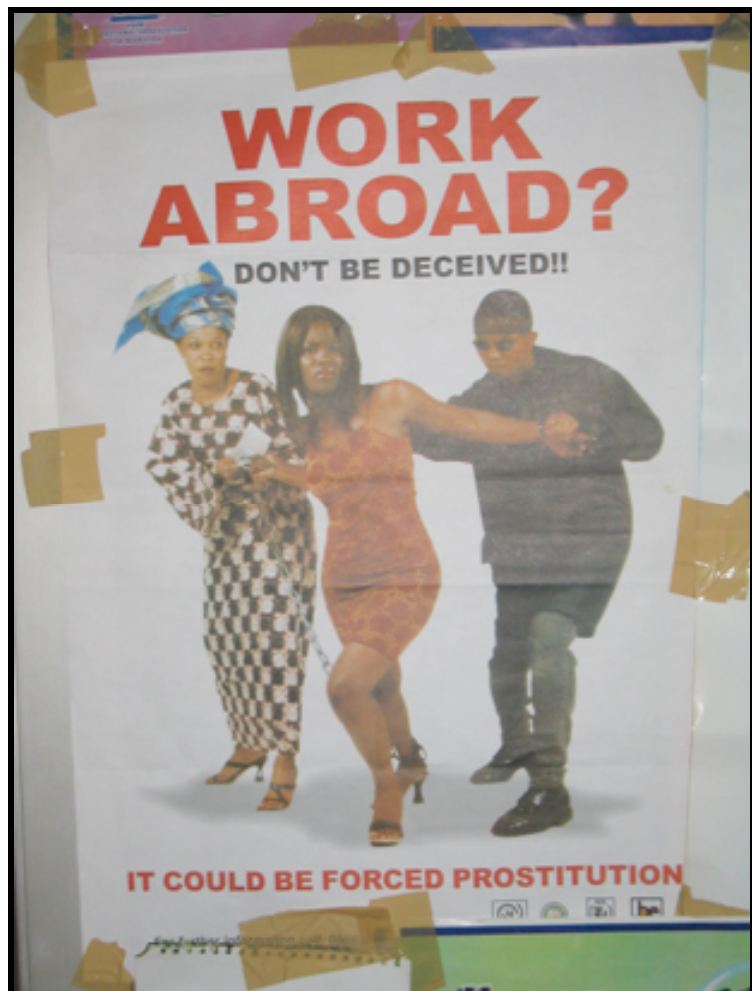


Report

**Trafficking in Women – Fact-finding  
trip to Nigeria (Abuja, Lagos and  
Benin City) 12-26 March 2006**



By: Geir Skogseth – Regional Adviser

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on information gathered during a fact-finding trip to Nigeria from 12 to 26 March 2006. The first part of the trip (12-16 March) was arranged by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and led by Senior Adviser Tove Skarstein, the Ministry's coordinator for human trafficking issues. It focused on the trafficking of Nigerians for the purpose of prostitution in Norway. The other members of the delegation were the Pro Centre's<sup>1</sup> Director Liv Jessen and Cultural Mediator Patricia Akinyemi, Helge Årsvoll of Kirkens Bymisjon Stavanger, Adviser Ingrid Oloram of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration,<sup>2</sup> Adviser Bent Skogen of the Immigration Appeals Board<sup>3</sup> and Regional Adviser Geir Skogseth of Landinfo.

The purpose of the trip was to collect first-hand information about the situation in Nigeria as a source country of trafficking victims who work as prostitutes in Europe and Norway, and on local structures for helping trafficking victims on their return to Nigeria. This report, together with other available information on the subject, will be used by the Norwegian authorities when formulating plans to combat human trafficking.

The delegation members from the Norwegian immigration authorities (Adviser Ingrid Oloram, Adviser Bent Skogen and Regional Adviser Geir Skogseth), remained in Nigeria until 26 March to investigate issues concerning Nigerian asylum seekers, but also discussed human trafficking with additional sources during this time. This report is based on the information collected during both parts of the fact-finding trip, insofar as it concerns human trafficking. Asylum issues are considered in a separate report.<sup>4</sup>

It was decided in advance that this report would be made public. All sources were informed accordingly.

