

Spotting signs of human trafficking during an RFL consultation

The Netherlands Red Cross – Working method Restoring Family Links – 4.7 Detecting possible victims of human trafficking during an RFL consultation Date: 31 August 2017

Introduction

Various Restoring Family Links (RFL) teams have experience with victims of human trafficking when dealing with RFL requests. Often it is known in advance that the persons concerned are victims of exploitation or human trafficking. In those cases they have been referred by care workers from protected reception or by other aid organisations. However, you may also see clients whose history you don't know and whose past or present circumstances shows signs of human trafficking.

Although your primary task is the RFL request, it is important for you as a Red Cross volunteer to know how best to help and refer possible victims of human trafficking.

Difference between people smuggling and human trafficking

Human trafficking and people smuggling are often confused with one another, but they are not the same. People smuggling is very common. Think of migrants who have come to the EU illegally on a boat: they made use of the services of people smugglers. People smuggling is the facilitation of illegal border crossing, usually for a payment. People smuggling can sometimes be violent or deadly, or turn into human trafficking. Most migrants, however, voluntarily agree on a transaction with people smugglers.

Human traffickers use a form of coercion to exploit their victims, often for a long time. Well-known examples are sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and forced begging. In case of human trafficking, people are trapped in a situation they did not choose and find it hard to get away from. Sometimes, family members are threatened in order to put pressure on victims. If minors are involved, human traffickers abuse their dependent position. Human trafficking can be international but can also take place within the Netherlands. About two thirds of victims in the Netherlands are migrants.

Project Support to Victims of Trafficking

The Netherlands Red Cross supports Victims of Human Trafficking (OSM project). OSM is aimed at foreign victims and recognising signs of human trafficking. For questions about detecting and referring possible victims you can always contact your colleagues at OSM directly (see contact details at the bottom of the page).

Signs of human trafficking and exploitation:

- Signs of physical or mental abuse, unkempt, malnourished, fearful
- Controlled and chaperoned by a person who often speaks for them
- Forced to work long hours
- Person accompanying them/employer is disrespectful or violent
- Bad accommodation and living conditions
- Little freedom of movement
- Passport taken away and/or made afraid of the authorities
- Job is very different from what had been promised
- Salary not paid out, outstanding debt with employer
- Working conditions: dirty, unhealthy, dangerous, work clothes don't offer protection
- Health problems due to work
- Forced to carry out criminal activities such as pickpocketing or theft

How to act in case of suspected human trafficking

At RFL, there are two ways you can meet a client who is or has been a victim of human trafficking.

1) **The client spontaneously starts talking about human trafficking**

In many cases, the person will no longer be in the situation and will be known to specialist carers. To check this, you can ask: 'You say you have experienced human trafficking (or exploitation). Have you discussed this with others before? And did you get help?'

If it's confirmed that other organisations already know that the client used to be in a situation of human trafficking and the client tells you he/she has received adequate help, in principle you don't need to take further action.

2) **You suspect that a person is in a troubling situation**

It's also possible that a client is still in a situation of possible human trafficking. Often the persons involved don't know they are victims, or that safe help is available in the Netherlands, or they're afraid to ask for help. You may recognise some signs of human trafficking in a client.

Depending on the situation, you can ask a number of questions to check your suspicion (the questions below are just examples):

- Do you feel safe in the Netherlands?
- How do you like your job?
- In a situation where you are suspicious about the person accompanying the client: 'I have a feeling that you are not at ease around this person, is that right?'

What to do when someone talks about a situation of human trafficking for the first time, or when you have your own suspicions?

Depending on the situation, you can do the following:

- If someone is accompanying the client, make sure you always speak to the client in private. The third person may be part of the problem, or the client may be afraid to speak freely with the third person present.
- Make sure the client feels safe and listen closely.
- Explain that everything the client say will be treated confidentially. Emphasise the working method of the Red Cross: we help people in distress. All conversations are confidential: without permission we do not share information with external parties such as the police.
- Indicate that it's a good thing for the client to be telling his/her story, and/or
- that you are worried about him/her.
- Tell the client that help may be available. Ask if he/she would like to know more about this.
- If so:
 - Ask if you can phone a Red Cross colleague from OSM (see contact details below) for consultation.
 - If the client indicates he/she is very worried about his/her safety, discuss the option of contacting the police. Indicate that in the Netherlands the police can be trusted.
- If not:
 - Repeat that you have the idea the client is not doing well.

- Emphasise that he or she can always come back to the Red Cross for help. Give him/her the telephone number of the RFL team and of Tracing and Support Services NLRC, so the Red Cross can always be reached.
- If there is a follow-up phone call or meeting, the RFL Team can call Tracing and Support Services NLRC to determine whether this is a case of human trafficking.
- You could ask if the client knows the emergency number, 112.
- In the end, the decision to ask for help is one the client must make (unless the client is underage! In that case always call Tracing and Support Services NLRC).
- In other words, do not put the person under pressure. Respect the client's decision to consider the consequences carefully before accepting help.
- If possible, always try to plan a follow-up consultation so the client has time to think about any action taken and/or so you have time to consult with your colleagues at OSM.

Note: Always contact your colleagues at OSM if you suspect a case of human trafficking

If this is not possible during an RFL consultation, you can do so afterwards. If possible, plan a follow-up consultation. OSM is helped by knowing which signs you have noticed. This gives them an idea of what is going on and helps them contribute their ideas about possible follow-up action. Also keep in mind that you don't need to keep your concerns to yourself: share them with your colleagues at OSM or with the care workers of Tracing and Support Services NLRC.

What not to do

- Don't dismiss or ignore what a client has told you. From a humanitarian point of view, it is important at least to lend the person an ear.
- Don't use the term 'human trafficking' if the client does not do so first. Many clients are unfamiliar with this term and it may cause distress.
- Don't discuss a worrying situation with anyone accompanying the client.
- Don't pass on information to third parties outside of the Red Cross without permission.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Don't ask for details or investigate a situation yourself. Leave this to specialist organisations or to OSM.

Safety of victims and their family

Human traffickers often threaten victims and family members in their country of origin. Family members themselves may also be a part of the human trafficking network. With this in mind, always ask careful questions about the safety aspect during an RFL consultation. Use the information in paragraphs 4.3 Safeguarding safety and 4.3a Assessing safety of the RFL Manual.

More information

Take half an hour to make the Red Cross e-learning module 'Herkenning Mensenhandel' and learn how to spot signs and adequately respond: https://www.rodekruis.nl/elearnings/herkenning-mensenhandel/story_html5.html

Contact OSM

Do you suspect that a client is or has been a victim of human trafficking? Call your colleagues at OSM to discuss it:

- Marieke van den Berg (project leader) or Dianne Keur (coordinator) at 0031-(0)70-4455822
- Or: OSM@redcross.nl