in the selling of sex. With respect to trafficking, Lithuania has ratified the Palermo Protocol and signed the CoE Convention.

The government adopted a new Programme on Control and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings for the period 2005-2008. The Programme covers protection, assistance and victim's legal rights, and aims to establish more coherent inter-agency cooperation across all levels of government and civil society. The Programme is coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior.

The assistance programme in Lithuania is coordinated by the Klaipeda Social and Psychological Support Centre which works with partner organisations, such as Lithuanian CARITAS, the Missing Persons Families Support Centre and Women's Aid.

#### Denmark

Denmark is considered to be mainly a transit and destination country for trafficked women from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Thailand and Asia. Of the estimated 4000-5000 women in prostitution, somewhere in the region of half are believed to be women of foreign origin.

Pimping and running brothels are illegal but the sale and purchase of sex are not prohibited. Denmark has ratified the Palermo Protocol and the CoE Convention.

A new Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted for the period 2007-2010, which includes provision to offer all women victims of trafficking a 'prepared return programme' in cooperation with receiving countries. Its assistance programme is organised and coordinated by the Nest-STOP Trafficking/Kvindehandel. Services are provided by NGOs funded by the State. However, a Centre Against Human Trafficking has now been established with responsibility for coordination, safe returns and network building in receiving countries.

#### Iceland

Iceland is considered a destination country, but believed to have only a small trafficking problem given the relative size of the population and sex industry. This partly explains the lack of an established government programme specifically for victims of trafficking. The State does, however, fund Stigamot Women's Shelter, whose services are designed include assistance to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Pimping and running brothels is illegal, as is the running of strip and private dance clubs involving the 'sale of nudity of staff'. Buying and selling sexual services are not prohibited.

Iceland has signed the Palermo Protocol and the CoE Convention but is yet to ratify either of these instruments.

#### Finland

Finland is considered a country of transit and destination, mainly for women from Russia but also from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Belarus. Increasing numbers of Chinese and Thai women are believed to be trafficked through Finland to other destinations.

The assistance programme is coordinated by the two Asylum Reception Centres of Jontseno and Oulu, the former responsible for the provision of services to adult victims of trafficking, the latter responsible for the provision of services to children.

Pimping and running brothels is illegal and, since 2007, new legislation prohibits the buying of sex although to date there have been no convictions. Finland has ratified the Palermo Protocol and signed the CoE Convention. The government adopted a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in 2005, which called for a victim-centred approach in the provision of services, an end to hasty deportations of foreign victims, better social and economic support services and the aggressive prosecution of traffickers.

#### Norway

Norway is deemed to be primarily a country of transit and destination, with reports of increasing proportions of foreign women, in particular Nigerian, but also Russian, Albanian and Eastern European and women from the Baltic countries.

The Ministry of Justice has designated the ROSA Project as national coordinator of assistance services to trafficked women. The ROSA Project was established in 2005 and to date has assisted some 250 women.

Pimping is illegal but the sale and purchase of sexual services are not prohibited. However, legislative changes, similar to the Swedish model (see below) are thought to be imminent. Norway has ratified the Palermo Protocol and the CoE Convention.

The government adopted the second Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking for the period 2006-2009 which extends the reflection period available to victims of trafficking and focuses on the demand side of the sex industry through awareness raising measures aimed at men who buy sex.

#### Sweden

Sweden is thought to be mainly a country of transit. Public officials estimate that between 400-600 women are trafficked through the country each year from the Baltic countries, Eastern Europe and Russia. However, it is also believed that women are trafficked to Swedish border towns.

Assistance services are available through a specialised prostitution unit which forms part of the Swedish Social Services but efforts are underway to create a more coherent structure and programme, inspired by the ROSA Project in Norway. The Swedish Women's Lobby is coordinating closer cooperation between the two largest women's shelter networks - ROKS and SKR - to increase capacity for housing and assistance.

The smaller trafficking problem in Sweden is, in part, attributed to its innovatory approach to prostitution, which criminalises the purchase of sex, alongside pimping and running brothels. There are no criminal charges possible against women (and men, where relevant) who sell sex. Sweden has ratified the Palermo Protocol and signed the CoE Convention. The government has been working on a National Action Plan which was finally adopted in July 2008, but no such plan existed for the duration of the Project.

## 4.2 Impact and Perspective

### 4.2.1 Defining the Problem

The previous section showed that all participating countries have ratified the Palermo Protocol, with the exception of Iceland, which has signed but not yet ratified it.

Additionally, Denmark, Latvia and Norway have ratified the CoE Convention, whilst Finland, Iceland, Lithuania and Sweden have signed it, leaving only Estonia which has neither signed nor ratified. Similarly, only Iceland and Sweden lacked a National Action Plan to combat human trafficking but, in both cases, it is understood that such a plan was in the making and, as noted above, Sweden adopted its National Action Plan in July 2008. Furthermore all participating countries excepting Estonia had specific domestic anti-trafficking legislation. At this formal level, therefore, the definition of the problem in terms of working with the UN definition of trafficking and according importance to victim services and a rights-based approach is fairly well established in the region.

A primary aim of the Project, however, was also to develop and deepen the understanding of the problem in focusing on gender equality and links between prostitution regimes and trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. This is a theme which is explored further at section 4.2.3 below but the success of the Project in promoting a gender equality perspective is acknowledged. Moreover, for some participants the Project was considered an important lever in moving debates in country towards the perspective espoused.

*It is vital for us to be a part of this project, it's our main tool in Iceland to be taken seriously as the only country which has not yet ratified the Palermo Protocol but we get expertise and best practice. (Iceland)*

*Main achievement is the common understanding of the problem (at least for this network) (Online survey).*

### 4.2.2 Support Services and Shelters in the Baltic Countries

It must be noted that the Project financed and supported shelter and services development, and the coordination of activities only in the Baltic countries, as Nordic governments were expected to ensure the availability of resources for shelter and assistance programmes in their own respective countries. Hence, perhaps the single clearest intended outcome of this project was to expand assistance and support services in the Baltic states, and to build an integrated regional referral, return and reintegration network. There are a number of claims the Project can make here.



Project financing made possible the establishment, and/or contributed to, significant expansion of service provision. In Estonia, in particular, three shelters were established in different parts of the country with capacity to provide not just assistance, but also housing, to six VOTs at any one time. In Lithuania, the Project played an important part in strengthening service provision and cooperation among service providers. However, some participants were hampered by waning political support and the diversion of vital resources to alternative domestic service provision to VOTs. Such difficulties are by no means unique to this Project, and the human rights elements also came into play here, with the project offering a source of strength and leverage in national policy development.

