

Article

Special rights within universal welfare: Assistance to trafficking victims in Norway

by

Anette Brunovskis
Researcher
Fafo
P.O. Box 2947, Toyen
N-0608 Oslo
Norway
Phone: +47 22 08 86 00, +47 22 08 87 09 (dir.)
E-mail: anette.brunovskis@fafo.no

Keywords:

human trafficking, social work, Institutional Ethnography, best practice



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Abstract

Over the past two decades, several measures have been developed to provide assistance to persons defined as victims of trafficking. This article describes and discusses the organization of barriers and access to assistance (such as housing, medical assistance and subsistence support) for this group in Norway, taking as its starting point the daily practice of social workers and using an institutional ethnographic approach. Of great significance to access to assistance are the different administrative statuses that trafficking victims are assigned and move between, thus having rights granted or taken away. The negotiation of these administrative categories and navigation of conflicting legislation become a central aspect of social workers' daily practice. Persons defined as 'trafficking victims' are eligible for a special residence permit, while assistance in Norway in practice is provided through the universal welfare system. 'Human trafficking' and 'trafficking victim' are operational categories in criminal law and immigration legislation, but they are not administrative categories for welfare provision. Instead, being defined as a trafficking victim functions as an inroad to assignation of *other* administrative categories (also dependent on residence and registration statuses) that determine what assistance is or is not available. Gaps and inconsistencies between institutional and legal complexes arise when one small group of people are awarded special measure rights within a universal system, creating a bureaucratically complicated and 'messy' path to assistance. This 'messiness' does not mean that it does not always work. However, it appears to work best for those who fit well with the modern Norwegian bureaucracy, e.g. in terms of being able to document identity and stay within one administrative status, and worst for those who do not. Hence, the system for victim assistance appears to be the least accessible for some of the least privileged members of the group it is intended for.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, the human trafficking framework has gained increasing international significance in addressing certain types of exploitation, particularly of migrants. While efforts have mostly been directed towards trafficking for prostitution, other forms include labour exploitation, organ trafficking, illegal adoptions, etc. Several measures have been developed to provide assistance to persons defined as victims of trafficking. However, social workers and others engaged in assistance to this group in Norway have for many years pointed out difficulties in providing stable and predictable assistance, e.g. in terms of housing, medical help and subsistence support.

In this article, I discuss the organization of barriers and access to assistance for this group in Norway. I take as my starting point the daily practice of social workers and other assistance providers, using an institutional ethnographic approach. A central and recurring theme in the article is the significance of different administrative statuses that trafficking victims are assigned and move between, having rights granted or taken away in the process. The negotiation of these administrative categories and navigation of sometimes conflicting legislation become a central aspect of social workers' daily practice. My intent in this article is to describe and discuss gaps that arise when special rights for a particular (and very small) group of people come into conflict with legislation governing universal welfare provision and immigration.

During my research on human trafficking and assistance, I have found a striking contrast between the often emotive and dramatic language in popularized accounts of human trafficking and the level of complication and opaqueness in social workers' accounts of exactly why it can sometimes be difficult to access medical care or other forms of assistance for some groups of trafficked persons. First and foremost, human trafficking in this context is a story not about human suffering in the face of organized and brutal crime, but a very bureaucratic tale of conflicting legislations, regulations and unclear practice that have great bearing on the day-to-day lives of victims of trafficking. At times, the institutional tangle surrounding assistance to trafficking victims takes on almost Kafkaesque proportions.

The most prevalent international definition of human trafficking, on which most national legislation builds, is found in article 3 of the so-called Palermo Protocol (United Nations, 2000), where human trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Human trafficking is a highly contested institutional and legal term, and there is much disagreement on how it is best understood and applied, not least in academic literature.

For example, human trafficking has been described as '[...] a present day slave trade [...]' and '[...] widely perceived to be a growing problem' (Hodge & Lietz, 2007, p. 163). It is, state some, '[...] a nether land of fear, violence and emotional and physical degradation', where victims '[...] face threats of violence or death [...]' (Van Hook, Gjermeni, & Haxhiymeri, 2006, p. 29). In contrast, other authors criticize the influence of the human trafficking framework on international and national policies. Here, human trafficking is often described as a cultural myth (see e.g. Doezema, 1999), a moral panic (see e.g. Kempadoo, 2007), and a social construction of greatly exaggerated political significance (see e.g. Weitzer, 2007).

I recognize the importance of these debates, not least concerning whether measures within the human trafficking framework protect or harm potentially vulnerable populations. However, it is not my focus in this article to discuss the construction of this category or its role in the political framing of migration or prostitution more broadly. Rather, my interest lies in examining how the human trafficking category comes into play in practice in social work with those defined as victims in a Norwegian context. By defining someone as a 'trafficking victim', certain actions become possible; the category becomes 'institutionally actionable' (Griffith & Smith, 2014). Special measures for trafficking victims were implemented precisely with this in mind: to make it possible to provide assistance to a group deemed particularly vulnerable. Nonetheless, my own and others' previous research (see e.g. Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007; Brunovskis, Tveit, & Skilbrei, 2010) has shown that while

categorizing someone as a victim can open some paths to assistance, there are also limitations, gaps and shortcomings. Access to assistance is not always straightforward or equally available to all of those categorized as victims. How and why this is the case is the main topic of this article.

