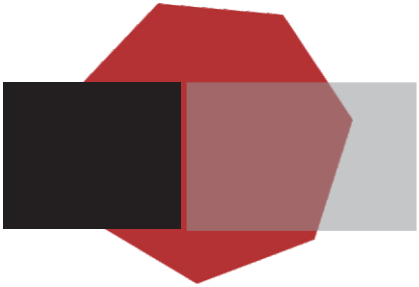
Ariadne

Against Trafficking in Human Beings in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe



LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

Case stories of former victims of trafficking re/integrated in the social life

NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE CENTRE

QENDRA PSIKO-SOCIALE "VATRA"

ALBANIAN REHABILITATION CENTRE FOR TRAUMA AND TORTURE

Ariadne network

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Case stories of former victims of trafficking re/integrated in the social life

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&
Albanian Rehabilitation Centre
for Trauma and Torture (ARCT)

VATRA

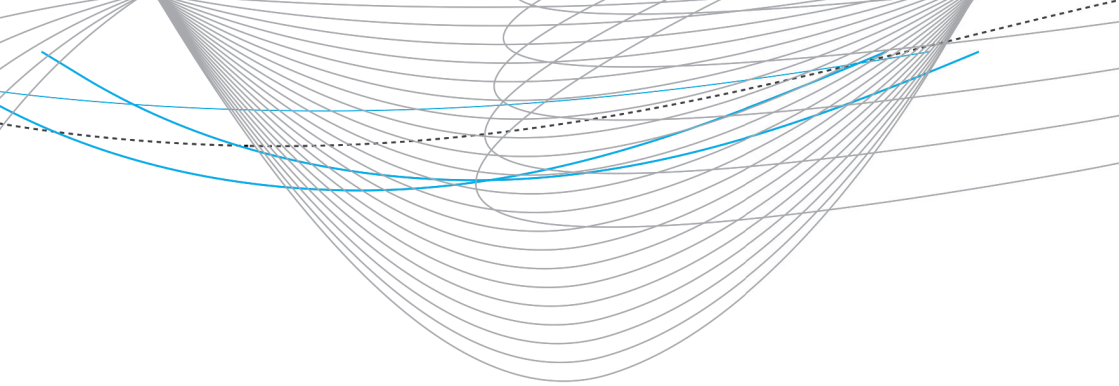
Since 2001 "Vatra" Centre has been working in the field of assisting the long-term reintegration of victims of trafficking. This manual contains stories of cases of girls and women former victims of trafficking, who have been assisted by Vatra over the years and have already been reintegrated in the social life. Apart from "Vatra", many other state and non-state actors have been included in this process to support the services needed by the victims.

ARCT

The Albanian Rehabilitation Centre For Trauma and Torture (ARCT) represents a non-for-profit, non-political and non-governmental organization registered and operating in Albania since 1994, designing and implementing programs which aim at "contributing in building a democratic society without use of torture and social justice in a country.

ARCT offer

- Rehabilitation Services
- Torture Prevention Programs
- Lobbying and Advocating for Social Justice, etc…



The purpose for the publication of this manual is to provide information and relate messages to the community and groups of interest that the reintegration process of victims of trafficking is a difficult, but not an impossible process. The commitment and cooperation of state and non-state service providers, responsible institutions for the implementation of the national and international legislation and mechanisms and community members is a guarantee for a successful reintegration process.

This publication has been produced within the framework of the 5th Project of ARIADNE network "Developing effective (re)integration models for trafficked persons in the Western Balkans", implemented in 4 participating countries of South-Eastern Europe/Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia&Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece) by the Human Rights Defence Centre (KEPAD), Greece, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With the aim prreservation of confidentiality, throughout the stories have been used fake names of beneficiaries, countries and cities..

CASE 1

Story

Linda, 32 years old, mother of two children (4 and 2 years old), comes from a rural area of a district in the Middle Albania. After 5 years of marriage, she decides to get divorce, due to physical and psychological violence used against her and against the children by her ex-husband. For this decision, Linda was rejected by her mother and brother (who took care of his mother). She only found support from her sister who lived in Greece. Jobless, homeless and without family support, Linda decides to go to Greece to her sister. It should be mentioned that the economic and living conditions of her sister were below the normal living level.