*It was really important to start a dialogue about safe returns. Also, getting the money to build a shelter here is very important. But there are still challenges. We need more time to build contact and trust. And having the EWL behind us, and other international organisations too, can help us influence government. (Latvia)*

*Because of that project and the Nordic money in it, the first shelters for trafficked women were opened in Estonia – we did not have such shelters and trained staff before. (Estonia)*

*It strengthened the support services, strengthened the cooperation of service providers. (Lithuania)*

Each of the three countries were also able to identify trafficked women who were assisted through the Project, with both Estonia and Latvia reporting that support services had been provided to three women, and Lithuania similarly reporting the provision of assistance through the Project to ten VOTs in 2007, although Project resources were also instrumental in reaching considerably more women through national hot lines and anti-trafficking campaigns.

Participants were also able to draw on the experience and expertise of other partners in the Project, and share models of best practice, thus improving the content of service provision.

*Since there have been achievements in some areas of victim assistance, it can be agreed that the overall understanding and quality [of a victim-centred human rights approach] has increased. (Latvia)*

This is further illustrated in the comments of a Lithuanian survey respondent, who noted the Project's impact led to improved national service provision.

*The NGO's network began to develop and run a comprehensive multidisciplinary rehabilitation and reintegration programme; Stronger collaboration with organizations in Lithuania providing support for VOT and stronger personal contacts among representatives of the organizations; Possibility to get individual and group supervisions for workers with victims; Trainings seminars for workers with VOTs on feminist approach. (Online survey)*

The Project has played a key role in the establishment of shelters and contributed to the expansion of and improvement in service provision in the participating Baltic countries. Its role in infusing a gender equality perspective is most visible, as would be expected, in the work of NGOs. This, however, must be seen within a wider political context and ongoing developments between government and civil society. Most importantly, it remains the framework within which a victim-centred human rights approach to service provision is expanding and improving.

The picture in participating Nordic countries is more varied, with most having dedicated services for VOTs and/or incorporating assistance to trafficked women within relatively extensive and pre-existing services for victims of domestic and sexual violence. In Denmark Reden was initially responsible for the coordination of service provision but that changed during the latter part of 2007. Denmark now has a National Anti-Trafficking Centre to coordinate the provision of services to victims of human trafficking, all of which are state funded. Finland has two asylum reception centres, one of which coordinates efforts with respect to adults, whilst the other focuses on child victims of human trafficking. Iceland has services for women in the sex industry and women victims of sexual violence, and has established an informal emergency team able to respond to the needs of VOTs. Norway has a fairly extensive network of service providers and shelters, 17 of which have supported and housed victims of trafficking, whilst Sweden reports a lack of real coordination between its various service providers, largely due to a lack of funding.

*The objective to develop and reinforce safe shelter and assistance programme has not completely been possible to realise due to lack of resources/funding. We have established a national network of shelters and have held meetings in order to develop a national programme. We plan to implement the work in the shelters as soon as we have new funding. (Sweden)*

*No barriers at regional level because the priority is to participate and that's been useful but I'm not sure we would have been able to absorb more activities at national level because that's not been necessary. We already have extensive networks here and they were there before we started to work with this project. The civil society is strong so I don't think we needed to build more networks. I think the imposition of the structures has been useful for some countries but not others because it's not been necessary. That's not a criticism. (Denmark)*

Although none of the participating Nordic countries were able to identify individual VOTs assisted and returned to any of the participating Baltic countries through the Project, the national coordinating teams of Finland, Norway and Sweden all indicated that trafficked women from Baltic countries had been identified in each of their own respective countries. No information on the origin of women victims of trafficking was provided by Denmark or Iceland.

It must be noted at this point that the provision and coordination of safe return services for all victims of trafficking is a difficult and complex undertaking. However, the specific complexities surrounding the return of women VOTs for sexual exploitation require attention to additional considerations to ensure their safety and effective integration. Complex intersections of cultural beliefs and practices, political economy and structural inequalities contribute to contexts of vulnerability for some women and need to be taken into account when implementing safe return and integration programmes (Kelly 2007). The development of effective exit strategies can play a key role in this process and, indeed, the Project concluded that without offering exit strategies it is not possible to implement safe return and integration services to women VOTs for sexual exploitation. This is resource-intensive work which precludes any notions of a 'quick fix'.

There are also a variety of complex reasons, including those set out above, as to why some women VOTs decline formal assistance. However, the availability of shelters and the

expansion of service provision in the Baltic countries, together with the development of the network itself, are likely to have greater future impact.

*We have not returned any women ourselves. There have been two women here but they wanted to make their own way back to the Baltic countries and did not want our help or that of IOM who run return programmes. But this was at the start of the project and the police did everything wrong. Today this would not happen and we again we now know who to contact. (Norway)*

*Our organisation is now providing safe accommodation for the VOTs in the assistance system, so the money is provided from the assistance system but I don't know if it's because of the Nordic Baltic Project. I think maybe it's accelerated things, to realise somebody has to do something, so in a way, things go hand in hand. This has been one element affecting things. The regional networks would have been harder to find (without the Project), I think, and for the safe returns this is an absolute necessity. And so I think we can build on this. (Finland)*

This is reflected in the views of a Finnish respondent to the online survey who noted improved return and integration services as a result of the Project.

That said, participants from Finland and Iceland regarded estimates of women assisted in various national programmes as unreliable and unlikely to represent the actual situation. Norwegian data suggests that since 2005, over 200 requests for assistance from victims of trafficking had been received, of whom 63 had been provided with a safe place to stay. The national coordinating teams of Denmark and Sweden provided no data, although in Denmark, it is estimated that some 50 per cent of women in prostitution are non-nationals, an estimate which rises to 75 per cent in the case of street prostitution<sup>2</sup>.

Overall, therefore, data was patchy on the numbers of women assisted in various national programmes. However, as previous sections have already noted, there is an absence of accurate and reliable data on the scale of human trafficking. This lack of baseline monitoring data being kept, even in wealthy Nordic countries, makes it impossible to assess the impact, not only of this project, but of any anti-trafficking measures, including all the national action plans noted at the outset of this chapter. The sparseness of the evidence base, including limited investment in case tracking, is a significant gap across the entire region which needs to be addressed.

#### ***4.2.3 Building shared perspectives***

The development of shared perspectives was critical to project success in two ways: firstly, that a core aim was to extend gender analysis; and secondly, co-ordination and more integrated approaches to counter-trafficking depends, in part, on identifying and building upon common ground. Sections 4.1 and 4.2.1 illustrated the position of each country with respect to international, regional and national legislation.