In Norwegian debates, human trafficking' is most commonly framed as an issue concerning international migration, but the definition does not exclude internal/domestic trafficking. However, all cases identified as trafficking in Norway have involved international migration. In 2014, the majority (78%) of those receiving assistance were female, and trafficked for prostitution or sexual exploitation. Since 2007, between 200 and 350 persons have been classified every year as possible trafficking victims in Norway (Police Directorate, 2015). Thus, policies in this field affect a very limited number of people directly, but nevertheless raise some principal issues. While the rights of victims of trafficking are so-called 'special measures' (designed for- and limited to particular groups), the Norwegian system for health care and social assistance is placed within the universal welfare system. What happens when a particular group is given special rights and assistance within a system developed for- and aimed at a general population? This is an issue that has relevance beyond the human trafficking field.

Before moving on to the description and analysis of the experiences of social workers, this article first relates my study to some of the relevant human trafficking literature and explicates my approach within an institutional ethnographic framework. I then give a brief description of a specific aspect of the legal framework for providing assistance to victims in Norway, the so-called 'reflection period' (Utlendingsforskriften, 2010; Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2013). This is a limited residence permit that can be issued to victims of trafficking and a central element in the sometimes complicated accounts of social work practice. Its particularities are therefore important for understanding the accounts of social workers that follow. The remainder of the article first presents the process of accessing assistance, with a specific focus on gaps and inconsistencies through social workers experiences. Lastly, I discuss the significance and impact of gaps in access to assistance.

Previous research

So-called anti-trafficking policies are to a large extent internationally driven, which are easily traced back to the United Nations (UN) and various European bodies (Friesendorf, 2007; Gallagher, 2001, 2006; Sullivan, 2003). However, policies are implemented and practiced nationally and locally. Weitzer (2014) makes the argument that manifestations and forms of human trafficking are best studied at the micro level, and documents a number of frivolous claims set forth in global and regional studies on human trafficking. These studies, argues Weitzer, fail to take into account local variations, both in how human trafficking takes place and how it is legally defined and regulated. I would contend that the same is also the case for human trafficking *policy* specifically – in terms of actual outcomes and consequences, it is best examined locally and empirically.

Internationally developed policies and obligations imply a so-called 'best practice', i.e. a practice that is deemed superior to other practices for achieving a goal. The reflection period for victims of trafficking is often cited as one such 'best practice' (see e.g. UNODC, 2008), following early models for specific residence permits for victims of trafficking developed in Belgium and Italy (Brunovskis, 2012).

Still, best practice is not a culturally or politically neutral concept. As Truong (2006, p. 82) argues: 'Institutions and rules governing a particular policy domain and sites of implementation mediate [best practice].' Best practice, then, does not enter into an empty policy space, but interacts with- and is shaped by existing frameworks and regulations. Closer attention to how international anti-trafficking policies enter into pre-existing local frameworks and institutions can illuminate the actual outcome of policy in practice.

There is a growing body of solid and empirical literature on assistance to trafficked persons. However, and as I have argued elsewhere (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2013), much research on anti-trafficking assistance focusses on individual victims, exploring their overall needs and situations (see e.g. Bjerkan, 2005; Derks, 1998; Kootstra & Commandeur, 2004, Brunovskis & Surtees, 2007). More targeted studies have focused on health, economic reintegration and safe migration (see e.g. Zimmerman

et al., 2003, 2006; Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart, 2007; Kato, 2007; Lisborg, 2009; Lisborg & Plambech, 2009).

Studies of implementation of anti-trafficking policy in the assistance field, not least with a focus on institutional responses, are scarcer. One notable exception is Wan Ismail et al. (2014), who analyse the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation in Malaysia. One of their findings is that the different responsibilities of various institutions complicated coordination between agencies, with dividing lines stemming from divergent priorities and contrasting perspectives, be they between '[...] local and international, internal and external, and public and civil society' (Wan Ismail, Ariffin, & Cheong, 2014, p.10). In the criminal justice field, one study found that a main barrier to effective institutional anti-trafficking responses in law enforcement agencies was a lack of previous experience with change and adapting new ways of working (Farrell, 2014). Both studies point to pre-existing structures and responsibilities as central for outcomes in practice.

Institutional ethnography: Approach and method

Hence, my starting point in this paper is an interest in day-to-day health and social work with victims of trafficking from an empirical (as well as practice oriented) perspective, but also how it is a manifestation of national and international policy on trafficking.

Assistance to trafficked persons straddles and relates to several legislative areas, among them immigration, social services and criminal justice, and as such relates to different uses, interpretations and legal implications of the category 'trafficked person'. Not least, these are heavy legal complexes that become intertwined. For instance (and as I will return to), the legal right to social assistance depends on legalized immigration status, which rests on a formal identification of a person as a victim of trafficking, or after an initial period of time, criminal proceedings or investigations. This creates an interdependency between systems and agencies that are to some extent separate, and where those who work within them are also caretakers of other overarching goals and logics.

In light of this institutional complexity, I find that institutional ethnography developed by Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith and her colleagues (1987, 2005, 2006a) is a perspective particularly well suited for approaching the local, specific, and practice oriented, while still keeping international and national policy levels in sight. The institutional ethnographic approach sets the goal of investigating power empirically, and linking relations and institutions through exploring how people's actions are coordinated (Widerberg, 2008). This way, we can understand the social through examining everyday life - not with a goal to understand everyday life in itself, but to understand society's structures and functions (Widerberg, 1999). Furthermore, the goal is also to make the coordinated aspects of experience visible to those who *hold* the experience, as reflected in the title of Smith's (2005) *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*.