..... *We often slept without dinner. Only my sister's husband worked, who often cursed us for the fact that I was becoming a burden to his home and threatened me that if did not find a job and a house he would evict me together with my two children from his house. My sister was crying for my destiny and that of my children, but also for her inability and powerlessness to support me.....*

After staying nearly 3 months at her sister' s, Linda meets an Albanian citizen who initially offers her security for herself and her children saying that he would keep them at his house. Linda accepts the support of this person immediately, being under the continuous pressure of her brother-in-law.

..... the first month I felt like I was living in a fairy tale. He bought me and my children new clothes. We ate well and he fulfilled every wish of the children... After one month, he told me that we would leave Greece and return to Albania , because there he had a house and a business which was being run by his brother .....

Linda agreed and the co-tenant transferred her and her children in a tourist city of Albania.

..... When we went there the city was very beautiful and I was enthusiastic. At the house where he took us there were one man and another woman younger than me expecting us. The woman had one child, a 13-year old girl.....He introduced them as his brother and sister in law (wife of his brother.....) I did not know that going in that place was the restart of my suffering, but this time an even greater and more horrible suffering.....

In fact, as Linda tells afterwards, the "sister-in-law" and her daughter were victims of this "charitable man" and his friend and they had no family ties. He began to threaten and force Linda to work during the night "as

a sex worker' and beg during the day together with her children. In this way they would earn the money to feed themselves and at the same time make profit for the man.

.... taking the children out on the street and working as a "prostitute" was the most awful thing I could do .. I refused but then he started to beat me and my children and to threaten me that if did not obey to him he would kill my children. The other woman told me to obey because she had refused at first but what he did with her 13-year old daughter in the woman's presence was terrible.....

Under threats, Linda started working during the night and in the afternoon, she took her children out on the street and together with them she begged in an area that the man claimed was his and his friend's..... When the two women and their children did not earn the profits the two men wanted, the men used to beat the women brutally.....

.... Me and the other woman had the duty to work during the night and give all the money we earned to them.....each of us slept with on average of 10 clients per night. In the afternoons we had to go out with the children to beg and from the incomes we earned, they gave us only money for food and bought us clothes.....

The two traffickers arranged everything and found the clients and places where Linda and the other woman were taken to be sexually exploited.

.....I often said to my friend that we had to think about a way how to escape from that life, primarily for the sake of our children.....She was frightened and terrified about what could happen then if we attempted to escape. She said to me that nobody was expecting her at home.....her parents had died and there was no one to support her. On the other hand, I was almost in the same conditions as her. I felt sorry for my friend, myself and for our children.....

One night Linda asked one of the clients to speak on the phone, through which she called her other sister who was married in a nearby village to her place of origin and told her everything that had happened. Her sister promised her that very soon she would try to go and take her together with her children, but firstly she had to speak with her husband.

Linda tells her about the place where she and her children went out to beg and that she would find her there every afternoon, whenever she came. After a week her sister goes to the place where Linda begged and together with her and her children they went to the place of origin where her mother and her married brother lived with his children.

.....I could not believe that me and my children had escaped. When my mother learned what had happened, she had asked my sister to take me and help me to return back home …...

Linda's mother and brother initially refused but when her sister told them about the conditions where she had found her sister and her children, they said that "we do it for her children so that they will not remain

beggars on the streets of Europe because if it was for Linda she could continue to work as a "prostitute" because that is the life she deserves for having left her husband..".

During her stay at her brother 's house, her exploiter and trafficker often called and threatened her and her family that if she said anything to the police, he would "wipe her family off the face of the earth".

.... One day, my sister in law (the wife of my brother) said to me that she had heard of a centre which provided assistance to women and girls who were in my conditions.....She told me that a friend of hers who worked at the social services at the Commune could connect me to this centre.