Meetings were arranged with the invaluable assistance of NAPTIP's Communication and Media Department and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Abuja.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.prosentret.no](http://www.prosentret.no)

<sup>2</sup> [www.udi.no](http://www.udi.no)

<sup>3</sup> [www.une.no](http://www.une.no)

<sup>4</sup> See Skogseth 2006.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The plight of Nigerian women involved in prostitution in European countries has been an issue of concern ever since the phenomenon was first observed in Italy and Spain in the early 1990s. Many of these women are victims of human trafficking, and today the range of destination countries includes France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, in addition to Italy and Spain. Denmark and Norway have also become destinations in the last few years.

In Norway, Nigerian women currently constitute some 20 per cent of the prostitutes working in the country. Most of the Nigerian women who are involved in prostitution in Norway have lived in Europe for a number of years, but a worrying new development is the increased number of Nigerian women brought directly to Norway by human traffickers. Nigerian women involved in prostitution in Norway appear to have little connection with Norway's established Nigerian community, or with Nigerian asylum seekers.

Poverty, unemployment and lack of hope for a prosperous future in Nigeria are the main forces driving Nigerian women towards prostitution in Europe. When human traffickers approach them to persuade them to go to Europe, some women do not know that they will probably have to work as prostitutes once they get there, while others may have a clearer idea of what the traffickers expect of them but have unrealistic ideas about escaping or paying off their debts shortly after arriving in Europe. Female migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation than men, as men generally have to pay traffickers up front, before being taken to Europe, whereas women pay only a deposit but are expected to pay off a substantial debt to the trafficker after arrival in Europe. Opportunities to pay off these debts through work outside the sex industry are very limited.

The Nigerian government is aware of the problems facing illegal Nigerian immigrants in Europe, and the plight of Nigerian women who are being exploited in the European sex industry has been the focus of significant attention from the local Nigerian media and politicians. Nigeria is at the forefront of regional efforts to confront the human trafficking problem through international cooperation, and has established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), a special government agency, to coordinate its efforts to combat human trafficking locally. NAPTIP handles the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases, rehabilitation and counselling of victims of trafficking, and awareness-raising work. Much of its work takes place in cooperation with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and foreign partners, particularly when setting up rehabilitation structures for victims of trafficking.

The Nigerian human trafficking industry is shaped by a number of factors:

- Without a market for their services, no Nigerian women would end up working as prostitutes in European countries.

- The structure of Nigerian criminal networks makes them notoriously difficult to break up. Particularly relevant in this context are the networks of the *madams* – many of whom are themselves former prostitutes – who are the primary exploiters of female Nigerian trafficking victims.
- Poor, unskilled Nigerians are particularly vulnerable to exploitation because they have limited opportunities to migrate to Europe legally.
- Many Nigerian trafficking victims have had mixed or negative experiences in dealing with the authorities in European countries. In addition, they generally have very little confidence in Nigerian authorities. This makes it difficult to build trust between victims and organisations designed to help them and to combat the problem.

### **3. TRAFFICKING OF NIGERIANS TO NORWAY**

Several of those interviewed in Nigeria stated that they were not aware that Nigerians were being trafficked to Norway, presumably due to this being a fairly recent development. By contrast, there was widespread awareness of the situation in Italy, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

It will therefore be helpful to include a brief overview of human trafficking of Nigerian women in the Norwegian context.

#### **3.1 WOMEN**

##### **3.1.1 History and figures**

Nigerian women have only begun working as prostitutes in Norway fairly recently. The Pro Centre is Norway's national resource centre on all matters related to prostitution, and offers a social service centre for male and female prostitutes.<sup>5</sup> It has worked with street prostitutes in Oslo since 1983.

The Pro Centre first noticed two Nigerian women working as prostitutes in Oslo in 2003. During 2004, it met 124 Nigerian female prostitutes, and in 2005 the number rose to 393 (Norli 2006:4, 38). Based on discussions with colleagues working with prostitutes in other Norwegian cities and towns (primarily Stavanger and Bergen, but also Kristiansand), Director Liv Jessen estimates that some 500 Nigerian women were involved in prostitution in Norway in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

It must be stressed that these women probably do not stay in Norway continuously. The majority of the Nigerian women involved in prostitution in Norway have told the Pro Centre that they have residence permits in other European countries, especially Italy and Spain (Norli 2006:38).<sup>7</sup> It is likely that many of these women travel back and forth between their countries of residence and Norway and, possibly, other countries in the Schengen area. Accordingly, the number of Nigerian women involved in prostitution in Norway at any given time is considerably lower than 500 – the Pro Centre estimates the number for Oslo to be around 100.<sup>8</sup> Even so, in just two years, Nigerians have become the single largest nationality among street prostitutes working in Norwegian cities.

