

# **VULNERABLE PERSONS FROM BULGARIA AND ROMANIA WHO SELL SEXUAL SERVICES IN OSLO**

EXPERIENCES FROM PRO SENTRET  
AND OTHER ACTORS IN OSLO

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# Introduction

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In Norway, the media climate has been harsh when it comes to migrants from Bulgaria and Romania, particularly in relation to begging and other forms of street-work. Producing a report that deals with persons of a specific origin who are involved in a very stigmatised occupation, prostitution, is a precarious matter; one risks further adding stigma to a highly-ostracised group.

The aim behind this report is to map what service providers and state actors know of the group through service provision, including general life situation, health and the extent of organised crime/trafficking in this group.

The composition of nationalities among the service users of Pro Sentret has gone through rather substantial changes in the last two years. People with Nigerian origin dominated the service users from around 2005, making up around 50 % of the total of service users of Pro Sentret. However, the number of Nigerian service users have diminished since 2015.

Because of the substantial drop in Nigerians, persons of Romanian origin are now the third biggest nationality among the service users of Pro Sentret despite of the numbers being fairly stable in recent years. Bulgarians make up a smaller, but stable group.

## ***How the group is defined in the report***

It is important to point out that persons from Romania and Bulgaria who sell sexual services in Oslo, is not a homogenous group. It holds both persons who are resourceful as well as persons who lack resources and are very vulnerable to exploitation. There are also differences in which arena people from Romania and Bulgaria work from; whilst Romanians and Bulgarians now dominate street prostitution in Oslo, there are also people of the same nationalities who sell sexual services indoors and in the higher end of the spectrum of the sex market.

The focus of this report however, is on ***persons from Romania and Bulgaria who sell sexual services in the street prostitution arena in Oslo***, from now on referred to as the ***Bulgarian-Romanian group***. Although the report also contains sections on men within the group who sell sex, this report primarily deals with women.

## ***Vulnerability***

Both Pro Sentret and other service providers have expressed concern regarding what has been perceived as a high concentration of highly vulnerable persons in the Bulgarian-Romanian group, since their arrival in the Oslo street prostitution arena in the 00's. Further, we have a particular focus on *vulnerability* within this group. We have defined four indicators to determine a person's overall vulnerability, hence increasing risk of exploitation:

- Financial destitution in the home country
- Lack of education, illiteracy
- Minority background
- Reduced cognitive ability

The indicators of a person's vulnerability are not specific to a person's nationality, but are general vulnerability factors. According to Pro Sentrets' and the other service providers and state actors consulted in this mapping's experience however, there is a high concentration of people that show all or several of these vulnerability indicators within the Bulgarian-Romanian group. Some of the people within the Bulgarian-Romanian group show all factors, others just a few. Thus, even within this group, the level of vulnerability varies greatly.

The indicators tend to interact with each other; for instance, a lack of education is also often an indicator of poverty, and minority groups

are more often excluded from educational institutions than the general population. Within the Norwegian context, showing some, or all of these indicators can make it difficult for a person to fully access the welfare and health care services available; not being able to read, use the internet etc. can be a challenge for both finding services, and for providers to give information on rights or give social and medical services.

## **Data**

The material that forms the basis for this report can be divided into two parts:

- Data gathered from the different departments at Pro Sentret
- Data gathered from other service providers and state actors in Oslo who have contact with the group

The data from Pro Sentret consists of interviews with all the staff at Pro Sentret, and documentation gathered since the turn of the millennia. To supplement this, Pro Sentret also initiated a survey among the Bulgarian-Romanian group who use the drop-in centre. The response frequency was however very low, with only 9 service users answering the survey. In addition, Romanian psychologist Iuliana Sandu who interned at Pro Sentret in spring-summer of 2016 made a smaller mapping of the Romanian service users.

In October 2016, a workshop was held with various service providers and state actors in Oslo who have contact with the Bulgarian-Romanian group. The invitation was sent out to both to service providers who work directly with prostitution-related issues, but also to providers who work with poor EU migrants such as shelters and a health service providers for undocumented migrants. The rationale behind also inviting providers outside of the prostitution field, was to investigate if there were any overlaps between prostitution and other forms of clandestine work such as begging. In addition to the service providers,

During the workshop, the various actors were divided into the following groups:

**Street-based:** Møtstedet (Church City Mission), Slumstasjon (Salvation Army), Marita Women (Night café for women in prostitution), and Akuttovernatting (emergency shelter)

**State actors:** The International Organisation for Migration, UDI (the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration), The Oslo Polices 'prostitution- and human trafficking section, Salomon and Johansen (law firm)

**Health related:** Helsesenter for papirløse (health service for undocumented migrants, run by the Church City Mission and the Red Cross), Sykepleie på hjul (ambulant health service primarily for people with drug addiction, run by Fransiscushjelpen), Ullevål team (Obstetric service for high-risk pregnancies, Ullevål University hospital)

**NGO:** Nadheim (service provider for persons in prostitution, Church City mission), Røde Kors (Red Cross), Rett å bli sett (Service for persons who have been identified as victims of human trafficking, Red Cross)

The participants were sent questions to be discussed in advance to allow the participants to discuss them with other colleagues in their workplace. At the workshop, the questions were discussed in the groups, and the participants were given the opportunity to add observations and information as they wished.