Upon contacting the employee of the Commune where Linda lived, she suggested to Linda that it would be better to tell her story to the police so that the man who exploited her and her children be faced with the law. Likewise, the Commune employee connected with our centre to refer the case together with her children in order to be included in the long-term assistance program.

... at first I was doubtful if I should denounce him or not. I had doubts that he would be convicted. If not, what would have happened to me and to my children? However, in my conditions, given that I had caused problems to my family, and having them threatened because of me, I took the decision to go to "Vatra" Centre and at the same denounce the person who destroyed my life and the lives of my children. My brother and my mother agreed with my decision....

Upon notification of the Commune employee, Vatra sent the social worker for the case interview, identification and information about the services provided. After Linda agreed with what was told by the social worker, she was accommodated together with her children in "Vatra" shelter.

Two days after arriving at the shelter, Linda accepted to initially go through the formal interview, conducted by the police and the state social service and afterwards made the denunciation against the trafficker.

Assistance and reintegration

Following accommodation in the shelter, Linda together with her children was provided with safe housing; the package of basic services for life; needs were assessed by the specialists such as: medical assistance, psychological assistance, legal assistance, vocational training and education etc.

Linda and the children adapted to the new premises immediately and felt safe. Recurrent counselling with the psychologist and case manager started to give results in calming their psychological situation. Linda was active in the activities carried out within the shelter and was involved proactively.

....being accommodated in the shelter, first it was sufficient to me to think that now my children were safe and that there he would not dare touch them...

During the first two months of stay in the shelter, Linda was fully engaged with the criminal proceedings against the trafficker, where

she had the support of the Centre's lawyer throughout this process and who accompanied her in each interrogation session at the Prosecution Office and regularly informed her about the process. With the arrest of the trafficker, the risk for her life and that for her children was revaluated under the assistance of the Prosecution of Serious Crimes and Police.

Upon the moderation of risk, Linda was actively involved in the activities foreseen in her assistance plan. These activities required her commitment and that of her children even outside the shelter such as: children's registration and attendance of kindergarten, registration and attendance of the vocational course of hairdressing, participation in the socio-cultural activities in different cities of Albania etc.

After nearly 8 months, the criminal proceedings were concluded and her trafficker was sentenced by the Court of Serious Crimes to 16 years of imprisonment.

... I was very happy about the decision I made to denounce the trafficker, but at the same time for accepting the help I was offered by the Commune employee and your Centre..... I do not know what I would have done without your support and the protection of the police and the Prosecution...

With the conviction of the trafficker and the guarantee by the institutions of justice that Linda and her children were now at no risk, she passed to

the next phase of reintegration. She was housed in a rented apartment (paid by "Vatra"), and in cooperation with the Directorate of Employment she was employed as a hairdresser assistant at a beauty salon in town.

For 6 months Linda was paid by "Vatra" considering it as "learning at work". This was done in order to expand her knowledge about the profession and, by virtue of an agreement that Vatra signed with the business, Linda would continue to work after the 6 months of internship. Her children continued to attend kindergarten which was offered free of charge by a Catholic religious institution, being a great help to Linda for the education and nurturing of her children.

Nowadays, after two years, Linda is still working at the same beauty salon, where she has gained confidence in her job and profession, she has made new friends and despite the challenges and problems that arise during her daily life, she feels assured for her life and the lives of her children.

....I never thought I would re-establish a strong relationship with my mother and brother. I am very happy to talk to them and thank them for believing in me and for helping me together with my sister. I thank God for being good to me and for bringing me closer to the people that saved my life and the lives of my children. I really wish that no other girl or mother relives my story.

....But something concerns me. I do not know what has happened to that woman and to her daughter with whom I was in that city where I lived the most painful and most terrible part of my life.... I do not have her contacts...I would really love to tell her how and where me and my children are today.....