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<sup>5</sup> It was founded in 1983, and is financed by the Municipality of Oslo and the Ministry of Health and Care Services. It is run by the Municipality of Oslo.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, 13 March 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Such residence permits exempt holders from visa requirements for all countries party to the Schengen agreement, and holders can therefore spend up to 180 days per year in Schengen countries other than their country of residence. It is not illegal for foreigners to be involved in prostitution in Norway, even without a work permit.

<sup>8</sup> Arne Randers-Pehrson, personal communication, 5 April 2006.



### 3.1.2 Who are the Nigerian women involved in prostitution in Norway?<sup>9</sup>

According to the Pro Centre, the women are aged between 18 and 53, with an average age of 29.1. Many left Nigeria several years before coming to Norway, and may thus have been considerably younger when they left. The majority come from Edo State and are of Edo/Bini ethnicity, but women of Yoruba and Igbo origin, as well as women from ethnic groups at home in the Niger Delta, have also been registered. Their family situations and educational backgrounds vary greatly, but most seem to come from the poorer sections of Nigerian society.

Before coming to Norway, many have lived in other Western European countries, especially Italy and Spain. Although a number have benefited from amnesties granting residence permits to illegal immigrants, they have had limited success on the job market, and mostly end up in sectors with low pay and little job security.

### 3.1.3 How did they end up in Europe?

Most are introduced to the idea of going to Europe by someone else, often an acquaintance, a friend or neighbour, or a family member. In some cases, they are recruited by women, known as *Italios*, who have “made it” in Europe.

There are, of course, also other channels. All of the women interviewed by the Pro Centre wanted to leave Nigeria for what they perceived as greener pastures in Europe. Their motivation for going was to be able to support their families in Nigeria.

As legal migration to Europe is virtually impossible for Nigerians with the social background these women have, they need assistance from others to get there. Most women expect to go into debt to pay for traffickers’ assistance (costs include those related to transport, travel documents and visas<sup>10</sup>), but they are informed of the size of the debt only once they arrive in Europe.

Those who are willing to talk about it most often state that the journey was overland from Nigeria to Morocco, and then by boat to Spain. Some travel directly by airplane from Nigeria to Italy or Spain. There is reason to believe that some have also been in transit in Libya, as this is a common route for Nigerians going to Italy.<sup>11</sup> Although some women are duped by the traffickers into believing that they will receive normal employment and a work permit when they arrive in Europe, most of them are aware that they will work as prostitutes.

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<sup>9</sup> Unless other sources are specified, all information in sections 3.1.2 to 3.1.5 is taken from Norli 2006:38-47. This report describes the situation in Oslo, but similar factors apply to other Norwegian cities.

<sup>10</sup> Both real and forged papers are used.

<sup>11</sup> On a fact-finding mission to Libya in June 2004, the report author personally observed that the old Medina in Tripoli is completely dominated by West African migrants in transit – with Nigerians constituting the largest group.

### 3.1.4 The reasons for going to Norway

There are many reasons why women travel to Norway (and Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, etc.). Some hope for better economic opportunities, while others are afraid that continuing to work in prostitution in their country of residence will put their residence permit in jeopardy. Orakwue Arinze, head of NAPTIP's Communication and Media Department, stated that Nigerian madams in Italy often report "difficult" women, and those who have finished paying off their debts, to the police as illegal immigrants, as they can become direct competitors to the girls through whom the madams make their money. Some women may therefore leave Italy to avoid deportation.

Most of the Nigerian women who travel to Norway have finished paying off their debts to the traffickers who brought them from Nigeria to Europe, and work freelance. Many pay experienced Nigerians in Italy between €1000 and €2000 for assistance with settling in Norway.