The understanding of 'institution' in institutional ethnography does not refer to specific organizations or entities, but rather to relations organized around specific functions, such as education or health care. The way the term 'institution' is used '[...] is meant to inform a project of empirical inquiry, directing the researcher's attention to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place in multiple sites' (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 17). The starting point for inquiry is people's local and everyday practice, or work, in a wide sense of the word. This work consists of the activities, knowledge and concerns of people relating to an institution or an institutional complex (Sinding, 2010). The aim, however, is not to generalize from the experience of a group of people, but to describe generalizing social processes that affect them (DeVault & McCoy, 2005). In institutional ethnography, the researcher will use experience as an entry point into the social relations of the particular setting, i.e. to discover how people's experiences are coordinated (Campbell, 1998).

There are many ways of 'doing' institutional ethnography, and Dorothy Smith herself has warned against orthodoxy in practice or prescriptive notions of procedure (Smith, 2006b, p. 1). Central, though, is to understand people as the knowers of their own lives. Secondly, not to stop at the point of experience. DeVault and McCoy (2005, p. 20) describe a common research sequence in institutional ethnography: The researcher: a) identifies an experience, b) identifies institutional processes that shape that experience, and c) investigates those processes to analyse how they operate.

The research

The starting point for my analysis is 24 interviews with people working in central state and municipal institutions and non-governmental organizations involved in assistance to trafficked persons in Norway. All the informants had personal experience with assistance work with this group. My access to informants was eased by my having conducted research on human trafficking since 2002, and I have known several of my informants in a professional capacity for more than a decade. While these established relationships are an advantage in many ways (not least in terms of access to informants), there are also some ethical aspects that warrant consideration. One is that I needed to be sensitive to my informants' ability to withdraw consent, as a sense of obligation can also follow from having an established relationship. Secondly, that familiarity can lead some informants to disclose more or other types of information than they might in hindsight be comfortable with. I therefore underlined informants' rights to withdrawing all or parts of their participation in the project, both in the written information and orally in the interviews. A separate ethical challenge in this field is the very limited number of people involved in work with trafficked persons, and how to preserve my informants' anonymity. I have tried to be circumspect in my use of direct quotes so that they would not be attributable to particular persons. This also means that I do not specify the professional affiliation of the quoted informants.

In the interviews, I asked about my informants' day-to-day work and what actions were necessary to access assistance for persons they worked with. In order to make this as specific as possible, I generally took as a starting point access to medical care, both because this is important in itself, and because the preconditions for accessing a general practitioner are also necessary to access other rights. In line with the above description of institutional ethnography, I then moved on to examining how these experiences were coordinated. In as good as all of these interviews, and as I will return to, a central theme was that my informants spent substantial time addressing problems caused by inconsistencies between different areas of legislation, and that this complicated access to assistance in many cases. My next step was therefore to examine the legal frameworks and institutional texts that

emerged as central to my informants' work, to further explore where- and in which ways gaps arose.

The reflection period for trafficked persons in Norway

Before proceeding to social workers' experience, a central backdrop to the problematic discussed in this article is the previously mentioned particular legislative framework for assistance to trafficked persons, the so-called 'reflection period'. This is a temporary residence permit for trafficking victims, from which other rights follow. The reflection period is grounded in the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (hereafter: CoE Trafficking Convention) (Council of Europe, 2005). As such, all States Parties are obliged to implement a reflection period of at least 30 days, as well as to provide assistance to victims (both with and without a legal residence). The stated goal of the reflection period is to provide time for victims to recover and escape the influence from traffickers, so that they can make an informed decision about whether they want to cooperate with the police in investigations of traffickers (EU Council, 2004). Far from a unitary approach, this is implemented in a variety of ways in the CoE Trafficking Convention's signatory countries (Brunovskis, 2012).

The Norwegian reflection period is six months long, and is intended as a low threshold opportunity for victims of trafficking to break free from exploitation. Formally, the reflection period is a limited residence and work permit. Among the limitations are that it does not give grounds for family reunification, nor does it form the basis for permanent residence. The holder is required to stay in Norway, unless permission to re-enter has been granted prior to leaving the territory (Utlendingsforskriften, 2010). The Norwegian version of the reflection period was first included in legislation in 2004, and initially consisted of a 45-day delay in the return of persons without legal residence, if it was believed they were possible victims of trafficking (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, 2004). In the following two years, only one woman accepted this arrangement. In 2006, only two years after its introduction, the reflection period was substantially changed, with the most important being an expansion from a 45-day delay in return to a six-month work and residence

permit. Moreover, victims who cooperated with the police also became eligible for renewable one-year residence permits.

In 2008, a further revision followed, which expanded the group eligible for a reflection period. Most important was the inclusion of European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) citizens, as well as persons with residence permits in countries that are part of the Schengen Agreement. The changes in 2006 and 2008 came in response to challenges identified by social workers and others, who reported problems with offering help to possible victims from new EU member states, as well as observations that possible victims from Nigeria often had residence permits in Italy and Spain, and under the previous system could not be offered assistance in Norway.

Also in 2008, yet another important change was effectuated. Victims who testified against their exploiters in cases with human trafficking charges would be granted permanent residence in Norway (commonly called the 'witness instruction') (Utlendingsforskriften, 2010). In 2010, this was changed to also include charges of promoting or procuring prostitution (or 'pimping') if this placed the witness in a similarly difficult situation as a charge of human trafficking. Furthermore, it was no longer necessary that the witness testified at a trial. Cooperating with- and giving statements to the police could be deemed sufficient, and permanent residence could also be granted to witnesses who were not the injured party in the case (Justis- og politidepartementet, 2010).

As this shows, the framework for protection of- and assistance to victims of trafficking has been substantially changed over a relatively short period of time. While in 2004 the reflection period consisted of a 45-day delay of return, in 2010 the reflection periods and its related residence permits could add up to several years. The longer duration, the inclusion of a work permit and the eligibility of new groups also meant that the reflection period came to intersect more and more with other legislation in the immigration and social welfare fields, the importance of which I will return to in the following sections.