CASE 2

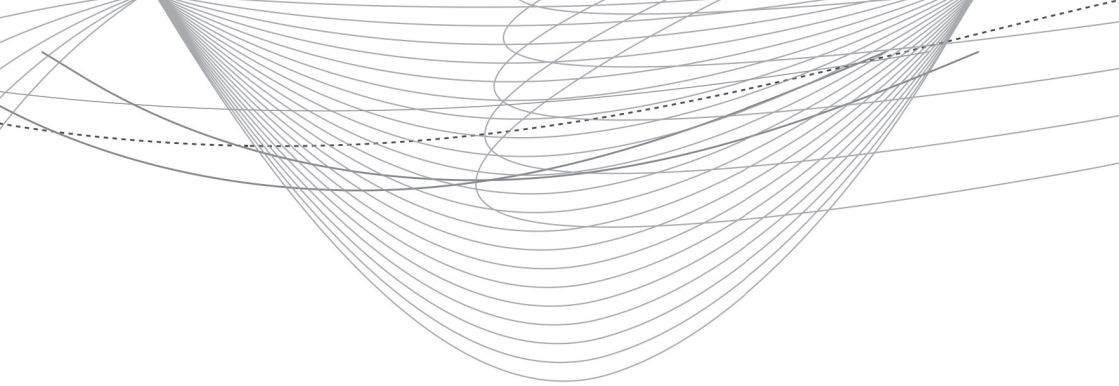
Story

Nevila is a 25-year old girl, who comes from a city in Central Albania. At the age of 16, due to economic reasons she quits high school and finds a job in a tailoring enterprise of the city.

While at work, Nevila makes the acquaintance of a guy who promises to marry her. Her parents agreed and Nevila gets engaged. After 4 months, her fiancé asks her to leave Albania together in order to work in one of the European Union countries, in seek for a better life.

Very soon a fake passport was arranged and she found herself travelling with two other persons escorting her, without even notifying her family.

.....By car, in complete darkness, we headed to the city of S. They threatened me continuously, telling me to say to my parents on the phone that I was headed to Kosovo with a guy I knew. That night I spoke to my father whose voice was trembling and repeatedly asked me where I was. But



I remained still as a statue and could not tell him that I was in danger ……..

After two days, they crossed the border to Greece, and thence left to Italy by ferry. They never came across with the police; Nevila's "fiancé" kept her passport and they didn't have any problems in any of the border crossing points.

From Italy a long odyssey of travelling by train began: Italy-Germany–France–Sweden-Norway being the final destination.

During all this time, Nevila was sexually abused by the escorts and exploited in the hotels and motels of the cities of the countries where they have passed and stayed for a few days …..

……..*I had to sleep with over 20 clients per day, in order to earn the profits they required*…….

In Norway, after a period of exploitation, Nevila finds an opportunity and denounces her exploiters to the police. Her denouncement set the police of the two countries in motion and made possible the arrest of the traffickers and procurers.

Upon her repatriation in Albania, due to security and protection issues and also with the approval of her family, Nevila is referred to Vatra Shelter,

in order to be treated with the relevant rehabilitation and reintegration services.

Assistance and reintegration

Initially she was withdrawn, distrustful of the people surrounding her and closed in herself as a result of the trauma she had suffered

Recurrent individual counselling with the Centre's psychologist and with the case manager started to gradually affect the psychological situation of Nevila. She had various health issues and for this reason she was assisted by the shelter's doctor as well as by specialized doctors depending on her health issues.

With the passing of time, Nevila started to adapt herself to the shelter, the social workers and the other beneficiaries as well. She enrolled in the tailoring course and completed it successfully, together with the computer course.

.... I felt well when attending the course. Neither the instructor, nor the rest of the women and girls at the training were suspicious or prejudicial. I was learning new things and I was making new friends every day....

Upon completion of the courses and with the skills that she possessed such as: communication and organization of works, Vatra employed

Nevila in one of the most active organizations operating in Vlora. In this organization Nevila felt useful, because the work was related to people in need and she liked helping them.

.... In certain moments while working in this organization, every time I met girls who had problems with their families I always remembered my story. I felt well when my advice was heard with such attention from these girls....