The adoption of international and regional law, and its incorporation into domestic legislation in the majority of participating countries, cannot be attributed solely to the Project. However, legislation is only part of the picture and the part which countries are most likely to implement, given that it features strongly in the assessments made by the US State Department for its

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<sup>2</sup> In other Western European countries, similar estimates range from 30-90% (Kelly, 2006).

global TIP report. This project, as indicated, had a more specific focus: to deepen understandings of the links between trafficking, gender equality and prostitution regimes. This aspect of the project is more contentious, since there is no regional consensus here – as evidenced by very different approaches to prostitution (see earlier section in this chapter).

At the same time to really fulfil the requirements of international agreements most countries are party to a human rights, victim-centred approach to support and assistance services and return and integration programmes, and these must become embedded in policy and practice. As the following contributions illustrate, the achievement of a shared perspective that travelled across contested ground was considered to be a substantial achievement.

*The ideological ground where trafficking in women and sexual exploitation of women in prostitution are seen as violence against women is one of the most important common standard I believe. Also it is very important that these principles have been widely advertised and repeated in order to change attitudes. (Estonia)*

*A victim-centred approach is something that has become more and more powerful, at least in the circle of the national network and specialists in the network. It is, however, not only the project that emphasises it, but also many different conventions and statements made by international organisations. (Online survey)*

By the end of the project considerable agreement was evident among national coordinating teams about the importance of a gender equality perspective in anti-trafficking work, and the links between trafficking, prostitution and violence against women. The unique focus of the Project was, therefore, recognised and integrated into the perspectives of parties. Although few of the Baltic participants were able to point to concrete examples of the Project's direct influence in matters of policy, counter-trafficking strategies and domestic legislation, the EWL position and the Project's stance provided an impetus for discussion and a framework for the development of victim-centred service provision, at least among NGOs.

*The NGOs are working nationally to incorporate and mainstream this. We are not a rich country but in our daily routine, normally we do it with or without the project, in the towns we go and speak out on the trafficking issues, but more and more in the wider sense it has a great impact. We have a choice of the programmes so over the two years it was not just the one and only way, but in addition with the programmes of the Social Security and Labour, it was one of the few realistically funded activities, partly due to this project but also NGOs have the gender equality and during the meetings with NGOs, they say we need to know more about that, because we're working with women, we lack this information, so some of them have discovered feminism and this also applies to government and the police but they still need training on a gender perspective. 10 years ago we never had violence and now it's the same with trafficking. (Lithuania)*

*Well, at least women's organisations are promoting the gender perspective and, for example, the integral security programme that was approved, they made, for example, immigrant women a special group, like a vulnerable group for all forms of violence, so it's here and there. The integral security programme is a guiding programme and it's a multi-agency programme, different departments of government, so we started a couple of years ago to have these different policy programmes but in these different policies, if they mention it, they usually mention children and the vulnerability of children, rarely women. So I think we can still make an impact and the government is going to make a big report in*

*2010 on what they have done on gender equality, so they want to have done something. So now, again, this year I think we'll have a busy year. (Finland)*

The final speaker illustrates how, when a significant project places gender analysis at its centre, this then provides a stronger ground on which participants can make gender mainstreaming arguments in their national contexts. There is no doubt that the sharing of stories about how gender is often marginalised, and how NGOs and sympathetic government officials can work together to bring it back into the centre, provided impetus and support to groups and individuals who often have to operate in isolation. Sharing strategies also provided ideas and examples that could be adapted to local contexts.

Whilst one would expect the centrality of a gender equality and human rights perspective to be most accepted in the Nordic countries, several national coordinating team members were more circumspect about the depth to which this was implemented and integrated in the development of anti-trafficking strategies and actions, some of which had a decidedly gender neutral flavour.

*We need to think about empowerment and special services geared towards individual women, for example, in Norway, still many do not talk about men's violence against women, they talk instead about violence in relationships. We have not discussed this much within the network but we have discussed it more among ourselves. (Norway)*

*Well, there's a big divide between, you know, what links there are between prostitution, trafficking and pornography. So the feminists have been quite well kept out of trafficking in Finland, the structures of the National Action Plan, the assistance systems because they are too vocal on certain things... and also as you heard, our National Action Plan is quite general. Well everything in Finland is gender-neutral because we don't have personal pronouns, 'he' and 'she' so we can use really neutral language. (Finland)*

The EWL approach and framework has undoubtedly contributed to keeping the issue of gender on government agendas with respect to trafficking and violence against women.

*They might not all follow the Swedish model but they now operate with some gender equality perspective. Both NGOs and government are working within that framework and some are looking at their laws, such as Norway and Iceland. The thinking of those who had intended to legalise prostitution has been reversed.. I think the project has contributed to this and it's symbolic for EWL. (EWL)*

The following section now considers the impact of the structure and mechanisms of the Project.

#### **4.3 Structure and mechanisms: theory and practice**

The principle structure developed to meet the overall aims and objectives of the Project is the 'troika': each Nordic and Baltic country had to establish a three person team in consultation with EWL – three to ensure that there were multiple perspectives and to ensure discussion and exchange in the process of making decisions.

Each national team must comprise a representative of: government or a public agency; civil society; and a resource person. The public or government representative was to be appointed from a relevant ministry or department, whilst the representative of civil society was nominated from within the NGO sector, in particular from among women's organisations already engaged

in the provision of services to women victims of domestic or sexual violence, women in prostitution and VOTs. No criteria were identified for the selection of the resource person but, in practice, the third team member tended to share a similar background of public office or involvement in the types of women's organisations referred to above. It is worth noting that virtually all the key NGOs responsible for assistance programmes were members of their respective troikas.

This structure is unique to this Project and differs from other anti-trafficking initiatives where government agencies and civil society groups tend to operate separately from one another and/or where high level government/policy groupings tend to operate in one sphere and more operational practice based networks in another. This project set itself a critical challenge: to accord NGOs and civil society equal weight with government representatives and, in order to develop gender analysis, to build processes of debate and discussion into the Project structure and mechanisms. Again, in many projects the emphasis is placed on delivery and measurable outcomes, whereas here process was accorded equivalent weight, since one component of the change sought was with respect to the philosophical principles underpinning interventions.

The principle implementation mechanisms were regional meetings, seminars, conferences and training programmes: all organised, coordinated and facilitated by EWL, in consultation with troika members. The meetings provided members of the national coordinating teams with opportunities to engage in capacity building, develop and expand regional networks, exchange information, expertise and resources, and to identify and monitor progress in relation to regional and national priorities. Additionally, EWL arranged for the attendance of speakers, for example, from the PETRA network in Croatia and the Poppy Project in the UK, to provide outside input on strategies and models of service provision, and to build the gender and human rights foundations of the Project.