The winding road to assistance: Experiences of social workers

In this section, I will describe the experiences of social workers in accessing assistance for persons classified as victims of trafficking, loosely organized along a chronological process from the identification of a person as a possible trafficking victim to the various residence permits that apply. One challenge in conveying the different paths to assistance is that it can be amazingly complicated. As a pre-emptive warning, this article does not aim to explain how the system works to such an extent that the reader will be left with a complete and clear understanding of all common trajectories through this system. That would be overly ambitious, as this is (for good reasons, and which excerpts from interviews below will show) at times very unpredictable even to people working in the sector themselves, which is one of my main points. As I signalled in the introduction to this article, this is indeed a rather complicated and bureaucratic tale.

Identification and applying for reflection period

Possible victims of trafficking are identified and come into contact with social workers in different ways. They are sometimes identified *by* social workers, they may self-identify as victims and seek out help themselves or they may be identified by the police. Regardless, the actors who first come into contact with possible victims are meant to inform them about their rights, including the right to apply for a reflection period and which rights and obligations this involves. An official information leaflet to persons who have been granted a reflection period informs that they have the right to participate in the regular general practitioner scheme, from which follows a number of other health care rights. Also, that they have rights to assistance under the social service legislation (Politidirektoratet, n.d.).

One common sequence of events when a possible victim of trafficking is identified, e.g. by social workers, is:

1. A person is identified as a victim;
2. A lawyer is contacted;
3. They go together to the police to apply for a reflection period (the police takes the application and passes it on to the Immigration Directorate, which is the deciding authority), and
4. Then to the municipal social office for support and assistance.

As mentioned above, the CoE Trafficking Convention obliges Norway to provide assistance, also before the possible victim has legal residence. For many, this will only be the case when the reflection period has been formally granted. For many years, clashes arose at this very early stage, due to conflicting legislation. Victims were in fact not entitled to social support or benefits until their reflection period had been formally granted, as a regulation to the (since replaced) Law on Social Services specified that it only applied to persons legally residing in Norway (Forskrift til sosialtjenesteloven, 1992; Sosialtjenesteloven, 1991). And Immigration Directorate decisions on reflection periods could – and still can - take time. While it does not appear to be the norm, there are anecdotal tales of applications in some cases being undecided for months, in a couple of cases, more than half a year.

Several social workers spoke of waiting relatively lengthy periods of time for responses. And the only reason victims in these cases previously received the assistance they were entitled to was through flexibility on part of the municipal social workers, who needed to bend (or strictly speaking, break) the rules to accommodate trafficking victims' needs (and Norway's international obligations). This was amended by a special provision granting the right to municipal social support to victims of trafficking who are waiting for a decision on their applications for reflection periods, coming into effect in 2012 (Forskrift om sosiale tjenester, bopelsløse, 2012). Again, this underlines the special measure position of victims of trafficking in Norwegian legislation and regulations, but also that there were several issues that had not been taken into consideration when the system for their assistance was set up, such as how victims would receive support while waiting to be granted a reflection period, given that municipal social support required legal residence. Also worth noting is that it took almost six years from the expansion of the reflection period to the change in the provision to secure rights during the application processing period.

During the reflection period

While municipal social services can now also be accessed before the reflection period is granted, the assignment of a regular general practitioner depends on legal residence and registration with a national ID number, issued to persons with a residence permit of at least six months in length. (An alternative mode of registration,

which I will return to, is a D-number, issued to persons with residence permits shorter than six months and to asylum seekers.)

There are a number of steps to fulfil in order to register for a national ID number, following from points 1 – 4 above:

5. Receive a confirmation of granted reflection period from the Immigration Directorate;
6. Take the confirmation to the police, who will issue a residence card, and
7. Take the residence card and documentation of address to a Tax Office and register for a national ID number in the National Registry ('Folkeregisteret').¹

The national ID number is the key to all rights accompanying the reflection period; without it, these rights simply cannot be accessed. It is needed for registering with a general practitioner and for effectuating a work permit, as well as for opening a bank account.

Historically, even the issue of whether persons with a reflection period had the right to a national ID number was complicated and unclear, due to what appears to have been a 'legal glitch'. As will be remembered, the reflection period is exactly six months. At the same time, the National Registration Act (Folkeregisterloven, 1970) specified that the requirement for issuing a national ID number was that the person had legal residence for *more than* six months, and for the D-number that the residence was *less than* six months. As one centrally placed actor in the field with some exasperation once said to me: 'If only they had made the reflection period six months and a day, we wouldn't have to spend all this time discussing what to do.' This was amended when the wording of the legal requirement was changed from 'more than six months' to 'at least six months'.²

For several years, it was also a problem that a physical address of residence was needed to register for a national ID number. Meanwhile, a substantial number of persons in a reflection period were housed at secret addresses. The problem for victims living at a secret address in registering for an ID number appears to have been recently resolved almost by coincidence, after having been a problem for several years, when a representative of the Tax Directorate was invited to a meeting

in the anti-trafficking coordination unit in the Police Directorate ('Koordineringsenheten for ofre for menneskehandel', KOM³). One social worker explained:

What has happened is that when you have a reflection period, you can register in the National Registry by including a letter of confirmation from us that you live at a secret address. We're now allowed to register with a post office box address. This is the starting point. When you get the national ID number, you get a regular general practitioner, and you get access to a lot of other health services than before. So the starting point is good. We have struggled with this for years, and then we were at a meeting in KOM where there was this woman from the Tax Directorate who suddenly understood the problem [...]. We've struggled with this for years, why haven't we found her before? [*laughing*]. I think KOM and the Tax Directorate are going to send out a letter, because not all of the Tax Offices know this. So – the starting point is good!