She also enrolled herself in a part-time high school and currently has completed all the educational cycle.

..... Restarting school was what I wanted most. My parents made me drop out of school without my wish. I did not think I would start it again....

Nevila was treated in the shelter for nearly 1 year, also due to life threatening problems she suffered from the traffickers she denounced and who were convicted by the Albanian Court. Then she passed to semi-independent living in a rented flat paid by the program for 1 year. After one year Nevila continued her life independently. Currently she has found her life companion, she has created her own family, she is the mother of a child, and works in a Travel Agency, in a city in the South of Albania. Our contacts with Nevila are continuous and she continues to consider Vatra as part of her family.

An old proverb says: "*When you fall down .....it is difficult to rise*……."

When we asked Nevila today, a mother with a regular life, with the skills and strength to face every difficulty and, moreover, with the desire and love for life, she replied:

..... *Difficult..... but not impossible.....*

Case 3

Story

Valbona is a 21 year old girl who comes from a remote northern village. For the past years she has been living in a southern city of Albania. Her trafficking story begins when she meets her boyfriend (who later becomes her fiancé), when Valbona was in the 8th grade. Her family did not approve their relationship from the beginning, because they had heard that the relatives of this guy dealt with "illegal" jobs, but Valbona had decided to get engaged to him.

.....For about 8 months, our relationship was good, it seemed that the fiancé loved and respected me and his visits in my family had become more frequent.....But with the passing of time, I noticed instability and unjustified jealousy in his character and felt bad.....

After the proposal of her sister-in-law, Valbona goes to live to Switzerland. She lives there for about one month, helping her sister-in-law to take care of the children. Her fiancé goes to Switzerland too and they both settle in Geneva because another friend of her fiancé lived there together with his wife and they could help them to find work.

.....At their home, I realized that the woman worked on the streets, forced by the friend of my fiancé and I was shocked. My fiancé could not find a job and asked me to work also on the streets for some time until things improved. I could not believe my ears, because in my mind had never crossed the idea that the man I loved so much was one of those people about whom I had previously heard such stories. Threats and pressure were continuous, until one day the fiancé physically assaulted me and threatened me that if I would not work on the street, even my family would be in danger.....

Facing threats and violence, shame, and fear for her family, Valbona is forced to prostitute herself, in shock of her own fate. During all the time, for about 5 months, she is supervised by her fiancé and his friends and brutally violated and exploited, until one day she is seized by Police for lack of documentation and together with the fiancé they return to Albania.

.... At the moment when the police seized me, I thought I was safe.... I felt bad because I could not denounce him there, as I was afraid, but for one thing I was sure ... I would return to my family and my sufferings would be over....

Once repatriated, the fiancé threatens Valbona to not tell her family and nobody else about the story of exploitation in Switzerland and, constrained to do so, Valbona remained silent for several months. The relationship with her fiancé was not like before and after a few months, helped by her aunt, Valbona together with her parents go to Greece to work in seasonal jobs. After some time her fiancé goes to Greece too and lives together with them.

... In the first months of our stay in Greece, it seemed as if the fiancé had changed, he was very lovely, respectful and very quiet, but after 4-5 months he became aggressive and violent towards me and therefore my parents helped me to definitely separate from him. I felt very relieved and returned to Albania with my parents.....

Upon return to Albania, Valbona was constantly harassed by her ex-fiancé, who started to threaten even her family members. For this reason, the father of Valbona denounces him in the District Police and initiated the investigation on this case immediately. At the Police Headquarters, Valbona told the truth about her story and the parents learned the tragic story of their daughter.

.... I would never have wanted my parents to learn my story that way. The pain I saw in their eyes will remain long in my memory ... In those moments I just wanted to disappear.....

Her parents supported her and required her protection from Police, as their daughter felt threatened.

Assistance and reintegration

After Valbona was informed about the services in the community by the police, with her will and support of her parents, she was accommodated at "Vatra" shelter. Together with the multidisciplinary team her needs were assessed and the reintegration plan was compiled.