#### ***4.3.1 Developing and strengthening regional and national networks***

The seminars, conferences and meetings provided the fora for troika members to come together on an equal footing. These were unique opportunities, not just for inter-country discussions and exchange of information, but also for members of national teams to meet and engage with one another on a recurring basis.

The first regional seminar took place in June 2006 in Riga/Jurmala, Latvia. At that time all but one of the eight countries attended with the full complement of their respective national coordinating teams, with Estonia short of one team member. By the final regional seminar, Finland and Sweden attended with only two representatives each. A theme in interviews has been the changing composition of the national troikas, particularly at government level. This did in some cases reflect variations as political commitment was seen to wax and wane, an issue which affected both Nordic and Baltic countries.

*It was a good idea (to give money) but because it (the Project) was under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, people change all the time. And then they are people who are not interested. They have been assigned this task and they don't want to do it, at a government level... For example, when this project started, the minister was a guy they knew was going to stay for only one year in the ministry, so another person came, then another and, as you have heard, there has now been organisational change... (Finland)*

*When the project started, there was a strong political commitment because of the State Secretary in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, but when she went, there was no-one to protect the project, so the lesson is that it's not good to have it dependent on a political commitment, better to have placed the project with a government agency outside the Ministries. (Sweden)*

*The regional network and support has worked well and the troika is good but maybe has not worked so well here because the government representatives don't attend meetings themselves. The two who came to Tallinn were minor people in the Ministries. And even when I got back I had no contact with the troika, they did not ask me anything about what had happened in Tallinn. (Latvia)*

*Issues of government commitment are a matter for concern but it comes down to civil servants having the will to engage. Progress was aided by the troika structure and the EWL meetings. We took a carrot and stick approach and civil servants didn't want to be embarrassed at meetings so the spotlight was on the troikas. (EWL)*

Despite these variations in political will and engagement, which often become evident in multi-country projects, it is important to stress that overall the troika system remained intact and the majority of participants found it to be effective. Similarly, there was general consensus that the seminars, meetings and conferences had been very successful in establishing and/or strengthening networks across participating countries. The greatest benefits were felt within the NGO sector, but not exclusively so.

*The meetings are excellent. Not just of the troika. Other government officials are also very interested. The regional meetings provide the impetus and ways to do things locally. And we can hear from NGOs working on issues of violence against women, so at the meetings we can talk to immigration and the police and they can learn so they can offer more effective help...(but ) I would say mostly on the NGO side because we would not have had the possibility to cooperate without this project and I mentioned we already have a result with the development of a perfect model, so now we're inspired to continue and make it more useful...The model worked and we can present it as an example model on cooperation. (Lithuania)*

It is also relevant to note the different starting points of the participating countries. National networks and cross-sector cooperation tended to be more developed in the Nordic countries, with a longer history of democratic participation. However, the opportunities created by the Project to reinforce and strengthen networking were invaluable, establishing contacts where none previously existed and laying the necessary foundations for cooperation on support and return programmes. Furthermore, being able to spend semi-public time<sup>3</sup> sharing expertise and engaging in dialogue proved to be an important resource for participants concerned to exert influence at government level and enabled deepened understandings of human trafficking.

*We have much to learn from one another but because of the network, we can visit each other so inter-agency cooperation, at least among the NGOs have improved and we now know who to talk to. It has also improved at government level because ministers can talk to each other directly. (Norway)*

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to meetings and seminars which were not open to the public, but were not just private bi-laterals either.

*The regional network had developed brilliantly and communication now is straightforward among most national teams. There were some problems to begin with but it is better now... The main achievement is the possibility for victims to receive assistance, they have somewhere to turn to. Also, the regional cooperation and discussions, for example, on identification, and that the troikas are there together on an equal footing. As a model it is interesting. Even if 4 out of 8 countries function, it's not good enough but it is still an achievement. And they have been able to use the network as leverage in national context and to increase their expertise... the network has also developed in a good way to counteract the narrow view of what constitutes trafficking, and this impacts on who is identified as a victim and therefore on who gets assistance. (EWL)*

The continued engagement of national troikas and regional networks, and the fact that meetings took place over extended periods of time – 2-3 days - is highly significant since in the normal course of events participants would seldom have anything close to that amount of contact time to explore commonalities and differences.

This section has illustrated that the building and strengthening of regional and national networks was embedded within the structures of the Project, creating a dynamic network which deepened over time enabling the Project to meet key objectives.

*During the project period, several NGO meetings took place within the frames of the project where the possible problems were discussed and the solutions tried to be found. The contacts of NGOs with the state official structures became stronger, the cooperation has improved. (Estonia)*

*For example, through the network the Norwegian police met with the Icelandic police so the Icelandic police had to take it more seriously. And we invited the Rosa project to present their model so now things are beginning to happen. (Iceland)*

The learning that took place through the project was further enhanced through formal training components.

#### **4.3.2 Capacity building and training**

The regional seminars/conferences organised by EWL were attended by the EWL coordinator and other EWL representatives, the national coordinating teams, facilitators and speakers. These meetings enabled participants to report on and take stock of the situation in their respective countries. They were able to identify and determine regional and national priorities for action, to share experience and expertise, to consider models of best practice, and to hear the views of a number of speakers invited to address specific issues of interest. One of the key themes to emerge here is that the meetings not only provided participants opportunities to build on and acquire significant knowledge, they also contributed considerably to the development of mutual trust and confidence between the troika members.

*At regional level, it has taken time to establish trust and contacts, it's extremely important to have the network, the support and expertise. (Iceland)*

*From the Latvian side the challenge was that there was little trust of us... I think having partners from different countries helped to establish more trust and our professionals had the opportunity to find out about other projects...I think at the beginning trust was a*



*problem but that's better now and we have learned to be a bit more confident with ourselves and each other. (Latvia)*

Being 'peers' – in the sense that all were trainees, or were discovering new ideas – provides a different ground on which to build relationships than the often contested ground NGOs and government officials usually occupy. The role of the troika is again key in the development of relationships and the building of trust among participants and fundamental to the Project's capacity building activities.