After the meeting, follow-up interviews were conducted with some of the participants. Follow-up interviews were conducted with Møtstedet, IOM, the Oslo police and Helsesenter for papirløse.

Interviews were also conducted with actors who were unable to attend the meeting: *Oslo krisesenter* (women's shelter), *Rosa Prosjektet* (a service provider for victims of human trafficking), *Lauras hus* (shelter for victims of human trafficking). In addition, a telephone

interview was conducted with *Mika Göteborg*, a social service for persons with prostitution experience in Gothenburg, Sweden to gather information from our neighbouring country.

## Vulnerable migrants from South-Eastern Europe in street prostitution in Oslo

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The first South-Eastern Europeans started appearing in Oslo in the early 2000's. They were mainly Albanian women in street-based prostitution and evoked concern from the staff at Pro Sentret; the women often came from extremely impoverished backgrounds and lacked formal education. Further concern was expressed as they also appeared to be controlled by pimps and/or traffickers. They were also younger than other foreign women who were active in street prostitution at the time, but often already had long experience of prostitution before they arrived in Oslo.<sup>1</sup> This is also the first group were Pro Sentret saw examples of boyfriends acting like pimps.

Already in 2004, Pro Sentret saw a decline in the number of Albanian women in street prostitution. Instead, there was doubling<sup>2</sup> of another South-Eastern nationality: Bulgarians. The increase of Bulgarian group continued until 2006 and afterwards went into a decline (it then stabilised on today's levels of around 40 women registered).

External factors on a political macro level can influence the composition of nationalities in the Norwegian prostitution market. For instance, Pro Sentret witnessed a dramatic decline of persons in prostitution (particularly street based) with the implementation of the Norwegian Sex Purchase Act in 2009. But also, general guidelines on a political level can have an effect; in 2015, in the wake of the migrant crisis, there was increased pressure on

Norwegian International Police Immigration Service to identify deport undocumented and illegal migrants. Nigerian women, who had dominated the Oslo street prostitution arena in Oslo since the mid-00, experienced frequent identity controls by police both when working and outside. Pro Sentret have been told by service users of cases of Nigerian women being deported, but the general unease experienced by the women, being frequently stopped by police, resulted in a large number opting to leave Norway. As of January 2017, Pro Sentret's service users of Nigerian origin have more than halved in numbers.

Bulgaria and Romania's incorporation into the EU in 2007 have been linked to an increase of vulnerable migrants from these countries supporting themselves through begging and other forms of clandestine work in Norway.<sup>3</sup> Following the same logic, the acceptance of Bulgaria as a member of the EU, should have worked as a push factor for Bulgarian women who worked in prostitution. Rather surprisingly however, the EU membership seems to have had no, or even a slightly negative, effect on the number of Bulgarian women Pro Sentret encountered in prostitution. The number of Bulgarians in prostitution in Pro Sentret registers "peaked", in 2006, i.e. one year before the EU membership, with 126 women. In 2008, this number had decreased to 74. Something that most likely affected the size of the Bulgarian group negatively however, is an operation led by the Oslo Police 2007 targeting Bulgarian prostitution scene. The operation resulted eight men and three women being prosecuted for procuring.<sup>4</sup> The growth of the Bulgarian group flattened out around 2009, with around 40 persons of this origin being registered per year.

As shown, EU membership does not seem to have influenced the size of the Bulgarian population in street prostitution. For the Romanian group, the situation is slightly different. The Romanian group in street

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<sup>1</sup> Pro Sentret, 2003

<sup>2</sup> From 31 persons in 2003, to 61 in 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Djuve et al, 2015. *When poverty meet affluence*. Fafo:Oslo

<sup>4</sup> Pro Sentret, 2007.

prostitution in Oslo grew slowly from around 2005 but flattened out in 2012. However, the correlation between EU membership and Romanian women in prostitution in Oslo isn't particularly strong.

As of today, Romanian and Bulgarian women dominate the Oslo street prostitution scene. This is a major change, as Nigerian women were in majority up between 2005 and 2015. As indicated, this is not a result of a growth in the Bulgarian-Romanian group, but that the Nigerian women have virtually disappeared from this scene.

Although not in growth, the Bulgarian-Romanian group seems to be firmly established in the Oslo street prostitutions scene, giving ample opportunity to establish and improve services to meet their, often substantial, needs.

## The women's backgrounds and life situation

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Bulgaria and Romania are the poorest countries in the EU, with a BNP per capita of 6993.5 and 8972.4 USD respectively.<sup>5</sup> Prostitution is virtually always a poverty related phenomenon; most of the women in prostitution sell sex due to a lack of financial opportunity, regardless of nationality, and the Bulgarian-Romanian service users are no exception. The Bulgarian-Romanian group is however characterised by many persons who come from extreme poverty in their home countries.