The Tax Directorate is an important institution relating to national ID numbers, as it administers the National Registry and the Tax Offices, which implement registration. It was therefore of great significance that this particular woman from the Tax Directorate understood the problems caused by the requirements for a physical address in registering for an ID number. It meant that the Tax Offices could be instructed that persons holding a reflection period *can* in fact register with a post office box address, thereby opening up their access to assistance.

Nevertheless, while this particular problem appears to have been solved, or at least recognized, there can also be other practical stumbling blocks on the path to the ID number. The first is to obtain a residence card (step 7 above) from the police. The residence card is another precondition for registering for a national ID number. One social worker explained practical problems and delays in this process:

The problem here is to get this residence card that releases your access to a general practitioner [by giving access to an ID number]. [...] and this is a long process. So sometimes it ends with her not getting a doctor before there's only one month left of the reflection! It's horrible. To get [the residence card] the women need to go to the police in the municipality or city district where they have been placed and apply for the residence card. [...] And the problem we face [here in Oslo] is that it's almost impossible to get an appointment to apply for the residence card; we can't get through on the phone. So we have to physically go there within their specific opening hours to book an appointment. She can't go there on her own; she will be stopped by security in the door. And then it's a month to wait, maybe three weeks if we're lucky. But the women need a general practitioner when they come to us, not two or three months later. There are two things they always ask about when they first come: one is their

residence permits, because very often they don't have one, and the second is a doctor, they have so many worries.

Without the residence card, identified victims need to use emergency rooms for medical services, in spite of (in principle) having the right to an assigned general practitioner in the same way as everyone else, and this is far from ideal. They cannot normally pre-book appointments, and the environment can sometimes be chaotic. Social workers spoke of bad experiences with taking clients in a fragile mental and physical state to the sometimes stressful environment of the emergency room.

The waiting time to obtain the residence card is not the only problem that can arise; in some cases it was difficult to get a residence card at all. A social worker recounted an experience with a woman from an EU country living at a secret address outside Oslo in a smaller municipality:

The thing is that all persons on a reflection period, no matter where in the world they come from, regardless of whether they are Schengen or EEA or Africa or Albania, you should get a residence card if you are on reflection. And this they have understood at the office in Oslo, so in Oslo this isn't a problem. But then if you move outside Oslo... We have a woman who was placed [more than six months ago], and she still hasn't got a residence card. Because the police where she lives says that she's not entitled, because she is from an EEA or Schengen country. So [the police officer] refuses. The main [social worker] has fought with her for ages, but she just hits a wall. So I tried to call, and by mistake I was put through to another district, where I was met with the same kind of police, but at least *she* does her job and checks. So she says that clearly this is wrong, this woman *is* entitled to a residence card, and she says that I can tell this to the other police officer. I try to call the correct police district again, but then [the police officer] is out and I haven't been able to reach her. But in sum, the reflection period is about to expire, and [this woman] never got her ID number. So she didn't get a doctor and she didn't get the work permit; frankly, she lost all of her rights during the six-month period.

Again, this underlines a certain fragility in the bureaucratic process, where the (mis)understanding of a particular exception to immigration legislation by an individual police officer comes in the way of accessing a general practitioner. It also points to the interconnectedness between different systems and legislations.

But this is where it gets tricky...

So, as the above has shown, there are a number of complications even within the relative clarity of being assigned the specific residence permit for trafficking victims and relating to one system. Other problems arise as time passes. In practice, there

are two common paths taken. If victims cooperate with the police, they are eligible for a one-year renewable residence permit. The other common path is that they apply for asylum. While the former are a municipal responsibility, asylum seekers are the responsibility of the state. Both groups have the right to a regular general practitioner, but this right is accessed in different ways. Due to incompatibilities in different systems, this can for some mean that they lose their rights. Key here is how the two groups are entered into the National Registry. As previously mentioned, persons with a reflection period are registered with an ID number. On the other hand, asylum seekers are assigned what is called a D-number (issued to asylum seekers and persons with a residence shorter than six months).

The quote below shows how these different registration procedures for different residence statuses can cause problems with access to medical care for persons who move from having a reflection period to seeking asylum. Key in this account is that incompatibility between the systems for registering with an ID and a D-number, respectively, can lead to the loss of registration (and accompanying rights) altogether:

There's this central problem that has come up, because first you have the six-month reflection period, and then you go over to asylum. And if you apply for residence through the witness instruction, you also go over to the asylum track. Regardless. And then, you see, the issue is that in principle you *can* stay registered with a national ID number as an asylum seeker. Usually asylum seekers get a D-number from Helfo [Norwegian Health Economics Administration, the Health Directorate]. And that also gives health rights. But then we had a situation with a woman who had had the six-month reflection period and then she got a letter from the Tax Office that she was de-registered because she didn't have a residence permit. So I call them and make a fuss and I say that OK, now that she's an asylum seeker, she needs to be registered with Helfo. But then Helfo says that she can't have a D-number and health rights even though she's an asylum seeker, because she used to have a national ID number. So then she's back to square one. So I call this National Registry officer, and apparently they go a bit back and forth, but he fixes it, because he is one of the good ones, if you know what I mean. But then later we had another case with a woman who had a one-year reflection period, and she also got this letter that she would be de-registered. So I call the [same] officer again, because it was so easy in the first case. But then he tells me that he had made a mistake in the first case. The rule is – yes, I know, this is completely... [*laughing*] - that if you have had a six-month residence, it's too short to be able to keep the national ID number, but if it's one year, then you can keep it. And if you have previously had a national ID number, you can't be given a D-number, which asylum seekers usually get.