.....In the shelter I felt well from the beginning. I wanted to spend time in a creative way and think positively about the future. The worst had passed... I wanted to show myself and my family that I could make it.....

Valbona, was supported with all the necessary psycho-social, medical and legal assistance. She attended and successfully completed the hairdressing course, showing good professional skills.

... My dream to become a hairdresser finally came true... Every day after coming back from the course, I practiced the acquired knowledge. My friends in the shelter and the social workers became my first "customers"..... I felt very happy that everything was going well...

During the stay in the shelter, Valbona was involved proactively in all the activities organized within and outside the sheltering facilities, in terms of increasing her social skills as well as her emotional wellbeing, self-esteem and management of daily life. Family relationships strengthened more and more, and Valbona felt safer.

After 6 months of Valbona's stay in the shelter, her family moves to another city and she decides to safely return to her family to continue life normally. With the help of Vatra's staff she enrolled to complete the part-time high school. A year later, the criminal case against the exploiter, who was sentenced by the court, ended.

.... I felt very relieved that he got the deserved punishment ...The anxiety and all my suffering and that of my family finally were finally over....

Unable to find work in a hairdressing salon, Valbona initially was employed at a Call Centre business and worked together with her sister for 5 months.

... My knowledge of the Italian language helped me to succeed at the job, but my dream was to open my beauty salon.....

Valbona' s sustainability during the reintegration process, her family support and the good professional skills she possessed, led Vatra' s staff to support her in establishing a small hairdressing business in the city where she lived.

.... The salon that today bears my name was my dream, but also the pride of my parents. Finally I am showing them that I can make it and I am sure that now I can successfully face any challenge that might come forward...

Case 4

Story

Klara, 24 years old, comes from a city in the South of Albania. At the age of 18 meets and falls in love with a guy from Central Albania. The family learns about this and strongly opposes to her relationship with this unknown person. Frightened by the family's opinion, but also in love, she leaves with this guy and moves in with his family. There she learns that her boyfriend was married and had two children, who lived with his wife in another city. Klara's family reported to the police that their daughter was missing and after a few days of searching for her, she returns to her family. Even after the return, her boyfriend asked for her again.

... He promised me eternal love and I, being too young and immature, thought no further. I left my family for the second time, never to return there any more...

Klara leaves her family again and her boyfriend convinces her to leave the country, in order for their relationship to be more secure and to build a new life. They leave the country using forged documents to cross the

borders. After crossing the border with Italy, they went to France at the house of some friends of her boyfriend.

...There started my long suffering...In that house, where I lived for 6 months, many boys who exploited some girls for prostitution came in and out....., I did not know that I would have the same fate. They accompanied me in shops that I had never seen, to buy clothes that I could have never worn in other conditions... How shameful! They forced me to prostitute myself in places I had never imagined... My boyfriend violated me every night and again promised me that this would not last for a long time, until our financial situation improved....

After 6 months of exploitation in France, Klara together with her exploiter go to the Netherlands where they initially live in a house with his relatives.

... There, he introduced me as his wife and they all treated me as such, but no one knew that I was just the person he exploited...

Following that, they go to another house and since then, for about 6 years Klara is sexually exploited by her "boyfriend".

.... Every day I was exploited in brothels, and was being watched so that I would not leave from there. I did not tell my nationality, I had another name. I could not communicate with my family, but occasionally only with my aunt. Even

when I spoke to her, I could not tell her anything, I only deceived her, as he was close to me and threatened me... The years went by this way and I lost all hopes...

During this period Klara undergoes two abortions, as a result of the physical violence used by her exploiter.

....I remember the horror of abortions in hospital. Apart from losing my children, I remember the violence, the punches in the stomach, the threatening to not tell the bitter truth at the hospital...

The long waited occasion to escape from the several years of exploitation comes when police seizes the trafficker for lack of documentation and returns him to Albania. Then Klara finds the opportunity to go to police and denounce the exploitation. Afterwards she is repatriated and denounces the exploitation in police. When her parents learn the truth, they try to take Klara home, but her brothers do not accept her, because of their mentality and Klara decides to be accommodated in "Vatra" shelter.