Most the women from this group that Pro Sentret and other service providers encounter in street prostitution has experience of prostitution from before their arrival in Oslo. Some have started selling sex at a very early age, such as early adolescence or even

childhood. Some have sold sex in their home countries, in other European countries or both.

In Pro Sentret's experience, persons in the Bulgarian-Romanian group come from various parts of Bulgaria and Romania, but we have seen a slightly higher concentration of people originating from Bacau, Romania as well as from various locations around the Black Sea in both Romania and Bulgaria. The women Pro Sentret has contact with, seldom state that they are from larger cities; most are either from rural villages, smaller towns, or sometimes from the outskirts of larger cities. This is also confirmed by other service providers consulted in the mapping.

### ***Family situation***

The women's civil status is to a degree related to age; the older women tend to have been married. But some of the younger have however also been married, or are married still, sometimes at a very young age.

The older women are usually divorced, often violence or alcohol abuse are stated as reasons for this. The women who are divorced often describe this as providing them with a sense of freedom, as they can keep the money they make for themselves and are in control of their own finances.

With the younger women, Pro Sentret sees examples of pimp like relationships. The women themselves don't necessarily view these relationships as exploitative, but the boyfriend takes some or all the earnings from selling sex, and is in control of their economy.

Among the older women, Pro Sentret also sees examples of transactional relationships. For instance, a woman can trade household and sexual services for a place to live. There are also a few examples of women who are in a type of transactional relationships with taxi drivers, where sex is traded for taxi rides.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2015. By comparison, Norway had a BNP of 74.400 USD per capita in the same time period. [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).



### ***The children back home***

Most of the women in the Bulgarian-Romanian group are mothers. The children usually stay with grandparents or other family members in the home country. We know of a few cases where the children are in state care, but these are exceptions. Usually, the women provide for both own children and additional family members, such as parents and siblings, in the home country. In general, the women go to great lengths to make sure the children are well provided for materially, and spend a lot on toys, clothes and so on. Again, this is not unique for the Romanian-Bulgarian group, but something seen in all migrated groups, in all prostitution arenas, in Oslo.

### ***Living conditions in the home country and in Oslo***

The living conditions in the home countries are often described as marked by extreme poverty and very low standards of living.

The living situation in Norway is more complex. Pro Sentret and other service providers, know of relatively few people sleeping rough, i.e. outside. Most appear to have some form of accommodation, usually a flat-share or boarding house. However, apartments often have a very basic standard by Norwegian measures, and several people may share a very small space. In addition, the group seems to move around a lot, and living conditions are rarely stable over time. It is important to point out that precarious living conditions are not unique to the Bulgarian Romanian group; other migrated groups in the Oslo street prostitution arena tell of similar conditions.

### ***Educational level***

The educational level within the group is generally low. All actors consulted for this mapping confirms this. Among Pro Sentret's service users there are a few exceptions; some have completed primary education, sometimes secondary education and further vocational training. The majority however,

have little or no education, and some are illiterate. In Pro Sentret's experience, there is slightly higher occurrence of illiterate persons among Bulgarian women, but this can possibly be due to natural variation as it is not brought up by the other service providers consulted. The lack of education severely limits the women's opportunities in the regular labour market, both in their home countries and in Norway. Further, many of the women have little or no work experience outside of prostitution, further limiting chances of regular employment.

### ***Bulgarian and Romanian men who sell sex***

Over the years, Pro Sentret has been in contact with a small number of Bulgarian and Romanian men who sell sexual services. These men have exclusively sold sex to men, and they have mainly used Pro Sentret's health service.

Other service providers have more contact with Bulgarian and Romanian men who sell sex. Møttestedet (The meeting point, Church City Mission), report that they currently encounter more men than women who sell sex. The men tend to come in groups; they've either known each other since before their arrival in Oslo, or have become acquainted in Oslo. The men primarily sell sex in public places such as outside of the gay bar London Pub, or at the Oslo central station. Another group Møttestedet have been in contact with are young men who for periods of time live with older women. Møttestedet suspects there to be some form of sexual transaction involved in this arrangement. Helsesenter for papirløse also reports of this phenomenon. Their impression of this group of young men is that they appear to be relatively resourceful, particularly in comparison to the group who makes a living off e.g. begging.





## Minority groups

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To make any kind of reliable estimate of how many of the Bulgarian-Romanian group are from a minority background is virtually impossible; ethnicity is not registered, and not all persons wish to disclose whether they belong to a minority group or not. Estimates are therefore often based on suspicion or “hunches” by service providers, rather than actual self-reported ethnicity. Based on both Pro Sentret’s and the other service providers consulted in the mapping, the minority groups encountered within the Bulgarian-Romanian group are:

- Romanian Roma
- Bulgarian Roma
- Turkish Roma
- Turkish-Bulgarian

As part of this mapping, Pro Sentret ran a survey among the service users in the Bulgarian-Romanian group. However, the response frequency was very low, only 9 persons responded to the survey, and the results are therefore unreliable. The survey included three questions<sup>6</sup> that were meant as an indicator of ethnicity. Out of the 9 respondents, 3 stated to be Roma (2 from Bulgaria, 1 from Romania), 2 responses were inconsistent, and 1 claimed to be of Turkish-Bulgarian origin. Although the sample is small, it does correspond with Pro Sentret’s estimates of the number of persons in the Bulgarian-Romanian group who are of minority background.