Some Nigerian women state that they have been taken directly to Norway, and these women are often considerably younger than those who have lived in Europe for several years before travelling to Norway. It is very likely that the women who have come directly to Norway are still in debt to their traffickers, and in a considerably more difficult position than those who have paid off their debts. The Pro Centre is concerned about the future impact of this new trend to bring in women directly.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.1.5 The Nigerian women's own perception of their situation in Norway

Trafficking does not seem to be perceived as a bad thing by the Nigerian women who are involved in prostitution in Norway:

*Pro Centre's impression is that women have little awareness of the human trafficking phenomenon. They have no concept of what human trafficking is, and often state that they do not understand the issue. Few of the women from Nigeria we speak to about human trafficking identify themselves as trafficking victims. They see no connection between the issue and their own situation – neither when they first came to Europe, nor now. Although there may be some exceptions, most are of the opinion that they are here to earn money so that they can help and support their families in Nigeria.*

*The women rarely consider it exploitative or strange that the way to Western Europe goes through organisations that earn large sums from their wish to leave Nigeria. They simply consider it a fact of life. As long as the women do not understand that they are, or have been, victims of trafficking, they will continue to believe that existing assistance and protection measures are irrelevant to them. Most are therefore unaware of these measures. (Norli 2006:46, translation.)*

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<sup>12</sup> Liv Jessen, personal communication, 13 March 2006.

## 3.2 CHILDREN

In Nigeria, most of the organisations the delegation visited work with trafficked children, as well as adult female victims of trafficking. Most sources stressed that child trafficking is possibly of even greater local and regional importance than the trafficking of adult women.

This phenomenon is both a national and a regional issue: children are moved across the country, and between countries in the region, to work as domestic servants, or in agriculture, workshops, quarries, etc. Sexual abuse of these children, and especially girls, blurs the line between child trafficking for labour purposes and the trafficking of women (including underage girls) for work in the sex industry.

It was also pointed out that children who live with people to whom they are related only remotely, or not at all, are more likely to end up as trafficking victims and/or working in local prostitution.

There have been reports that children have been brought into some European countries under the guise of family reunification or as foster children to work for African families as domestic servants. Others are simply smuggled in.<sup>13</sup> From informal contacts with West African immigrant sources, it seems that this phenomenon is almost unknown in Norway thus far. However, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration is aware of the issue.<sup>14</sup>

Given that trafficking of Nigerian children for child labour purposes is of very limited relevance in the Norwegian context, it has not been considered in depth in this report.

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<sup>13</sup> See BBC, 2003. Call to close child traffic loophole. *BBC NEWS*, 30 July. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3107461.stm> [accessed 30 May 2006]; BBC, 2004. 'I was a victim of child traffickers'. *BBC NEWS*, 17 May. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3720699.stm> [accessed 30 May 2006].

<sup>14</sup> Foster children can only be granted Norwegian residence on the grounds of family reunification if they have been part of the household of the foster parent who is resident in Norway *before* that person took up residence in Norway.

In cases where children from West African countries apply for family reunification with parents residing in Norway, and these parents never informed the Norwegian authorities that they had children outside Norway before the application was made, the children and their parent(s) in Norway are offered to take a DNA test to establish whether they really are related.

### 3.3 ASYLUM SEEKERS

The number of Nigerians seeking asylum in Norway increased from 14 in 2000 to 236 in 2003, and fell to 93 in 2005. During this time, the proportion of female applicants has increased, to about half of all applicants. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration has reported that, in 2005, less than ten women claimed asylum on grounds related to the trafficking of women from Nigeria to work as prostitutes in Norway. The Directorate has turned down several of these applications on credibility grounds. Currently, therefore, it seems that there is little overlap between Nigerian asylum seekers and Nigerians involved in prostitution in Norway, unlike in e.g. the Netherlands and Belgium, where many prostitutes apply for asylum.<sup>15</sup>

Concerns have been voiced within the Norwegian immigration authorities that Nigerian female asylum seekers may be vulnerable to attempts to recruit them into prostitution while they are waiting for decisions to be made on their asylum applications. However, no actual cases of Nigerian female asylum seekers working as prostitutes have been registered.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.4 THE ESTABLISHED NIGERIAN COMMUNITY IN NORWAY

The established Nigerian community in Norway is relatively small. As at 1 January 2006, 1 179 individuals of Nigerian origin were registered as residing in Norway.<sup>17</sup> From informal contacts with Nigerian immigrants in Norway, it seems that there is a fairly large group of Igbos – perhaps the majority. Most of the others come from southern Nigeria (Yorubas and others). Few are from the north of Nigeria.

