



Chapter 13. VoT Support and protection

Unit-responsible partner: Dignita



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13. VoT Support and protection

13.1 Introduction

Trafficking in persons represents one of the most complex violations of human rights, requiring a multidimensional approach to address its consequences effectively. This training on '**Victims of Trafficking (VoT) Protection and Support**' is specifically designed for frontline practitioners, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, labour inspectors and professionals in social and health services who encounter victims of trafficking in their work. It aims to equip participants with the knowledge and tools needed to ensure victims receive the care, protection and assistance they deserve. The training focuses on improving participants' ability to apply VoT sensitive approaches. Special attention will be given to addressing the risks faced by vulnerable groups, such as Ukrainian refugees, who are at high risk of exploitation. This chapter will also highlight the importance of collaboration among anti-trafficking actors at national, international and inter-agency levels, fully in line with the broader goals of the ERADICATING II project.

13.2 Learning objectives

- **Ensure victims' safety and address immediate needs:** Participants will develop skills to identify and understand victims' urgent needs in order to be able to ensure physical safety, provide medical care and access to safe housing.
- **Apply VoT sensitive practices:** Participants will learn to prioritise the use of VoT sensitive practices and will develop skills to interact with victims using trauma-



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informed and victim-centred approaches in order to avoid re-traumatisation, respect autonomy and build trust.

- **Coordinate comprehensive support services:** Participants will gain expertise how to build a victim's support plan and facilitate access to appropriate services like legal aid, psychosocial support and reintegration programmes, ensuring these are tailored and culturally sensitive.
- **Strengthen multi-agency collaboration:** Participants will strengthen their capacity to seek collaboration and work effectively within multidisciplinary teams in order to deliver adequate holistic support and protection for victims.

13.3 Definitions

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world.

Labour Trafficking

Human trafficking with the purpose of labour exploitation, in which individuals are compelled to work through the use of force, fraud or coercion. Common indicators include unpaid wages, excessive working hours, confiscation of documents, unsafe living or working conditions and physical abuse.





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Victim of Trafficking (VoT)

A person who has been subjected to exploitation through means such as coercion, deception, abuse of power, or vulnerability for purposes including forced labour, sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse.

Trauma

Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to a distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope. It may result from either witnessing or experiencing an event that poses a fundamental threat to one's physical and mental integrity or survival.

VoT Sensitive Approach

A method of interacting with and supporting individuals who are identified or suspected to be victims of trafficking. It emphasizes empathy, dignity and respect while addressing the unique needs and vulnerabilities of victims. This approach integrates principles from trauma-informed care, victim-centred strategies and culturally sensitive practices to create a supportive and empowering environment for victims.

Victim Support

Victim support refers to the comprehensive assistance provided to individuals who have experienced harm, ensuring their physical safety, emotional recovery, and overall well-being. It includes immediate interventions such as medical care, shelter, and legal aid, as well as long-term measures like counselling, education, vocational training, and reintegration services. A victim-centred approach ensures that support is tailored to individual needs, respects their dignity, and empowers them to rebuild their lives with independence and resilience.





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Vulnerable Groups

Individuals or populations at high risk of exploitation due to circumstances such as displacement, poverty, lack of legal status or discrimination. Refugees, migrants, women and children are part of this category.

Multi-agency collaboration

A coordinated approach that involves various stakeholders, including law enforcement, social workers, healthcare providers and NGOs, working together to ensure holistic support and protection for trafficking victims.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

A framework for identifying, referring and supporting victims of trafficking. The NRM involves multiple stakeholders, including law enforcement, social services, NGOs and healthcare providers, to ensure victims receive comprehensive care and protection

13.4 Theoretical / informative part

Support and protection for victims of labour trafficking are fundamental to ensuring their recovery, safeguarding their rights and preventing re-trafficking. These efforts must prioritise the safety, dignity and autonomy of victims while addressing the immediate and long-term consequences of their exploitation. A holistic approach to victim support and protection integrates trauma-informed principles, a victim-centred focus and multi-agency collaboration.