The Roma are Europe’s largest minority group. Estimates of the size of the group varies between 7 and 9 million people and out of these, approximately 70 % reside in Central and South-Eastern Europe.<sup>7</sup> Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia and Slovakia have the

highest proportion of Roma, making between 6 and 11 % of the total population.<sup>8</sup>

The Roma is not a homogenous group; within the group there are different clans, languages and religious affiliations. Marginalisation and discrimination of Roma is however rife, regardless of which country the Roma reside in. In comparison to majority populations, the Roma have a substantially higher poverty ratio. According to the World Bank, 71 % of Roma in Eastern Europe live in deep poverty.<sup>9</sup> Also when it comes to educational levels, the Roma stands out from the majority populations. For instance, in Romania 70 % of Roma children were enrolled in primary school by comparison to 93, 5 % of majority populations’ children.<sup>10</sup> Further, 25 % of Romanian Roma adults were illiterate according to one study.<sup>11</sup>

The Roma usually speak the majority language of the country in which they reside. Many Roma also speak some form of *Romani*, sometimes as their first language. Language has been bought up as a challenge by both Pro Sentret and other service providers consulted for the mapping. Not all persons within the Bulgarian-Romanian group are proficient in Bulgarian or Romanian. If the first language is Romani, their Bulgarian or Romanian can be highly characterised by this, sometimes making communication with an interpreter difficult. Further, communication is not necessarily improved by employing a Romani interpreter: Romani is a heterogeneous language with large variations in dialects and expressions.

The Roma has generally assumed the majority faith of the countries in which they resided. Turkish Roma has traditionally belonged to the Muslim faith<sup>12</sup>, unlike Romanian and Bulgarian Roma who are Christians. Although this group

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> worldbank.org

<sup>10</sup> Landinfo, Utlendingsenhetens fagenhet for landinformasjon, 2014. *Romania: Situasjonen for rombefolkningen..*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gille, Cristoph, 2007. *Romanian and Bulgarians in Male Street Sex Work in German Cities*. Master dissertation, Hogeschool Zuyd, Maastricht/Metropolitan University, London.

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<sup>6</sup> The questions were: Is there any other group except Bulgarian/Romanian that you belong to; What language did you speak (with your parents) when you were little; What other languages do you now.

<sup>7</sup> Ringold et al, 2005. *Roma in an expanding Europe: Breaking the poverty cycle*.

calls themselves “Turkish”, they are not of Turkish ethnicity, but refer to themselves as such because of their religious affiliation and language (they speak a form of Turkish, with elements of Romani). Turkish Roma resides in both Romania and Bulgaria.

The Turkish-Bulgarian minority in Bulgaria make up slightly under 9 % of the total population.<sup>13</sup> Educational levels are lower and illiteracy rates are higher, within this group<sup>14</sup>, but the degree of marginalisation is not as high as with the Roma.

Some of Pro Sentret’s Bulgarian service users claim to be of Turkish-Bulgarian ethnicity. However, in some cases staff suspects that that they are Turkish Roma, based on their descriptions of living conditions in their home countries. This suspicion was also confirmed when consulting with colleagues in the outreach organisation Dose of Love, based in Burgas, Bulgaria. The reasons for not disclosing their ethnicity can be due to fear of stigmatisation and previous experiences of discrimination from authorities and health services in the home country.

## Health

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Neither Romania nor Bulgaria has universal health insurance. In Romania, all residents have a right to membership in the national health insurance, but to qualify, one need to have paid insurance premium for at least 6 months out of the last 12 months.<sup>15</sup> Emergency health care and treatment for contagious diseases are available to everyone, including those without insurance. Bulgaria has obligatory health insurance for everyone residing in the country; however, the insurance holder must have paid a minimum of 3 monthly premiums in a 36-month period to qualify.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Liakova, Marina, 2012. *The Turkish minority in Bulgaria*. Euxeinos, 2012:8

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> SOU 2016:6

<sup>16</sup> SOU 2016:6

Few of the persons in the Bulgarian-Romanian group Pro Sentret and other service providers have been in contact with have been in ordinary employment. Hence, many have not had the financial possibility to pay for insurance themselves, nor have they had an employer who paid it for them. Because they lack health insurance in their home countries, they do not qualify for a European health insurance card. Thus, as adult undocumented migrants, they are only able to access limited healthcare services that are:

1. Emergency healthcare
2. Necessary healthcare that cannot wait
3. Prevention, treatment and medicine for some infectious diseases
4. Termination of pregnancy
5. Health care for pregnant women before, during and after childbirth<sup>17</sup>

There are health care providers available that offer non-emergency health care free of charge to persons without health insurance in Oslo, such as Pro Sentret’s health department and the Church City Mission-run *Helsesenter for papirløse* (health service for undocumented migrants).<sup>18</sup> In addition, all child health clinics offer pre- and antenatal care. Ullevål team, an obstetrics team specialised in high risk pregnancy at Ullevål University Hospital, offer maternal care for undocumented migrants.