This demonstrates that the provisions set in place for victims of trafficking do not mesh with existing legislation and systems in practical and concrete terms. It also shows how the special measure position of victims of trafficking can lead to a status that is poorly compatible with the general, universal system. The key issue in the account above is that if the person has been registered with an ID number for more than six months, they can keep it, and consequently keep their rights. This will be the case for persons who have been granted the initial six-month reflection period, *and* the one year extension grounded in a police investigation of their case. If, however, there is no police investigation, they cannot apply for a new residence permit, and typically apply for asylum following the initial six-month period. If this is the case, they have not had legal residence for long enough to keep the ID number, but can also not be registered with a D-number, and thus end up with no registration. Consequently, they lose their rights to a general practitioner. In all its absurdity, it can have serious personal consequences. One social worker spoke of such an instance:

There was this one woman I worked with, who has been through the reflection [period]. When that expired, she applied for asylum. She lost her ID number and lost her general practitioner, lost her apartment. [...] It was a very special situation, she was a mother with psychiatric illness.[...] She was very depressed and unstable. Lots of anxiety and worries.

In this case, the social worker's assessment was that the woman had not received the necessary medical treatment, and further, that her health situation had been worsened as she at the same time lost her municipally funded apartment as part of the same change in her administrative status (going from a reflection period under municipal responsibility to being an asylum seeker and a state responsibility).

It has also been problematic to obtain a national ID number for persons granted a reflection period for other reasons. Registration also depends on the person being able to document their correct identity. Said one social worker:

Some of the African women have also gotten an ID number, [but they didn't] have the right to it, because they [didn't] have passports. Some of them have gotten it at the National Registry anyway. They have registered with papers from KOM that confirm who they are, and some officers have given them ID numbers. This is really random and depends on who the officers are.

This introduces an element of arbitrariness into a system that is ostensibly predictable and rule bound. Also central is the observation that different groups of trafficking victims are affected differently. While they may seemingly be granted the same rights on paper, their actual access depends not least on whether they have passports. And this systematically differs between groups, with people being less likely to have a valid passport if they come from countries where regular migration to Norway is more difficult.

Institutionally, and in sum, the accounts in this section of what can be barriers to accessing rights involve no less than the National Registry, the Police Directorate and individual police offices, the Immigration Directorate, the Health Directorate and Health Administration, and the Tax Directorate, Tax Administration and Tax Offices. Several laws and provisions also apply: the National Registry Act, the Immigration Act and Regulations and the Health and Care Services Act. Systems sometimes clash, as in cases where EEA citizens are granted a reflection period, but are not issued a residence card, or when people go from having a reflection period to seeking asylum. Then there are the two stages of the reflection period, with different implications (six months or one or more one-year extensions), and the so-called 'witness instruction'. The only thing that seems fairly clear from these accounts is that the reflection period does not necessarily provide trafficking victims with straightforward access to medical or other assistance.

The tale of the travelling passport machine – transnational complications

While the previous section shows an institutional tangle that arises in Norway, it does not stop there. As all identified trafficking cases in Norway have been transnational, it means that systems, practice and legislation in other countries also come into play. There is one particular piece of machinery that in some ways perfectly exemplifies a number of issues with assistance to victims, and not least, the unpredictability in what rules victims' lives: An ambulant passport machine.

For several years the Nigerian Embassy that covers Norway, located in neighbouring Sweden (in Stockholm), did not have a permanent passport machine at their office, but shared one that was sent between Embassies and Consulates in Europe.⁴ And as described above, it is often a problem that victims, and particularly Nigerian

victims, either have no passport, a false passport or a passport with partially incorrect information. Without the passport, they are unable to document their identity, which means that they cannot register for a national ID number, which again means that they will not have full access to assistance. Having a passport issued is therefore of great practical concern for this group.

Typically, my questions to social workers about the current state of affairs with respect to these passports were met with an element of exasperation. One central issue was the lack of a predictable schedule for when the passport machine would be at the Embassy:

We made contact and asked the Embassy to kindly let us know in advance when they expect the machine, but then suddenly they say that it'll be here in two days. And then you have the process in advance where the women need to apply to the Immigration Directorate before leaving Norway to be allowed re-entry to the country, and they need to apply the Social Office for funds to cover the travel. So two days in advance is no good, but we have no authority.

So the combination of the legal requirements and bureaucratic procedures in Norway, with the unpredictability of the passport machine's physical presence in Sweden, was not a good match. Connected with the passport problem is also the documentation necessary to have the passport issued. I asked one social worker how, exactly, they worked with 'passport cases' if the person had no documentation:

Sometimes you're very lucky and they've been born in a hospital, and then maybe you can get some documentation. But if they weren't, then... If they have family, it has happened that the Nigerian Embassy will accept that someone vouches for their identity, but not everybody has family. So then you'll need to apply to the Immigration Directorate for an exemption from the requirement to document identity. But it's still very hard to live in Norway without it. Employers won't pay you in cash, and you know, simple things like picking up a package from the post office...

Aside from the decided complications that arise, even if only from trying to live in a society like Norway without a bank account, a paradoxical situation arises for those who have applied for protection (asylum), but are unable to document their identity. Even though their need for protection may be deemed credible, their residence permits will be limited and temporary until their identity can be documented (Sønsterudbråten, 2012). This means that they will not be settled in a municipality, offered Norwegian language classes or able to apply for family reunification. A

subgroup of victims therefore end up in in a double bind: Victims who have been granted residence in Norway with credible claims of being in danger from their traffickers in Nigeria, but who lack documentation of their identity, may not be settled in Norway until they have travelled to Nigeria to collect documentation of their identity. Which they cannot do because it could place them in danger. Which is why the temporary residence permit was granted in the first place.