The **VoT sensitive approach**, combining trauma-informed and victim-centred focus, forms the cornerstone of effective support. Trauma-informed care recognises the deep psychological and emotional scars trafficking leaves on victims, such as fear, distrust





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and emotional instability. This approach focuses on avoiding re-traumatisation, using sensitive communication techniques and providing a safe space where victims feel empowered to share their experiences at their own pace. A victim-centred approach complements this by ensuring that victims are treated with empathy and respect, enabling them to make decisions about their care and recovery. This emphasis on autonomy is crucial in helping victims regain control over their lives.

Comprehensive support services address both immediate and long-term needs.

Immediate needs

The first priority in protecting victims is ensuring their **safety and security**. Victims must be removed from environments where they face harm and placed in safe, confidential locations. This may include emergency centres, shelters or housing programmes that protect them from retaliation by traffickers.

In the immediate aftermath of their rescue or identification, **medical care** is often with high priority. Victims may suffer from physical injuries, such as untreated wounds, fractures or chronic illnesses, resulting from harsh working conditions or abuse. **Psychological care** is equally essential, as victims frequently experience severe mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and dissociative symptoms. Access to trauma-informed healthcare professionals who understand the specific needs of trafficking victims is crucial. Immediate health interventions can also include reproductive healthcare for victims of sexual exploitation and substance abuse treatment where necessary.

Basic necessities like food, clothing and hygiene supplies are vital in stabilising a victim's immediate situation, as they address both physical needs and emotional well-





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being. When victims are rescued or identified, they often arrive with little to no personal belongings, having endured harsh living and working conditions that deprived them of basic resources. Food is particularly important, as many victims experience malnutrition or dehydration due to long periods of neglect, overwork or insufficient access to meals during their exploitation. Many victims need clothes as they may have been subjected to degrading conditions that left them in tattered or inappropriate clothing. Hygiene supplies, such as soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and sanitary products also address health and dignity needs. Beyond meeting physical needs, offering these basic necessities demonstrates compassion and concern, which can play an important role in establishing trust between victims and service providers.

Legal assistance from the beginning is crucial for victims to know their rights, as this empowers them to make informed decisions, seek protection and access the support and justice they need to begin rebuilding their lives. For those involved in prosecuting traffickers, legal assistance ensures they are treated with dignity, prepared for court proceedings and protected from re-traumatisation or intimidation. Additionally, it advocates for non-punishment policies, ensuring victims are not criminalised for actions they were coerced into during their exploitation. Legal aid also supports victims in filing for compensation, such as unpaid wages or damages, providing resources for rebuilding their lives, reclaim their rights and rebuild their lives with dignity. In cases of trafficking abroad, it helps victims secure temporary or permanent residency, protecting them from deportation if returning home is unsafe, or organising a safe return if possible.

Confidentiality must be upheld throughout legal proceedings and interactions with service providers to protect victims from potential risks. Safeguarding victims' identities is equally critical to avoid stigmatisation, further exploitation or harm. Victims should be fully informed about how their information will be used and given the power to consent





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to any disclosures. Breaches of confidentiality can expose victims to significant risks, including retaliation from traffickers or harm to their reputation in their communities.

Long-term needs

In the long term, reintegration services are essential for enabling victims of trafficking to regain stability and independence. These services go beyond addressing immediate needs, focusing instead on equipping victims with the tools and resources necessary to build sustainable futures and prevent re-trafficking.

A key component of reintegration is **psychosocial support**, which includes counselling and therapy tailored to the unique experiences of each victim. Trauma-focused therapy helps victims process the psychological and emotional effects of their exploitation, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Group counselling or peer support programs can also play a vital role, providing victims with a sense of solidarity and understanding as they share their experiences and recovery journeys.

Education and vocational training should offer victims new skills and opportunities to pursue meaningful employment, financial stability and dignity regain. Many of them have limited educational backgrounds or job experience due to the circumstances of their exploitation. Training programs and coaching tailored to local job markets enable victims to acquire certifications or practical and social skills that enhance their employability. Collaborations with employers and job placement initiatives further facilitate survivors' entry into safe and sustainable work environments.

Social reintegration programmes are also important in helping victims rebuild their connections within communities as they often experience isolation and stigmatization.





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Programmes that foster community engagement like mentorship initiatives, peer support groups or other local activities, can help victims feel accepted and valued.