### ***The lack of health care access and its consequences***

The health needs within the Bulgarian-Romanian group are often characterised by a history of lack of access to qualified health care. This is confirmed by both Pro Sentret’s health professionals and by Helsesenter for papirløse. Patients often seek help for conditions that in themselves are non-malign,

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<sup>17</sup> Forskrift om rett til helse- og omsorgstjenester til personer uten fast opphold i riket. 2011-12-16

<sup>18</sup> Helsesenter for papirløse offers health services to all undocumented migrants, Pro Sentret only to persons with experience of prostitution.

but due to lack of treatment, potentially can have serious medical consequences.

As shown, educational levels in the group tend to be low (or very low) something that often leads to a very limited understanding of physiognomy and health. For health care professionals, this can be highly challenging in patient consultations. For instance, if the patient does not understand the relation between menstruation, ovulation and pregnancy, giving counselling on contraceptives can be an arduous task. This is not however something unique to the Bulgarian-Romanian group, but something seen in most vulnerable migrants, regardless of their origin.

### **Sexual and reproductive health**

#### **Case**

Romanian patient, 19 years old. Patient is distraught and crying. She has tested positive for pregnancy. The patient has been diagnosed with STI on several occasions, and I have informed her that recurring infections can cause reproductive complications. This has caused a lot of anxiety, as she has told me that it is very important to her to have children. She tells me that her boyfriend will lose money if she carries the baby to term, and that he wants her to terminate the pregnancy. It is her boyfriend that makes such decisions, she tells me. I try to tell her that it is only she who can make such decisions, but she does not seem to understand me. The girl talks of this as if it is a set of rules that she needs to follow, and she does not show any signs of that she views herself as an autonomous individual. I make an appointment for termination.

Most women Pro Sentret encounters in the Bulgarian-Romanian group, place great value on fertility and being able to conceive. Anxiety

and fears connected to infertility are common, and many are worried that selling sex might have affected their reproductive ability negatively. A highly problematic practise associated with this, are women who try to become pregnant to confirm their, or their partner's, reproductive abilities. Once pregnant, the pregnancy is usually terminated. In some cases, patients have a history of recurring terminations due to this type of "fertility testing". Unfortunately, neither Pro Sentret nor Helsesenter for papirløse has the capacity to offer fertility testing, something that may stunt this practice.

Generally, compliance to use barrier protection with clients in this group is excellent. The vulnerability for STI lies more in the women's private sexual lives; condom use with boyfriends is more uncommon.<sup>19</sup>

Within the group, but also in other migrated groups, we see many examples of private relationships with men, who in our view are exploitative. The women however, sees these as romantic relationships. These exploitative relationships are more common among the younger women in the group; the older women are more likely work independently and without procurers.

The case<sup>20</sup> above illustrates this kind of exploitative relationship, where the boyfriend takes some or all the income the woman makes from selling sexual services. Further, the boyfriend's demand on the woman making money, trumps her wish to keep the pregnancy. In effect, her fertility is under the control of the boyfriend. This type of situation is particularly challenging for medical staff in the consulting situation; the understanding self-determined sexuality and reproduction is alien to the patient's understanding. From the standpoint Norwegian law, the boyfriend is defined as a

<sup>19</sup> This is not specific to the Bulgarian-Romanian group, but seems to be a common practice among people in prostitution in general. See Sanders, 20--, for an in-depth discussion.

<sup>20</sup> Case retrieved from: Kock, Ida, El Nadjar, Azza, 2015. *Menneskelivet bak prostitusjonen*. Tidsskriftet 2015:09

procurer. The woman however, views him as a romantic partner.

### **Reduced cognitive ability**

Pro Sentret and other actors consulted in this mapping have expressed concern for what appears to be an overrepresentation of persons with reduced cognitive ability within the Bulgarian-Romanian group. It is highly important to point out that the causes for what can appear as a reduction in cognitive ability can be multifaceted and not necessarily congenital; physical and psychological trauma, a complete lack of education or a stressful life situation can create what appears to be reduction in cognitive functioning. Regardless of cause, persons who express a reduction are in a highly vulnerable state, particularly for exploitation.

Reduced cognitive ability complicates giving both health and social services. This can manifest itself in, for instance, patient consultations on contraception and reproductive health. But it can also pose a challenge in human trafficking cases, where the person needs to process complicated information and understand a complex judicial system. This can result in that a person will become less credible in a witness situation if, for instance, s/he is unable to give a cohesive description of a time course.

## **Social challenges**

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Particularly two of the vulnerability indicators, low education and reduced cognitive ability, play out in an unfortunate way when it comes to living in the high technology Norwegian society. This is not to say that the very same indicators do not have an impact on the groups situation where they come from, but the contrast between often very low levels of technology and living standards in their home countries and Norway is often very stark.