*The meetings, networking and capacity building, have been the main contributions. The fact of the troika of government, NGO and a more neutral representative has been useful and interesting and set a different tone to discussions. The experiment is very positive. For example, when I travel with my government counter-part that person will not be informed but I can dialogue with them and that's very constructive, discussing the impact and the lessons learned. The activities, networking meetings, are about support to Baltic countries. It's not clear to me what has transpired but I think they've found them helpful and have been able to draw on the experiences of Nordic countries in discussions about the future of the women. From an NGO perspective, the contacts have been useful and the players have used one another in positive ways with services funded by the project or government. (Denmark)*

Training is an essential part of any capacity building strategy, and it was identified and prioritised at the inaugural meeting. Virtually all interviewees noted that they had benefited from the formal and the informal learning opportunities provided by the Project.

*Well, at the national level, the materials provided by the project, at these seminars and lectures, are very useful, in terms of capacity building but I have also left the materials at my office and with people who work with possible victims. (Finland)*

*Seminars and trainings have provided us with useful information and knowledge that we otherwise wouldn't have received. (Sweden)*

From the outset the Project recognised the importance of extending training beyond the target groups of the troikas and those providing support and assistance services to VOTs. The importance of extending the understanding of trafficking to those actors responsible for identification and referral of victims was understood at an early point, but budgetary constraints limited implementation. Some of the implications of this are discussed below.

#### **4.4 Innovation, shared resources and developing regional good practice**

Another of the activities which the Project was established to deliver was shared resources, policy and practice guidelines, through which a shared regional perspective could be operationalised. These were also to be vehicles through which the gender equality and human rights perspectives could be implemented. Early project meetings identified and expanded key areas of work, in accordance with existing international standards. The areas where common standards were considered most significant were:

- identification of victims;
- residence status/reflection period;

- sheltered accommodation and specialised support services;
- referral mechanisms and safe returns;
- victim and witness protection;
- financial assistance and compensation.

The Palermo Protocol and the CoE Convention were key reference points here, with the latter setting out the broad responsibilities of signatories in each of the key areas, including minimum standards for compliance. This foundation was combined with the collective knowledge, experience and expertise of participants to produce Regional Guidelines and Standards. These stand as models of best practice. The meetings and seminars were used to discuss and exchange information about activities and practices across the eight countries, which were then evaluated and selected through cross-sector engagement. Although the Regional Guidelines are not binding on participating countries, they are an important resource and a useful lever in developing and influencing policy and legislative initiatives in counter-trafficking work. Even established organisations, including those in Nordic countries, found these processes not only productive, but challenges to enhance their structures and practices.

*We have developed more standards after entering the project. (...) from Rosa has been sharing the standards they've developed and these have largely been adopted by the police who are open-minded and attentive to Rosa. I think the project has also improved protocols and policies as well as information sharing... the project has brought together different NGOs and even different points of view, for example, on demand. [It] has at least helped but it's had no effect on the allocation or sharing of funding. At regional level, government level... one of its main contributions is better cooperation between NGOs from different countries. (Norway)*

*Probably the most useful aspect of the project is the sharing of good practice and learning from each other and trying to provide possible solutions also to other counterparts. Implementation of common standards and guidance is something that has to be continued and developed also in the future. Sharing of financial resources, was certainly one important part of the project, especially for the Baltic countries. (Estonia)*

*The fact that we've been able to distribute our national materials and discuss legislation, especially about prostitution and the situation in Sweden and Norway, this is useful to see when we're producing our own legislation. A positive aspect is at meetings... we have small groups and heard about research from experts with knowledge to pass on - for example, the situation in the UK about compensation. This has been an eye-opener... Things are done differently in different countries but we can draw on each other and also apply them to others... We're interested here in Denmark because of the debate on root causes. And it's also been useful to learn, for example, about the Poppy Project, and the sharing of good practice... As Danes we are acutely embarrassed there is no contribution to the project and the Swedes are effectively paying for our travel. But we'll make it clear we've found the project useful. I was in the UN for many years before this so I'm sceptical about these projects, but in fact it's very positive. (Denmark)*

*It's always when you know more about the common standards and the European standards, and the way the work is done in other countries, it helps you, it gives you ideas how we can improve our own work. (Iceland)*

That the project has clearly been of benefit in building models of victim support and assistance for the Nordic countries is important to stress. It would be easy in such a project, where the deficits in terms of provision were most obvious in some of the Baltic countries, to focus on an exchange from north to east. But the Project set itself more demanding ambitions – to improve and enhance assistance across the entire region.

The examples cited above are examples of the resource development and information sharing the project was intended to produce. Additionally, the Project set up a web site which is readily accessible to ensure key information about the project, and specialised documents are available to all participants and their wider networks. Web resources are critically important ways of spreading information: they work best, however, when combined with face to face exchange and engagement and joint production of material. The involvement of partners in the production of resources means that the products are owned and valued by partners, which in turn means they are likely to promote their relevance, importance or innovative nature to wider networks.

#### 4.5 European Women's Lobby

Before presenting the specific achievements of, and challenges for, the Project, the work of EWL requires further comment. It has already been noted that this was one of several initiatives in the region. Most actors in the field already had their networks of contacts and their own agendas, often influenced by funding sources, and all individual participants, from NGOs through to government, will undoubtedly have been acting under constraints imposed by time, office and other considerations. Pulling together such diverse and, at times, perhaps even resistant network members into a coherent and coordinated regional network, with shared aims and a commitment to achieving concrete objectives, was a challenging undertaking. The quality and value of the work of EWL was acknowledged by participants.

*The EWL have done a great job coordinating the project. I'm very impressed. At the outset I was worried this would be another 'talking shop' but in fact there have been some concrete results and shelters have been established. (Denmark)*

*I think the leaders of this project have been good, I've known (...) for a long time and she's a good chair person, (...) has got better and better, they are very efficient, they are organised and they can push energy. (Finland)*

*They've been very structured and they've done what they said they would in meetings which is a good achievement. (Norway)*

*EWL has always been positive; it has been good to work together with these people. (Estonia)*

It appears that EWL were able to provide the mercurial combination of leadership and participation that is the hallmark of effective project implementation and management. Judging when to continue discussion and debate to ensure 'buy in' from partners and when to shift the focus to action is a delicate art, as is conducting meetings and seminars in ways that engage and involve all parties. To do this in any group is demanding, to do so across eight countries and cross-sectorally, whilst broaching content which is contentious and emotive is no small achievement in itself.

## Chapter 5: Overview of the Project's Achievements and Remaining Challenges

The troika structure lies at the heart of this project. It was the mechanism through which cross-sector cooperation and coordination would take place, which would in turn deliver the other project outcomes. It was designed to enable government and other public officials and representatives of civil society to communicate directly with one another and with their counterparts in the region. The three members were to share responsibility for development and implementation of initiatives nationally. All countries succeeded in setting up their national troikas and the overwhelming majority maintained the model for the duration of the pilot project. This is an original model where NGOs are equal partners in developing and implementing counter-trafficking initiatives. In many other projects, NGOs are designated service providers, invited to attend seminars and workshops, but having limited decision-making powers. The troika structure, and its effectiveness, are both significant innovations and achievements.