Monitoring and follow-up mechanisms are essential components of support, ensuring that victims receive ongoing assistance and are safeguarded from re-victimisation. These mechanisms involve regular check-ins with victims to assess their well-being, address emerging needs and adapt support plans as necessary. Continuous engagement helps identify and mitigate risks that could expose victims to exploitation again. Furthermore, these mechanisms enable service providers to evaluate the long-term impact of their interventions, ensuring that support services remain effective and responsive.

Multi-agency collaboration is essential in providing the overall holistic support and protection. Social workers, healthcare providers, law enforcement and NGOs must work together to address the multifaceted needs of victims.

Formalised referral pathways, like the **National Referral Mechanisms** of each country, and coordinated efforts ensure that victims receive adequate care and that no aspect of their recovery is neglected. International cooperation is particularly important for victims trafficked across borders, as it ensures their safety and access to legal remedies.

Referrals and all support to victims of trafficking are due with their consent and are voluntary!

Special attention must be given to the vulnerabilities of **women and refugees**, particularly those displaced by conflict, such as Ukrainian refugees. Women face additional gender-specific risks, including sexual violence and exploitation, requiring access to specific care. Ukrainian refugees, forced to flee with limited resources, face additional challenges such as language barriers, stress and disorientation, no close





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people and partners, lack of documentation and exclusion from local services, which increase their vulnerability to trafficking. To address these risks, interventions must be culturally sensitive and targeted. This includes providing interpreters, legal assistance for securing documentation, safe housing and legitimate employment opportunities.

Outreach to refugee communities to raise awareness about trafficking risks, combined with psychosocial support to address the trauma of displacement, as well as social-economic inclusion support, is essential.

Support plan

Building a comprehensive support plan for victims of trafficking, particularly labour trafficking, involves a structured approach that prioritises the victim's rights, safety and recovery as already discussed. All interventions should be planned with the consent of the victim, which is stated with a signature in the end of the plan. Clear guidelines on maintaining confidentiality to protect the victim's identity and personal information should be in place.

Here's an example how it can be developed:

Table 19. VoT detailed support plan

VoT DETAILED SUPPORT PLAN	
1. Victim's Personal Profile	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Information - Name (if they consent to disclose), age, nationality and any relevant personal background details. 	



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- **Case History** - A brief description of the victim's trafficking situation, including how and where they were exploited.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Considerations** - Details about the victim's language preferences, cultural background and specific needs related to these aspects.

2. Assessment of Needs

- **Safety and Security Needs**
 - Risk assessment to identify threats from traffickers or unsafe environments.
 - Immediate and long-term safety measures (safe shelter, relocation if needed).
- **Medical Needs**
 - Physical health concerns (injuries, malnutrition, untreated conditions).
 - Mental health issues (trauma, PTSD, depression, anxiety).
- **Legal Needs**
 - Legal status (residency permits, asylum applications).
 - Compensation claims or legal proceedings against traffickers.
- **Psychosocial Needs**
 - Emotional support and counselling.
 - Rebuilding self-esteem and addressing trauma.
- **Economic and Social Needs**
 - Financial assistance for immediate stability.
 - Vocational training, education or job placement.
 - Social reintegration into a community.



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3. Goals and Objectives

- **Immediate Goals**

- Ensuring physical safety (securing safe housing).
- Providing basic necessities (food, clothing, hygiene supplies).
- Addressing urgent medical and legal issues.

- **Short-Term Goals**

- Stabilising emotional and physical well-being through counselling and medical care.
- Helping the victim understand their legal rights and options.
- Connecting them to temporary employment or skills training.

- **Long-Term Goals**

- Achieving economic independence through sustainable employment.
- Supporting reintegration into a community or relocation if necessary.
- Empowering the victim to regain autonomy and rebuild their life.

4. Services and Interventions

- **Healthcare Services**

- List of medical treatments (physical therapy, mental health counselling).
- Schedule for follow-up medical check-ups.

- **Legal Services**

- Details of legal aid support, including representation and documentation assistance.
- Steps for applying for residency, asylum, or compensation.

- **Psychosocial Services**

- Type and frequency of counselling or therapy sessions.
- Peer support groups or community programs.

- **Housing and Shelter**

- Temporary and long-term housing solutions.
- Conditions for ensuring safety and confidentiality.