### **Communication and processing information**

Low educational levels, illiteracy, reduced cognitive ability, being brought up in extreme poverty and sub-standard housing can result in very poor understanding of the rules and regulations of civil society in both Norway and their home countries. Further, these people often lack fundamental proficiency in using information technology.

Challenges surfaces already in the migration process; buying tickets, getting or replacing lost travel documents, may be possible through staffed offices in person in the home countries. However, in Norway these types of tasks as a rule requires rather high levels of proficiency in reading and writing, as well as in using the internet. All information is provided in written form, using the Latin alphabet, and is mostly only available in Norwegian and English. If a person is illiterate, or only has reading proficiency in the Bulgarian alphabet, s/he is dependent on help from a third party.

Booking and paying for tickets requires both valid travel documents and usually also a credit/debit card. As a rule, the Bulgarian-Romanian group lacks one or both. In these cases, facilitation from a third party is often necessary. Pro Sentret's, and several of the service providers consulted, know of vulnerable persons within the group who are being exploited by peers and required to pay, often high sums, for this facilitation.

If a person from the group is granted residency in Norway, for instance through receiving protection as a victim of human trafficking, or if s/he manages to register as a EEA citizen applying for work, s/he is faced with multiple challenges.

Norwegian authorities, such as the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, social and child welfare agencies etc., primarily communicate in written Norwegian. Information is occasionally available in English. Processing

information by authorities can be very difficult, often resulting in non-compliance with regulations. Examples of this non-compliance can be failure to meet requirements in relation to immigration law, or failure to provide correct documentation to receive financial aid.

Other examples of failure to process information can be seen in apartment leases, work contracts etc. Both Pro Sentret and other service providers are aware of numerous cases of exploitation in relation to this. Landlords and employers may produce counterfeit contracts, or charge large sums of money to produce documents that are needed.

Many of the consulted service providers confirms Pro Sentret's experience that daily life in a high technology, modern society also poses challenges for persons who come from a background of severe poverty and sub-standard housing. The proper use of electrical appliances, such as a cooking stove, washing machine or even a WC can be completely unknown. Having lived in a hand-to-mouth, cash based economy, makes paying bills online, or participating in the digitalised economy in general, impossible. Skills such as these often needs to be learned from start. Service providers needs to address this with users, and not take skills such as these as a given, when housing is provided.

### ***Language and service provision***

Language is often a complicating factor for drop-in services. Making an appointment with an interpreter is often not realistic option, as appointments are rarely made beforehand. Further, due to chaotic living conditions, patients often do not show up for appointments that have been made. Even if a service user does show up for an appointment with an interpreter, the communication does not necessarily run smoothly. The service user can, for instance, belong to a minority group and have a different maternal language than standardized Bulgarian or Romanian. Using an

interpreter can also be challenging if the interpreter holds prejudice against persons who sell sex, and/or to Roma people. Reversely, persons within the Bulgarian-Romanian group can hold prejudices against the majority in their home country, or expect that the interpreter holds prejudices against them. In Pro Sentret's experience it can be more purposeful to use a telephone interpreter, hence avoiding one-to-one interaction between the service user and the interpreter, minimizing physical interaction between them, thus avoiding perceived stigmatization.

### ***Mistrust and fear of authorities***

Having lived their life up to this point with little or no confidence in authorities and officials, many chose to trust information distributed through peers. The problematic side of this, is that this information is often either wrong, or based on the peer's subjective experience rather than on general guidelines, hence not transferable to another individual's situation. This is often a source of frustration for both the service user and the provider; due to a long history of being abused and exploited, many holds general mistrust to their surroundings.

As shown, even if a person has residency, vulnerability factors can severely limit a person's access to Norwegian welfare services. Service providers need to be aware that these vulnerability factors create challenges in service provision that are hard to breach. Service providers need to have realistic expectations as to what is possible for these service users to master within Norwegian society. As shown in the chapter on health, persons within this group can be unfamiliar with the concept of independent choice and autonomy. Our choice of methods need acknowledge this. Combined with knowledge on trauma and PTSD, service providers are better equipped in giving adequate help to this group.







## Human trafficking, procuring and organised crime

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According to Europol, 70% of suspected human traffickers in Europe in 2013 and 2014 were EU-citizens.<sup>21</sup> Of the suspected traffickers, an absolute majority had their origin in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania or Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> Human traffickers tend to recruit their victims in their own environment, meaning that victims tend to be from this same environment. Thus, in 2013-14, most identified victims also had their origin in the very same countries.<sup>23</sup>

As shown, Romania and Bulgaria are hotspots for human trafficking in an international context, although there have been some improvements in recent years.<sup>24</sup> Also within the Norwegian context, there is ground for concern; KOM, the Norwegian police coordination unit for human trafficking, report that Romania now is the second largest nationality among identified victims of human trafficking in Norway in 2015, Bulgaria the fifth.<sup>25</sup>

Both Pro Sentret and other service providers that have been consulted for this report, have expressed concern for Romanian and Bulgarian migrants in relation to human trafficking. The concerns are based on both known trafficking cases within this group, suspicion thereof, and a high concentration of very vulnerable persons.

