



THE JOURNEY FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR

The essence of human trafficking is the denial of personal freedoms. Victims of human trafficking are denied the most basic of freedoms, such as choosing where to live and work, and being free from harm or threats of harm to themselves or their families. Victim assistance programs must be carefully crafted and flexible, incorporating victims' input into decisions relating to housing, employment, residency, and disclosure. With the right support and services, trafficked persons can move beyond their victimization and forward with their lives. With the right legal structures and support, they can see justice done. With the right opportunities, they can make choices about the lives they want and even use their experiences to help guide and strengthen efforts to fight this crime.

Governments play a vital role in facilitating this process. The following "good practices" set the stage for a victim-centered approach to care and enhance opportunities for trafficked persons to make choices for themselves. While a government institution will never be able to reverse what has happened to someone abused in a situation of modern slavery, governments can aid an individual's recovery by supporting each victim on his or her journey toward becoming a survivor.

OPEN SHELTERS

An effective shelter promotes, rather than hinders, a victim's freedom of movement. Victims should not be detained in shelters, yet in order to stay in many government shelters throughout the world, victims are forced to surrender their right to freedom of movement. Some shelters prohibit them from leaving, others require that if they leave they are accompanied by shelter personnel, and in others, they must obtain the permission of shelter staff to leave. Instead they should be allowed to stay, leave, and return freely. Shelters should be safe and secure, and measures should be put in place to ensure that security. Additional procedures and restrictions may be needed to guarantee a child's safety. Staying in a shelter should be an option; many victims may have access to other accommodation and should be allowed to choose those alternatives.

FULL INFORMATION TO VICTIMS

Victims should be informed of the rights accorded to them by local law as early as possible and in a language they understand. A victim-centered approach to the criminal justice system includes telling trafficked persons what will and will not

be expected of them should they choose to participate in criminal proceedings against their trafficker. This has proven effective in bringing more victims along as participants in investigations and prosecutions. Some countries develop brochures and other literature in many languages to facilitate early disclosure. Victims of trafficking crimes abroad may also be put in touch with their country's embassy or consulate for additional assistance. Governments can further these efforts in a variety of ways, including by involving NGOs during the course of investigations.

RESIDENCY

Providing immigration status, including permanent residency, to victims of human trafficking is a best practice. Immigration regulations that offer trafficked persons permanent residency, rather than mandating forced return, can help them stabilize as well as facilitate the law enforcement process. Residency schemes should allow some flexibility for victims of trafficking to have time to determine whether they wish to participate in the criminal justice process, with special exemptions for minors or those who have experienced severe trauma. There are many reasons trafficked persons may initially refuse to cooperate with an investigation. Sometimes they do not trust the police to protect their rights; sometimes law enforcement has participated in the exploitation; and sometimes victims are simply too traumatized by their experiences to discuss them with law enforcement officials.

ACCESS TO WORK

Governments should consider granting foreign national trafficking victims the right to work. In many countries, even formal entry into a victim assistance program does not provide a victim with the right to a work permit. Without the opportunity to make a living, survivors are vulnerable to being re-trafficked.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Trafficked persons should be given control over how much of their personal information is shared publicly. They should not be exposed to media without full and informed consent, and also should decide whether their families are told about their exploitation. In some countries, disclosure by government authorities of victims' identities to the press or even to family members can cause harm to the victims, who would suffer from the invasion of privacy, may believe their victimhood is shameful, and may be retraumatized.