- **Education and Vocational Training**

- Enrolment in language classes, vocational training, or educational programs.
- Job placement assistance and mentoring.

- **Financial Assistance**

- Access to emergency funds or stipends during recovery.
- Support in managing finances or opening a bank account.

5. Monitoring and Follow-Up

- **Regular Check-Ins** - Maintain regular contact to assess progress, address new needs, and update the support plan as required.
- **Prevent Re-trafficking** - Monitor for signs of risk and implement measures to prevent further exploitation, such as safe housing and legal protections.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Lead Coordinator** - Identifies who is responsible for overseeing the plan (usually a social worker or case manager).
- **Involved Professionals** - Lists all agencies and individuals contributing to the victim's recovery (healthcare providers, NGOs, legal advisors).



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- **Victim's Role** - Details the victim's involvement in decision-making and their responsibilities (attending therapy or vocational programs).

7. Timeline

A clear schedule for:

- Achieving short- and long-term goals.
- Service delivery milestones (therapy sessions, legal document submissions etc.).
- Regular reviews and updates to the plan.

8. Emergency Contact Information

List of emergency numbers and contacts for:

- The lead case coordinator or social worker.
- Local shelters, medical facilities and legal representatives.
- Crisis hotlines or trafficking-specific support services.

9. Signatures



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13.5 Suggested activity for the chapter

Table 20. Designing holistic support plans for labour trafficking victims

Activity Name	'Designing Holistic Support Plans for Labour Trafficking Victims'
Type of Activity	<p>Case Study & Group Discussion</p> <p>Scenario: Yulia is a 28-year-old woman from Ukraine who fled the war and sought refuge in Bulgaria. A man offered her a job as a cleaner at a hotel, promising fair wages and safe accommodation. Upon arrival, her passport was confiscated, and she was forced to work long hours without pay. Yulia lived in cramped, shared housing with limited freedom to leave and low hygiene conditions. She suffers from physical exhaustion, untreated injuries and signs of depression. Yulia is withdrawn, distrustful and hesitant to seek help. She is identified as a VoT by law enforcement, a police officer, during a routine check. Her lack of proper identification and visible signs of distress prompt the officer to question her situation further.</p>
Duration	50 min.
Learning Objectives	<p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the key principles of trauma-informed and victim-centred care for victims of labour trafficking.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse the specific needs and vulnerabilities of labour trafficking victims, including refugees, to tailor effective support plans. Develop comprehensive support strategies that address immediate safety, medical care, legal aid and long-term reintegration for trafficking victims. Apply collaborative approaches in a multidisciplinary context to ensure holistic protection and support for victims. Evaluate the effectiveness of support measures and identify gaps in current practices to improve victim recovery and empowerment.
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A case study handout for each group. Flip charts, markers or digital collaboration tools for groups to outline their plans.
Guidelines for the facilitator	<p>Introduction (5 minutes)</p> <p>Present the case study and brief participants on the purpose of the activity.</p> <p>Group Work (20 minutes)</p> <p>Divide participants into small groups (4–6 members). Each group represents a multidisciplinary team: social workers, law</p>

enforcement, healthcare providers, labour inspectors and legal advisors.

Assign the task – to develop a comprehensive holistic support plan for Yulia that addresses her immediate safety, medical needs, legal right, and long-term reintegration.

Provide guiding questions:

- What immediate steps should be taken to ensure Yulia's safety and well-being?
- How can trauma-informed practices be applied when interacting with Yulia?
- What services and protections does Yulia need in the short term? In the long term?
- How can collaboration between agencies improve Yulia's care and recovery?

Group Presentations (15 minutes)

Each group presents in 2-3 minutes their support plan to the entire training panel, outlining their strategy and key considerations.