In terms of solid numbers, it is difficult to make estimates of the exact number of potential victims of human trafficking who have been in contact with either welfare services, police or the Norwegian judicial systems. In Oslo, 84 persons have been plaintiffs, and 62 persons have been suspects, arrested or defendants in

cases regarding human trafficking for sexual purposes.<sup>26</sup> IOM, who are responsible for the vulnerable groups returnee program, reports that there has been a reduction of persons from Romania and Bulgaria within the program in 2016. Whether this reduction reflects an actual reduction of victims of human trafficking in need of this assistance is however unknown to IOM.

### **Forms of exploitation**

As indicated, there is an overrepresentation of highly vulnerable persons within the Bulgarian-Romanian group, due to lack of education, extreme poverty, early marriage/pregnancy, illiteracy, and reduced cognitive abilities. These same vulnerability indicators are also risk factors for becoming a victim of human trafficking; who is trafficked is rarely coincidental, as traffickers consciously target persons in highly vulnerable situations.<sup>27</sup>

The prostitution and human trafficking unit at the Oslo Police have seen shifts in the modus operandi of Bulgarian-Romanian traffickers and procurers in recent years. Previously, traffickers tended to organise a group of several women, but in recent years, the police have seen more examples of the trafficker/procurer only organising one individual. According to the Oslo Police, the trafficker/procurer specifically targets women in their home countries who are in a precarious situation, often divorced women with one or two children. The trafficker/procurer then establishes a relationship with the women, tying her to him through emotional dependency. This form of exploitation is particularly difficult to investigate for the police, as the woman is emotionally tied to the trafficker/procurer and have a sense of loyalty towards him.<sup>28</sup> This type of exploitation is, according to the police, an adaptation in method in order to stay under the police's radar; if they organise several women, they are more likely to catch the

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<sup>21</sup> 2015, Europol. *Situation Report: Trafficking in human beings in the EU.*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Department of State, United States of America, 2015. *Trafficking in persons report.*

<sup>25</sup> KOM, 2015. *Rapport fra Koordineringsenheden for ofre for menneskehandel.*

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<sup>26</sup> Strategisk stab, Oslo politidistrikt, 2015. *Trender i kriminalitet 2016-15: Udfordringer i den globale byen.*

<sup>27</sup> 2015, Europol. *Situation Report: Trafficking in human beings in the EU.*

<sup>28</sup> Polismyndigheten, 2016. *Människohandel för sexuella och andra ändamål.*

attention of the police and is also more likely to fetch a higher sentence if caught. Also, the police report that they see less of visible physical violence, and more of psychological violence and pressure, again an adaptation to avoid detection by authorities. As a result, the woman is less likely to see herself as a victim of exploitation, hence less inclined to accept help from the police. The observations by the Oslo Police are confirmed by Europol as a type of exploitation in growth. Europol refers to it as the lover-boy method, and is often seen in cases of trafficking of minors. Europol also confirms the drop in physical force and violence, in favour of “soft methods” such as the loverboy phenomena.

These soft-methods are also observed by Pro Sentret and other service providers in Oslo. As for the police, this poses a challenge to aid and support to women who are suspected to be victims of human trafficking. To motivate her to press charges against her exploiter is severely stunted if she views him as a partner. Pro Sentret and other service providers have also seen examples of exploitation carried out by family members, something that makes motivating the person to press charges even more difficult.

Because of low educational levels, possibly reduced cognitive abilities, and a general mistrust against authorities as described in the previous chapter, victims of human trafficking from the Bulgarian-Romanian group, often fare poorly in accepting and utilising the various forms of help and protection offered by Norwegian authorities.

### ***Roma people and trafficking***

As indicated earlier, a substantial percentage of the Bulgarian-Romanian group are suspected to be of Roma origin. The Roma are also particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. Although exact numbers are unavailable, ethnicity is often not registered, there are estimates by the IOM that between 35, 4 %

and 42,6 % of Bulgarians being trafficked for sexual purposes are of Roma origin.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Prostitution and other forms of clandestine work in relation to human trafficking and organised crime***

The correlation between human trafficking and clandestine work, such as begging and prostitution, has been a reoccurring topic in Norwegian and Nordic debate in both the media and in political discussions.

In 2015, research institute Fafo published the report *When poverty meets affluence*.<sup>30</sup> The report concluded that there were low levels of human trafficking and organised crime among Romanian and Bulgarian beggars and street workers in the Scandinavian capitals Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen. The report has however been subjected to criticism, particularly from the Norwegian police.

Kripos, the National bureau of crime investigation, came to other conclusions in their 2011 report on organised crime in Norway.<sup>31</sup> The report states that clan- and family-based networks organise and exploit persons, including minors, for begging and petty theft. The Kripos report also claimed that exploitation for begging can be far more extensive than documented by authorities.<sup>32</sup>

In April 2017, the public and political debate on organised crime and clandestine work gained new fuel by the NRK<sup>33</sup> documentary *Lykkelandet* (The fortune country). The documentary was based on covert observations of a Romanian group in Bergen and showed how begging was being used as a front for organised crime that included theft and procuring.