The meetings, seminars and conferences provided the opportunity for direct contact among participants and have led to the establishment of a sustainable regional network, particularly across the NGO sector. Moreover, the network has grown in strength and confidence and has proved to be a significant resource in terms of support, information, knowledge and expertise. It has:

- provided a comprehensive backdrop to and, at times, acted as a springboard for, national initiatives;
- facilitated exchange visits between countries;
- enabled participants to gain first-hand knowledge of the care and assistance services elsewhere;
- developed and built on models of best practice;
- established a basis to implement regional standards and guidelines.

Whilst not binding the guidelines are important tools in informing law-makers and in laying the foundations for harmonising approaches to counter-trafficking, and common principles and standards in support and assistance programmes for women victims of trafficking.

The provision of care and assistance services in Baltic countries where none previously existed, in particular shelters in Estonia, is a significant achievement and lays the foundations for delivery of the Project's core objectives: the development and implementation of safe return and integration programmes for women wishing to return to their respective countries of origin. Here too the development of common standards and guidance, and the sharing of models of best practice, has enabled participants to develop and/or improve focus on the needs of victims.

The gender agenda in anti-trafficking work was also given welcome emphasis, an importance that was acknowledged and endorsed generally by participants, even if it is yet to be reflected in policy, strategy and actions at government level.

Overall, therefore, the Project has put to effective use the available resources in meeting the majority of its aims and objectives. It has established and reinforced a Nordic-Baltic inter-agency network in which government and public agencies and NGOs work together to support and protect VOTs. The innovative model developed is capable of delivering sustainable support (legal, social, economic, medical and psychological care and safety), safe return and integration services. This constitutes a solid foundation for the development and implementation of a regional assistance programme.

## 5.1 Challenges

Political will and the active participation of government and other public officials are a vital component in ensuring the successful implementation of any regional counter-trafficking project's aims and objectives. Changes in personnel at this level are inevitable. Countries which encountered difficulties in maintaining an effective and active troika, either due to such changes, or due to delegation by troika members to lower level officials, left the remaining troika members hampered in progressing the Project's work nationally. It also rendered the task of coordination by EWL harder. However, a more conventional structure would not have improved matters, since the government representative would still be necessary, and the lack of a replacement might mean no participation at all from that country.

Participating countries operated within different legislative frameworks and with different priorities, depending whether they are primarily countries of origin, transit or destination. The accession of the Baltic countries to the European Union and the expansion of the Schengen area impacted on issues of immigration border controls and presented new challenges to coordinate efforts nationally and regionally.

The Project has undoubtedly made significant progress in developing regional networks willing and able to cooperate in the provision of victim-centred services to trafficked women, including return and integration. There is, however, less evidence within the framework of the Project of the development of similar will and coordination among other key actors at government level or among police and immigration authorities. This has significant implications, since in order for women to gain access to these services they must first be identified as victims of trafficking. The under-identification of VOTs has vexed counter-trafficking initiatives across the globe with some state agencies – immigration and border control in particular – proving especially resistant to change. That this project has not been able to overcome these impediments is, therefore, unsurprising. Funding shortfalls also limited the ability of the Project to engage directly with these officials.

The original contract between Sweden and EWL lacked clarity with respect to the payment plan and funding did not always proceed according to the contributions agreed by each participating country. The main area in which this shortfall made itself felt was in the development and implementation of a regional training programme to include, in particular, public officials such as police and immigration officers, and the wider stakeholder group. Furthermore, whilst the Baltic countries were intended as, and have in fact been, the primary beneficiaries of Project funding, the lack of dedicated funding in some Nordic countries has had implications for the progress of the Project as a whole and is indicative of a lack of political will. However, Nordic participants, notably from the NGO sector, expressed their intention to continue work on strengthening national and regional inter-agency networking and service provision, even without dedicated funding, indicating the importance of the Project to them.

## 5.2 Guidance for Future Priorities

This section draws on the findings of the evaluation in order to present recommendations for the future of the Project. These seek to reinforce and build on the Project's already considerable achievements in developing vital support services and laying the foundations for safe return and integration programmes. Additional priorities are to overcome under-identification, instigate more consistent data collection and case tracking and begin to tackle the important issue of demand reduction.

### Sustaining Support Services

The Project has built a strong network, and enhanced provision of support and assistance. For this to become a sustainable regional resource which can provide holistic victim-centred services can only be secured if funding streams and continued support are provided for shelters/support services to VOTs. Funding and capacity building should continue to enable services to deliver holistic specialised services, responsive to the needs of their service users.

### Regional and National Inter-agency Cooperation

Regional/international cooperation lies at the heart of effective counter-trafficking action and must be supported through strong and coordinated national measures: the troika structure should be renewed and/or reinforced since it is a significant strength of the Project.

Police and immigration authorities need to be more directly engaged by the Project, since these frontline officials have a crucial role to play in the identification of victims of trafficking and their referral to appropriate centres of support and assistance. Building good practice here should be a priority for the next phase of the Project.

Expanding involvement of/engagement with national networks, since misunderstandings and miscommunications between agencies were evident in all countries. This also needs to be linked to ongoing regional networking, especially between those most responsible for delivery of counter-trafficking programmes. The best return and reintegration will take place when the particular needs of individuals, and the basket of resources needed to make them safe, can be negotiated bi-laterally. Similarly, the most effective and efficient criminal investigations take place when counterparts can liaise directly with one another.

### Data systems

Few of the eight countries could provide current evidence of the numbers of trafficked women detected in recent years. No country can claim to be able to monitor its counter-trafficking strategy, plan of action, legal reform and assistance programmes if these most basic of data are missing. The next phase of the project should include the development of a set of common indicators, common data to be collected year on year to track trends over time. Alongside this, all national support and assistance programmes should collect a common core of data which will enable comparisons and case tracking.

### Training Needs

The training component of the project should be extended, to both enhance identification of victims and mainstream the common standards and guidance, and models of best practice. Training is an important means of opening dialogue, countering narrow definitions of, or approaches to, human trafficking, and securing access to services for the victims of trafficking.

This is particularly critical in the adoption and application of common identification criteria, and in furthering the objectives of ensuring a gender-equality, human rights approach.

#### Emerging Priorities

##### Increased outreach work.

Many agencies already engage in outreach work, particularly to women who sell sex. Additional training and financial resources are required to enable the development and extension of this work, as another route to the identification of victims and provision of assistance.