Facilitator-Led Discussion (10 minutes)

Lead a discussion on the approaches presented by the groups. Highlight strengths, gaps, and innovative ideas in their plans. Ask reflective questions:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did your group prioritise Yulia's needs? • What challenges did you identify in collaborating as a multidisciplinary team? • How can these strategies be applied to real-life cases?
Debriefing	<p>Summarise key insights from the activity, reinforcing the importance of tailored, victim-centred support and collaboration. Share best practices that participants can use in their professional roles.</p>
Tips for facilitator	<p>Before the exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clearly explain the purpose of the activity and its relevance to the training objectives. ○ Outline the structure, time limits and expected deliverables (victim support plans) ○ Emphasise the importance of collaboration, respectful dialogue and active participation. • Organise groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assign participants to groups, ensuring a mix of professional backgrounds for richer discussions. ○ Define roles within each group (group leader, note-taker, presenter).

During the exercise

- Facilitate engagement: Rotate between groups to observe discussions and ensure they stay focused on the task.
- Provide guidance
 - Clarify any misunderstandings about the case study or task requirements.
 - Offer probing questions if groups are struggling or veering off track:

‘How does this solution align with trauma-informed principles?’

‘What challenges might arise in implementing this plan?’
- Encourage depth: Challenge participants to think deeper with questions such as:

‘How does this plan address immediate and long-term needs?’

‘What role does collaboration play in ensuring success?’
- Monitor time
- Facilitate presentations
 - During group presentations, ensure all key points are covered.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask follow-up questions and encourage reflection. <p>After the Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide constructive feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlight the strengths of each group’s analysis and solutions, like innovative ideas or comprehensive strategies ○ Offer positive suggestions for improvement, focusing on missed aspects or areas for deeper consideration. ● Summarise and reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recap the major takeaways from the exercise, linking them back to the learning objectives. ○ Reinforce best practices in trauma-informed and victim-centred approaches. ○ Ask reflective questions to the entire group: <p>‘What was the most challenging aspect of designing the support plan?’</p> <p>‘How can these strategies be implemented in your professional role?’</p>
<p>Handouts</p>	<p>Printed key studies</p>

Variations for online implementation

- Present the case study to all participants during the main session using slides or a shared document and give instructions.
- Divide participants into breakout groups (4–6 people each) using the online platform's breakout room feature.
- Assign roles: Facilitator, Note-taker, Presenter.
- Share the virtual case study (via a shared document or a slide) with each group.
 - The exercise takes place in breakout rooms for 20 minutes.
 - Encourage participants to use collaborative tools such as: Shared documents (Google Docs) for brainstorming and recording their plan. The platform's whiteboard or annotation tools to organise ideas visually.
- Monitor the breakout rooms to ensure discussions stay focused and productive. Use the chat or 'drop-in' feature to provide guidance if needed.
- Bring all participants back to the main session.
- Group Presentations
- Facilitator-Led Discussion and Feedback
- Debrief & Wrap-up



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References	IOM, UNODC, OHCHR, ILO, NRM Bulgaria
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CASE STUDY & GROUP DISCUSSION

Yulia is a 28-year-old woman from Ukraine who fled the war and sought refuge in Bulgaria. A man offered her a job as a cleaner at a hotel, promising fair wages and safe accommodation. Upon arrival, her passport was confiscated, and she was forced to work long hours without pay. Yulia lived in cramped, shared housing with limited freedom to leave and low hygiene conditions. She suffers from physical exhaustion, untreated injuries and signs of depression. Yulia is withdrawn, distrustful and hesitant to seek help. She is identified as a VoT by law enforcement, a police officer, during a routine check. Her lack of proper identification and visible signs of distress prompt the officer to question her situation further.

- Form groups of 4–6 people.
- Roles in each group: Group Leader, Note-taker, Presenter

Task: Build a VoT support plan

- What immediate steps should be taken to ensure Yulia's safety and well-being?
- How can trauma-informed practices be applied when interacting with Yulia?
- What services and protections does Yulia need in the short term? In the long term?
- How can collaboration between agencies improve Yulia's care and recovery?



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13.6 Reflections

After you went through this chapter, think about the following questions:

- What are the most important insights you gained from this training and how will they impact your work?
- How has the training deepened your understanding of trauma-informed and victim-centred approaches?
- What challenges do you anticipate in applying the practices discussed and how can you address them?
- How can inter-agency collaboration improve the support and protection of trafficking victims in your role?
- What specific steps will you take to address the unique vulnerabilities of victims, such as refugees or displaced persons?
- Which tools or strategies from the training do you find most valuable and how will you use them in your day-to-day responsibilities?



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