<sup>29</sup> IOM, 2005, *Second annual report 2005*.

<sup>30</sup> Djuve et al, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Kripos, 2011. *Den organiserte kriminaliteten i Norge: Trender og utfordringer i 2011-2012*.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Norwegian public service broadcast.

For this mapping, Pro Sentret wanted to investigate whether service providers and state actors had knowledge of overlaps between prostitution, organised crime/ human trafficking and other types of clandestine work, such as begging. Further, we also wanted to investigate if there were any indications of organised crime and human trafficking among persons who sell sex. All actors consulted in this mapping stated that an overlap between prostitution, organised crime/human trafficking and other clandestine work exists. The extent of overlap however is unclear, and seem to be small.

Pro Sentret are aware of a handful of cases where women have either combined selling sex with begging, or have started selling sex when income from begging was perceived as too small. However, these cases are rare and not at all typical for this group. Other service providers share this view; it does occur, but rarely so.

Other service providers within the prostitution field reports that they have seen indications of persons that organise Bulgarian-Romanian street prostitution also organises for instance street musicians. These persons, both the organisers and the organised, are primarily of Roma origin. Lawyers specialising in trafficking cases, also have knowledge of cases of multilateral exploitation where prostitution has been one of the variables, such as networks that organise both, for instance, begging and prostitution. Service providers in the human trafficking field also confirm that they have knowledge of multilateral exploitation, and know of cases where women have been exploited for both begging and prostitution. In these cases, family members have often been involved in the exploitation.

Drop-in service providers, such as emergency shelters, report that they occasionally suspect an overlap of prostitution and other forms of clandestine work. They also see examples of a form of grey zone prostitution, where sexual services are traded for, for instance, shelter, within the group. These people live in a kind of

mixed economy, where prostitution can be a part together with selling knick-knacks, illegal substances etc.

## Closing remarks: The way ahead

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The challenges of the Bulgarian-Romanian group that is the focus of this report are not necessarily fundamentally different from other migrated groups who sell sex in the street arena in Oslo; low educational levels, a background of extreme poverty etc., is something we see in, for instance, Nigerian women as well. Since Nigerian women have virtually disappeared, street prostitution in Oslo is now dominated by persons from Bulgaria and Romania. As shown, the Bulgarian-Romanian group is not showing any signs of growth, but neither is it decreasing; the number of services users registered at Pro Sentret has been stable in recent years. Being a stable group, and one who dominates street prostitution in Oslo, it will most likely lead to more persons from the group encountering various service providers and state actors.

All service providers, including Pro Sentret, that have been consulted in this report have expressed concern regarding the high concentration of extremely vulnerable persons within this group. Considering that Bulgaria and Romania are hotspots for human trafficking within the EU, this further strengthens the reason for concern.

Although Romania and Bulgaria are members of the EU, poverty levels in certain social strata and among minorities are comparable to countries in Global South. On a political macro level, Norway and other countries need to put pressure on Romania and Bulgaria to improve the living standards of certain groups, particularly the Roma.

Poor persons from Romania and Bulgaria now seem to be a permanent feature on Oslo's

streets, whether it is beggars, bottle collectors or people who sell sex. As shown, many within this group are in highly precarious life situations and are in great risk of exploitation.

To single out a group like we have done in this report, is of course problematic; especially a group that is already ostracised, but service providers and state actors therefor need to be equipped with tools to meet the needs within this group.

During this mapping, the most frequent challenge stated by the actors consulted, was that of communication. Language difficulties were frequently mentioned, but further, communication was often stunted by extremely low educational levels within the group, including illiteracy. To produce information material adapted to persons with no, or very low levels of education, is therefor of extreme importance, particularly information regarding sexual- and reproductive health.

As mentioned in the report, Bulgarian and Romanian men sell sexual services in Oslo, primarily to men. Although some service providers, such as Møtstedet, have some contact with this sub-group, knowledge is very limited. Considering that MSM are defined as a high-risk group for STI, we need more knowledge of the general situation of these men.

All actors consulted in this mapping have stated that they are aware of exploitation, and to some degree, human trafficking within the Bulgarian-Romanian group. Concrete and updated knowledge on organisation within the group is however sparse, and often contradictory. We suggest that more research and knowledge is needed, ideally through collaboration with stake holders and service providers in Bulgaria and Romania.

### ***Suggestions for activities***

1. Develop information material for persons with very low levels of education and illiteracy on:
  - Sexual and reproductive health
  - Safety at work
  - Rights in Norway for EU citizens

This information material will be developed by Pro Sentret and external expertise.

2. Initiate a mapping of Bulgarian and Romanian men who sell sex in Oslo. Pro Sentret and Møtstedet will be responsible for this.
3. Initiate collaborations with Romanian and Bulgarian organisations to improve our knowledge and understanding of the Bulgarian-Romanian group

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