##### Demand reduction.

The development and implementation of effective measures to reduce demand is a fundamental element in counter-trafficking required under the Palermo Protocol. Such measures have to be developed and implemented on a country-by-country basis, depending on whether a participant is primarily a country of origin or destination, and within the overall legislative framework of the country in question. However, measures are likely to be most effective when coordinated within a regional framework. Apart from Sweden, limited work among the partners has addressed this core issue. To do this will require exploring complex and contentious issues in the spirit of constructive engagement. This Project has already demonstrated that it can create such conducive contexts for change.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

### 6.1 Summary

The Nordic Baltic Pilot for the Support, Protection, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Women Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation engaged five core mechanisms to achieve its objectives:

- development of a Nordic-Baltic inter-agency network;
- strengthening national networking processes and national inter-agency teams;
- developing and reinforcing safe shelter and assistance programmes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania;
- capacity building and training;
- development of shared resources, common standards and guidelines.

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate:

- the troika structure has been key in the development of a dynamic cross-sectoral network, willing and able to work together across eight countries to drive the Project forward and to address contentious issues in the spirit of constructive engagement. Whilst the Project was only one of a number of initiatives and participating countries had different starting points, all have benefited and contributed to achieving tangible outcomes in the provision of support and assistance services to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Greater benefits can be achieved with increased participation of wider stakeholders, including law enforcement and immigration agencies. This would assist in particular with infusing theory and practice with a gender equality perspective.
- national networks and inter-agency cooperation were more developed in the Nordic countries but the Project contributed to a strengthening and reinforcing of these and developing networks in the Baltic countries, especially, but not only, among the NGO sectors. Again, the deeper and more sustained engagement of wider stakeholder groups will enhance development of common perspectives and approaches in combating trafficking, in particular the identification of women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, increasing the possibility that they might access support and assistance services;
- the Project financed, supported and provided vital training and other resources for the establishment of three shelters in Estonia, and contributed to the development of safe shelter and assistance services in Latvia and Lithuania. This is a key achievement of the Project and lays the foundations for the development and implementation of safe return and integration programmes. In Estonia, in particular, this has enabled the provision of dedicated support and assistance services where none previously existed and has enhanced facilities and service provision elsewhere in the Baltic countries. Continued national support for the shelters and services is vital but their work will be



most effective within the regional framework of the Project, which also remains essential to implementation of safe return and integration programmes;

- the role of the troika is again key, not only in the development of relationships and the building of trust among participants, it is also fundamental to the Project's capacity building activities. Access to the expertise, knowledge and experience of participants and external speakers and contributors, and exchange visits among participants, created valuable learning opportunities and benefits for all. In extending training programmes to wider stakeholders, a deeper understanding of the problem could be achieved and narrow definitions of trafficking countered, with particular emphasis on a gender equality perspective.
- participants shared knowledge and expertise and made available to one another wide-ranging materials, as well as producing common documents such as the Regional Standards and Guidelines. Additionally the Project set up a web site for the exchange and production of joint material, an important supplement to the face to face exchange and engagement facilitated during meetings and seminars. The establishment, through inter-agency consultation, of agreed common identification criteria, and a data system for collection of common indicators must be among the activities of the next phase of the Project.

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that much has already been achieved, and solid foundations have been laid to pave the way for significant future development of the principles and practices which are the cornerstones of the Project's strategies and goals. The Project owes its success to date to the efforts and commitment of all participants: governments and funding bodies, national troikas, and EWL, as well as some of the wider stakeholders. Each has played a significant role in advancing the Project's aims and objectives, and each has a significant role to play in its continuing development, and in the provision of essential and dedicated services to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

#### Government

Political will lies at the heart of effective regional and national counter-trafficking measures. Its strength or weakness directly impacts on the provision of services to VOTs. In the case of women VOTs for sexual exploitation, a gender perspective must inform political ideology and commitment, and be reflected in policy, strategy and implementation measures. Government commitment to and participation in the Project is therefore vital, to both learn from and contribute to advancing the Project's key objectives. It is recommended that governments:

- ensure/maintain the participation of a government representative in the national troika;
- ensure a gender perspective informs development and implementation of all counter-trafficking policies, strategies and operational measures;
- secure dedicated financial resources for effective provision of support and assistance services, and return and integration programmes;
- work towards harmonisation of regional policy and legislative approaches to prostitution;

- establish/maintain data systems for the collection of data to monitor trafficking and to track changes in trafficking trends.

#### Funding bodies

Most Project funding to date has been provided by Sweden. Renewed/additional funding is essential for the continued development, expansion and implementation of sustainable regional support, return and integration programmes. No participating country can achieve this in isolation from its neighbours. The way forward is to strengthen regional networks and service provision through effective inter-agency cooperation. It is recommended that funding bodies, in collaboration with the regional coordinator and national participants:

- devise a budget for long term, sustainable funding of the Project;
- allocate the budget according to the Nordic key or other agreed method;
- agree and implement a firm payment plan.

#### National troikas

The troika structure, and its effectiveness, are both significant innovations and achievements of the Project. It is the mechanism which has facilitated cross-sector cooperation and coordination, designed to enable government and other public officials and representatives of civil society to communicate directly and with their counterparts in the region. It proved most effective when all three members worked together to develop and implement initiatives nationally and through their wider stakeholder groups. It is recommended that national troikas:

- be renewed/strengthened;
- ensure the appointment/continued participation of a government representative;
- ensure the engagement/continued engagement of wider stakeholder groups, in particular, those involved in the provision of services, police and immigration agencies;
- develop a data system to collect a common core of data to enable comparisons and case tracking.

#### Regional Coordinator

The task of providing leadership and management of a Project involving such a diverse range of actors across eight different countries is not an easy one. Section 4.3 illustrates that EWL succeeded in combining the leadership and participation that is essential to effective project implementation and management. Specifically, EWL demonstrated its ability to work cross-sectorally, as well as across countries, in dealing with often emotive and contentious subject-matter, despite being hampered to some extent by funding difficulties. This impacted particularly on its ability to roll out effective regional capacity building seminars. So far as the future coordination of the Project is concerned, a number of points should be noted. Should it become necessary at any time to appoint a new regional coordinator, it is recommended that EWL continues to receive sufficient funding to maintain a key support role until such time as a planned and orderly handover can be arranged. It will then be vital that any new coordinator demonstrates similar leadership qualities to those outlined above, and sustains a dynamic and

flexible approach to meet new challenges, and to work with funding bodies and national triokas to:

- secure long term funding of the Project and its activities;
- devise and roll out regional training programmes to wider stakeholder groups;
- coordinate and manage data systems for the collection of common data year on year;
- coordinate and manage on-going evaluation of the Project.