Discussion: The simultaneous dominance and absence of ruling

One central and consistent theme in the previous section is the extent to which social workers refer to legal complications and inconsistencies that affect their everyday work with victims. The navigation of clashing legislation and systems is a time consuming part of their daily work. Several social workers expressed frustration that they had to spend so much time in trying to access rights that victims were entitled to on paper, and particularly so when this meant a delay, e.g. in accessing a general practitioner. Furthermore, while victims of trafficking have internationally anchored rights, the actual outcome is decided locally. This can hardly be stated more clearly than in this observation from a social worker:

In the Council of Europe Convention article 12 it says very clearly what Norway needs to offer: psychological, physical and restitution, and there's no end to it. But at the same time, it's hopeless to run around to the local doctors' offices with the Council of Europe Convention and say, 'Look here..!'

This social worker has a very clear view of obligations in Norway having originated from a European level, but she also observes the distance between the levels of international policy and daily practice. While the Council of Europe specifies what type of assistance an individual identified as a possible victim in Norway should receive, it has no actual bearing on the daily work and practice of a local doctor's office.

When setting out to examine the ruling relations in assistance to trafficked persons in Norway, what is striking at first is just *how much* ruling there is, as described in the slightly overwhelming numbers of institutions and legislations that comprise the path to medical and other assistance, and shape and coordinate the daily activities of social workers in this field.

On closer examination, there is also a palpable *lack* of ruling, in the sense of coordination. The Immigration Regulations refer to the health and assistance obligations Norway has committed to through the CoE Trafficking Convention, but these obligations are not *part* of the immigration legislation, which regulates residence status only. Based on residence status, The National Registration Act regulates who can register in which ways, depending also on the ability to document

one's identity. Based on residence and registration status, the health legislation determines who has the right to what types of health care, and so on and so on. One social worker quite perfectly summarized the simultaneous presence and absence of ruling in this field:

If you read the Action Plan [against human trafficking], you see that all the Ministries are in, and then [the Ministry of] Justice, I think, has the main responsibility. But it's all just hot air, isn't it, because there's nothing in it. It says that 'It's like this' and 'It's like that.' But when push comes to shove, it's not in place when it comes to the lowest level. It hasn't come that far. And maybe it's too early, it's been, what... eight years? [Laughing]

Slow and rickety bridges between the mountaintops

In one sense, one might see the different institutional complexes involved in assistance to trafficked persons as fairly monolithic entities, with clear and delimited fields of responsibility: health, immigration, criminal justice, registration, etc. From each of these institutional vantage points, rules and practice may be clear and unambiguous. The problems for assistance to victims of trafficking arise in the gaps between these monoliths, when their administrative status in one is incompatible with that in another. Or they may fail to acquire the proper status in one, meaning that they will not gain access to another. With the foundation for their rights being a special measure, their status and trajectories in the system differ from the norm of the general population, for which this institutional framework is primarily designed.

The way this is being addressed, albeit often slowly and only after a problem has been known for years, is to build virtual 'bridges' between the institutional 'mountaintops'. These bridges consist of amendments, special provisions, new regulations, circulars, guidelines and so forth. One example of such a bridge was given early in this article, in the problems with victims having the right to assistance under the CoE Trafficking Convention, also before their residence status was legalized. This clashed with the Norwegian Law on Social Services, which excluded persons without legal residence from individual assistance. The 'bridge' that was built was the updated regulation to the Law on Social Services (Forskrift om sosiale tjenester, bopelsløse, 2012), which specified that those who are waiting for a decision on a reflection period application are exempt from the rule that rights to individual

assistance is limited to people with legal residence in Norway. However, this particular bridge was only constructed six years after the problem was first identified.

So these bridges may be slow in construction, but they may also be somewhat rickety. They are not always easy to find, or may be unknown, as in the example where a police officer would not issue a residence card to an EEA citizen who was granted a reflection period, and who consequently was unable to access a regular general practitioner.⁵ But the police officer was right in that EEA citizens are normally *not* issued with a residence card – and the general information on the Immigration Directorate's web pages will also tell you as much: 'Everyone who holds a residence permit in Norway and who is not an EU/EEA national must have such a card.' (Utlendingsdirektoratet, n.d.). The Immigration Directorate's Circular on residence cards also specifies that the card is issued to persons who are *not* citizens of an EU or EEA country (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2012). In this case, the bridge presupposes the knowledge *both* that the reflection period can be granted to EEA citizens, *and* that it supersedes the other provision on who can be issued a residence card.

And there are still chasms between systems where the construction of bridges has not begun, such as in the incompatibility of the registration systems for asylum seekers and persons who already have had legal residence for six months (i.e. you cannot have a D-number if you previously had an ID number, but you cannot keep the ID number if you have not had it for more than six months).

'The problem is that trafficking victims don't exist.'

One fundamental issue is the very existence of 'trafficking victims'. I mean this not in a political or ideological sense, although the human trafficking term is certainly a highly contested one, and where the useful- or harmfulness of the human trafficking discourse continues to be hotly debated. The 'existence' of trafficking victims that I am referring to is rather a question of administration, and came to mind after discussing my work a while ago with a new colleague, who had previously worked for several years in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Directorate. I talked about some of the complications that can arise in assistance to victims. 'I suppose the problem is that victims of trafficking don't exist', he said. By this, he meant they do not exist as

an administrative category. And as I am writing this article, his casual observation seems particularly pertinent.