.... When I returned to Albania, I was looking forward to coming back to my home and I could not believe that my brothers denied me... I felt sorry for my parents, because despite the great wish to take me, they were obliged by my brothers to not keep me near....This was my second loss.....

Assistance and reintegration

After accommodation in the shelter, Klara has been included in

the reintegration programme. Once her needs were assessed, the reintegration plan has been compiled together with her. The stabilization and improvement of her psycho-emotional situation has been enabled through psychological assistance. Due to problems in the reproductive health, she was supported with medical assistance for the sexually transmitted infections and Hepatitis B.

.... At first I felt lonely; I was often upset and refused to participate in activities. Lack of family and my psychological situation prevented me from living as everyone else ... It took me a long time to recover from the trauma of my life...

With the assistance of the multidisciplinary team, Klara managed to set goals for her reintegration. Her social and communication skills were improved. She was more proactive and participant in every activity organized within and outside the shelter. Also she acquired knowledge of the Italian language and the computer, through the services provided in the framework of our Centre's projects. She has been counselled and encouraged repeatedly by the social workers to increase the level of attention and patience towards the tasks assigned in the professional and living context.

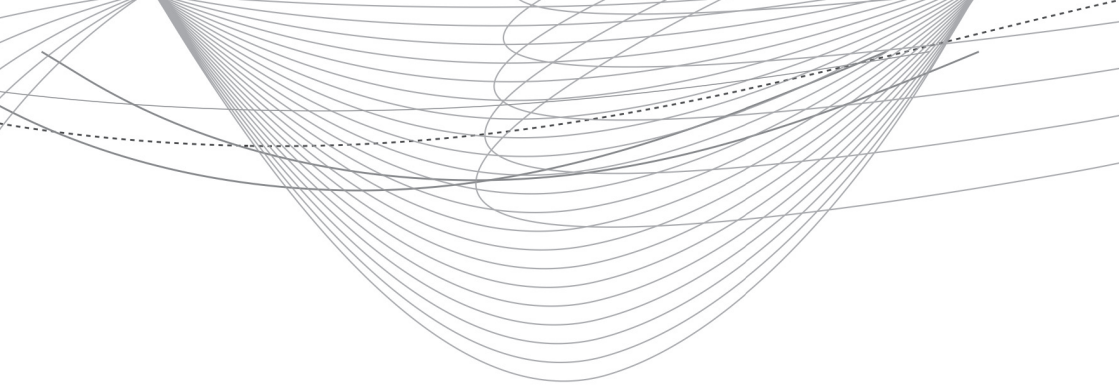
Meanwhile she started to attend the vocational course of hairdressing, which she completed successfully.

With the help of the social group, her family relationships were improved, but only with the parents, because the brothers continuously refused to contact her. Meetings with the parents, at the premises of Vatra were regular and this made Klara feel well.

She was also enabled to institute criminal proceedings through the legal assistance scheme. But what further hampered her hope for reintegration was the failure to arrest the trafficker, who had managed to hide from the police. His relatives constantly threatened Klara's relatives, so that she withdrew the charges.

....Time after time, staying in the shelter seemed satisfactory to me, in those cases when my hope for a normal life grew, and time after time it seemed difficult, when I learned that that man was free, and me and my family were threatened.....Sometimes it was impossible for me to manage my sadness and sometimes I thought to put an end to my life... But with the help of the social workers and my parents, I regained confidence in the future again...

Having lived in the shelter for a year and a half, risk evaluation for Klara's life was made through the efforts of Vatra's staff, the Prosecution Office and the Foreign Diplomatic Body in Albania. Failing to arrest the trafficker and taking into consideration the level of dangerousness of the criminal group where he operated, Klara's safety was enabled through her inclusion in the Witness Protection Programme.



Although Klara's reintegration in Albania was not possible, she was successfully integrated in a foreign country where she became part of a new community.