## 6.2 Concluding thoughts

The Nordic-Baltic Pilot Project has achieved a great deal within a relatively short period of time, despite being hampered by funding shortfalls. The expansion and strengthening of the regional network, the development of common standards and guidance, and the establishment through Project funding of shelters in Baltic countries, has laid the foundations for coordinated implementation of assistance, return and integration programmes across the region, with an emphasis on a human rights, victim-centred approach to the needs of VOTs.

The absence of baseline information within each of the eight countries and, in some instances, inconsistencies particularly at government level with regard to perceptions of the nature and extent of the problem, limits the claims which can be made about the impacts of the Project.

Other wider political changes have also had an influence, notably the accession of Baltic countries to the EU and/or the extension of the Schengen area, allowing for the free passage of citizens across borders to neighbouring countries and beyond. It is impossible to assess the effects of these changes on the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation within and between the Baltic and Nordic countries. However, it is likely that in those countries in which prostitution, or some aspects of prostitution, are not prohibited, there will be greater difficulty in identifying trafficked women from EU countries, where previously their irregular immigration status might have brought them to the attention of the authorities. It may also lead to the erroneous perception that the numbers of women trafficked between member states are decreasing, particularly when set against a perceived increase in the presence of women from more easily identified groups.

This spotlights an issue which all participants in the Project have acknowledged as fundamental in counter-measures: the identification of victims of trafficking. It is this which offers the potential for access to support and assistance services and, where desired, return and integration programmes. The importance of the adoption and uniform application of common identification criteria cannot be understated, more so as evidence suggests that only a small proportion of women detected, for instance, in bar raids (a common counter-trafficking measure) identify themselves as trafficked and/or request support and assistance (see, for example, UNICEF 2002: 5). This suggests that reliance on 'self-identification', or the targeting of groups which have a higher visibility, for example, because of their race, will be inadequate and will potentially deny a great many women access to vital services.

As previous chapters show, the relatively low numbers, to date, of women in Project-based assistance, or return and integration programmes cannot simply be attributed to any shortcoming in the Project. The establishment of shelters, particularly where none previously existed, is relatively recent. Furthermore, service providers - those working to afford women support and assistance, return and integration – have a difficult and sometimes dangerous task. However, it is a task they can begin to undertake only when women are identified as victims of trafficking and/or feel able to request assistance. It is often the responsibility of others – police, immigration authorities, government – to create the conditions which will facilitate identification. This requires agencies to work together across all sectors, to build relationships, to gain a deeper and better understanding of the capacities and constraints which apply to each, to share knowledge and expertise, and to develop common standards and guidance which will stand the test of time.

The Project has laid solid foundations and created a network capable of facilitating vital inter-agency cooperation if resources and political will support the continuation of its work, and if future developments allow for greater inclusion, participation and training of other key actors. This possibility is inherent in the unique structure of the Project which can also potentially serve as a model elsewhere. Furthermore, the focus of the Project on issues of gender equality serves as a reminder to government and other actors that these are key concerns in efforts to combat trafficking in women for sexual exploitation.

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- UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2006) *Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns*. Vienna: UNODC

## APPENDIX 1

1. National Consultation and Assessment Meeting: Draft Agenda (undated)
2. National Consultation and Assessment Meeting Report 18.04.06
3. National Priorities/ Country Work Plans
4. National level network
5. Regional Guiding Principles
6. International Regulations: Standards for Implementation
7. National Activity Reports (8): 6/07
8. Capacity Building Seminar 06/06
9. Capacity Building Seminar 12/06
10. Report on Network Seminar for National Coordinating Team - 4/10/?
11. Conference Report: From National to Regional Strategies - 5/10/07
12. Assistance to women victims of trafficking: a Comparison of Data – May 2008
13. Assistance to women victims of trafficking: a Comparison of Legislation – May 2008
14. A Detailed Overview of the Legal Situation in the countries of the Nordic Baltic Region
15. Suggestions and plans for continuation of NB network activities (Tallinn May 2008)
16. National Action Plan: Denmark – 2007 – 2010
17. Development Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2006-2009: Estonia
18. Factsheet: Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings - Sweden: 04/05
19. Model for Assistance of women victims of trafficking; Lithuania
20. Report on the Nordic Baltic Seminar for National Coordinating Teams – May 2008

## APPENDIX 2: Key Nordic Baltic Project Activities

### 1<sup>st</sup> regional seminar: 18-20 June 2006 – Riga/Jurmala, Latvia

#### *Immediate next steps*

- national troikas to consult wider stakeholder group and finalise national work plans
- national troikas to share regional guidelines with wider stakeholders
- national coordinator to set up email contact list

#### *Longer term*

- develop regional and national level work on identified priorities
- identify training priorities and roll out 07-08

### 2<sup>nd</sup> regional seminar: 07-09 December 2006 – Copenhagen, Denmark

#### *Report back: country situations*

#### *Training/capacity building*

Presentations on five assistance models – two within network, three outside  
Presentation from Cathy Zimmerman on the Health consequences of trafficking

#### *Work planning*

- coordinate/set up shelter facilities in the Baltic countries (2007)
- targeted capacity building (Baltic countries)
- extend training programme to law enforcers
- organise network conference (2007)

### Interim Country Reports

Submitted to EWL 30 June 2007 - identifying key priorities and challenges

### Website established mid 2007

### Regional Guidelines and Standards for Implementation

finalised

### 3<sup>rd</sup> regional seminar: 04 October 2007, Vilnius, Lithuania

#### *Report back: country situations*

#### *Training/capacity building*

- Workshops on national and regional strategies: involvement of different stakeholders; identification criteria; legislative/policy initiatives; safe returns; shelter financing, training; regional 'identification' guide; outreach work; safe returns; resources; data collection; compensation

### Conference: Strengthened cooperation against trafficking in women: from national to regional strategies: 5 October 2007 – Vilnius, Lithuania

Invited speakers/facilitators

Overview of Country Developments

Discussions on promotion of an equality culture

### 4<sup>th</sup> regional seminar: 15-16 May 2008 – Tallinn, Estonia

Nordic Baltic Pilot Project for the Support, Protection, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Women Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation

*Country overviews*

*Training/Capacity Building, working groups on:* outreach/identification; increasing visibility of assistance/shelters; data collection

Three presentations: one on why victims may decline assistance and one on compensation.

*Continuation/Future of Network*

Common understanding there is a willingness to continue the NB Network with the inter-agency structure that makes it unique but will need funding.