As I touched upon in the beginning of this article, human trafficking and its victims is a topic that often fosters strong, emotional responses, language and dramatic pop-cultural representation, and it exists in many people's minds as one of society's absolute evils. At an international policy level, in action plans, political discussion, and not least in criminal law, human trafficking most certainly exists as an operational category, subject to legislation and interventions.

However, in operational assistance work to individuals, people start out holding special measures and internationally anchored rights as victims of trafficking, but are then assigned Norwegian administrative statuses which, together with their other pre-existing statuses (e.g. minor/adult, passport holder, etc.) become the basis for what will further be available to them. They cease, in a sense, to be 'victims of trafficking', which in this context serves only as an inroad to the assignation of administrative statuses relevant to welfare provision.

Consider, for instance, this excerpt from a consultation response from the Immigration Directorate to the Ministry of Labour in 2011 on a memo regarding the change intended to secure individual social assistance to victims, also before the reflection period had been granted (one of the 'bridges' described above):

The category 'victim of trafficking' and certain other special permits are described in the memo pt. 2.2. We would like to point out that 'victim of trafficking' is not an established designation for a certain type of permit. The Immigration Act § 38 uses the term 'reflection period' for this type of permit. We therefore recommend that the Regulation to the Law on Social Services uses the same term. (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 4 November 2011)

So it is not the 'victim of trafficking' that the Ministry of Labour memo refers to, who will have the right to individual social assistance, but the 'applicant to a reflection period'.

Similarly, I mentioned earlier in this article that persons who have been granted a reflection period are given a Police Directorate leaflet, where they are informed of

their entitlement to participate in the regular general practitioner scheme. Strictly speaking, this information is not entirely precise, as observed by a social worker:

It's been said that the women have the right to a general practitioner, but that is connected with membership in the National Insurance Scheme [i.e. registered with an ID or D number], and then you need a passport. The Eastern European ones have passports, they get the ID number and are automatically members of the National Insurance Scheme when they register.

In this case, it is actually not the 'holder of a reflection period' (and most certainly not the 'victim of trafficking') who is entitled to a regular practitioner, but the 'member of the National Insurance Scheme'. And as I have already discussed at length, it is not necessarily the 'holder of a reflection period' who can become a member, but a 'holder of a reflection period' who is simultaneously a 'holder of a passport' (and previously also the 'holder of a physical address'). My point is that what may seem as a cohesive set of rights for a defined group ('trafficking victims') is in fact fragmented and hangs on a number of contingencies. In practice, access is highly unequal.

Conclusion

I set out in the beginning of this article to say that in this context, human trafficking is a rather bureaucratic and institutionally complicated tale, which is an aspect of the lives of trafficking victims less discussed in the literature. It is also a story of fairly massive ruling, in the sense that a rather staggering number of laws, regulations and official bodies are involved in the process of providing victims of trafficking with medical care and access to social assistance. Furthermore, as I discussed in the previous section, when special measures for this group were introduced to the universal welfare system, it created gaps and inconsistencies that again lead to a sometimes very 'messy' path to assistance.

The fact that it is messy does not mean that it does not always work. But it works very differently for different people. And it appears to work the best for those who fit well with the modern Norwegian bureaucracy, in terms of being able to document their identity and stay within one administrative status, and worst for those who do not. And this, again, brings forth a bit of a paradox. Not least is this paradox tied to identity documents, as being robbed of a passport or migrating illegally may precisely

be a part of being trafficked (see e.g. Brunovskis & Tyldum, 2004). This implies a system for victim assistance that is the least accessible for some of the least privileged members of the group it is intended for.

This 'messiness' becomes visible through an examination of the daily work and activities of social workers. If looking only at the legal and formal framework, everything may seem to be in order. Rules and regulations are in place, responsibilities and positions are clear. And from the victims' standpoint, this may actually in many cases also look a lot less messy, because the social workers and others try to protect them from the consequences to the extent that they can (Brunovskis et al., 2010).

Returning to one of my starting points, much policy in the human trafficking field rests on international obligations and legislation, meaning that it is implemented in vastly different contexts. In the Norwegian case, it is implemented in a very comprehensive welfare state. By implication, this policy will have different effects and manifestations than in countries where social work does not exist as a profession or where state welfare is marginal or non-existent. Or indeed in contexts where assistance for victims is organized as discrete systems, employing doctors, psychologists or other professional groups to work exclusively with victims within assistance providing institutions. It is precisely the extensiveness of the welfare state that can create so many complications in providing welfare to a small group with special rights that does not quite fit with the system. At the same time, in many ways it makes perfect sense; precisely because the welfare state is so extensive, it is difficult to just add another layer on top, without substantial ripple effects.

End notes

1. The National Registry contains information about everyone who is- or has been a resident in Norway (e.g. birth date, address, marital status, citizenship, name changes, etc.), which forms the basis for the tax register, electoral register and population statistics (Skatteetaten, n.d.a.).
2. Official information from the Tax Administration still states that for stays for *more than* six months, one registers with an ID number, while for stays less than six months one registers with a D number, and nothing about what to do if the stay is exactly six months (Skatteetaten, n.d.b.).
3. At the time the interview refers to, the Unit regularly held meetings with various stakeholders (social workers, governmental directorates, other institutions involved in anti-trafficking work), often addressing specific problems or issues.
4. At the time of my interviews for this research, the Nigerian Embassy in Stockholm had very recently been issued with a permanent passport machine, so my informants were cautiously optimistic for an improvement in some of the problems described in this section.
5. As may be remembered, the inclusion of EU/EEA citizens in the reflection period was also a “bridge” that had been ‘built’ two years after the initial expansion of the reflection period, after helping professions identified a gap in their ability to assist EU/EEA citizens who were possible victims.

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