According to both Patricia Akinyemi (the Pro Centre) and Helge Årsvoll (Kirkens Bymisjon Stavanger),<sup>18</sup> there seems to be little contact between Nigerian women involved in prostitution in Norway and other Nigerian immigrants. Their impression is that there is a fair amount of reserve towards these women in the Nigerian community, as established Nigerian immigrants worry that other Nigerians' involvement in prostitution will reflect badly on them.

Thus, there seems to be a very limited link between Nigerian immigrants and prostitutes from Nigeria, and it is unlikely that the existence of a Nigerian community in Norway has been an important pull-factor. Although the possibility that established Nigerian immigrants are or have been involved in individual cases cannot be excluded, there is no equivalent of the *Italios* phenomenon described above.

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<sup>15</sup> However, claims related to trafficking have been rare in this group – many apply as citizens of other West African countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia, probably to avoid being returned to Nigeria. (Katarina Smits, Belgian immigration authorities, personal communication, December 2003.)

<sup>16</sup> One relevant factor may be that most asylum seekers are housed in rural areas, located far from the urban centres in which street prostitution takes place, while they wait for asylum decisions to be made.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.ssb.no/emner/02/01/10/innvbef/tab-2006-05-11-05.html>. The figure includes all persons born in Nigeria, as well as persons born in Norway to one or more Nigerian parent(s).

<sup>18</sup> Personal communications, March 2006.

## 4. THE TRAFFICKING ISSUE IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

All sources to which the delegation spoke stressed that the issue of trafficking in Nigeria is complex, concerning different groups and involving considerable geographic variation. Both minors (of both sexes) and adults (mainly women) are victims.

Trafficking within Nigeria is closely linked to migration from rural to urban areas: traffickers stress the opportunities cities offer when persuading parents to let them take over responsibility for their children. It occurs both inter- and intra-state, and involves mainly children and (to a lesser degree) young women.

Human trafficking between neighbouring countries is a particular issue in relation to children. UNICEF has documented that Nigeria is both a destination for and a source of trafficked children.

Trafficking between Nigeria and countries beyond West Africa involves mainly, but not only, adult women. Europe, the Arab Gulf states and South Africa are the main destinations. There are regional differences within Nigeria regarding the destination countries, in that the women going to Arab Gulf states are mainly Muslims from northern Nigeria, whereas the women going to Europe and South Africa come from Nigeria's southern states.

### 4.1 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE NIGERIAN "SOUTH-SOUTH"

Many women involved in prostitution in Europe, including in Norway, are from Edo State, which is located in what Nigerians call the South-South of the country. This has led to the stigmatisation of Edo women in Nigeria but, as Mrs Agun, head of the NGO coalition working with NAPTIP in Benin City put it: "We are *not* a "prostitution tribe" in Edo." She stressed that the root causes of women ending up in prostitution are similar all over the country: "Social problems are often at the root of the issue: unemployment, underequipped schools and hospitals, etc. Some 80 per cent of the women are school drop-outs, and many come from rural areas." Eki Igbinedion, founder of Idia Renaissance, and the wife of the Governor of Edo State, echoed this view, and stressed that poverty was one of the main reasons why women end up as trafficking victims.

Sister Florence, a member of the Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women (COSUDOW), mentioned the social problems created in the region as a result of the collapse of the local oil industry in the 1980s, along with the structural adjustment programme imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as important factors behind the first migration of Nigerians to Italy in the late 1980s, originally to work in agriculture: "Edo girls went to Italy on visas to work picking tomatoes, but ended up in prostitution. Some came back rich, and became examples of success."

Orakwue Arinze, NAPTIP's Head of Communication and Media, pointed out that women from the Delta and Rivers states are also very vulnerable to trafficking, as the level of social development in the Niger Delta region is lower than in many other Nigerian regions.

#### **4.2 THE GENDER DIMENSION**

Grace Osakue, founder of Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), pointed out that traffickers operate differently with men and women. Men are expected to pay more or less the full costs of being taken to Europe before leaving Nigeria, whereas women are only expected to pay a deposit. Accordingly, the men are largely free of debt when they arrive in Europe, whereas the women are still tied to the traffickers and have little control over own lives until their debt has been repaid.

Traditions and upbringing also play an important role, in that girls and young women are taught to obey their families, and are used to being dominated by family elders, especially men. This makes them easier to control.

Women's low status and value in Nigerian society, coupled with the weaknesses caused by this and other tradition-related factors, therefore make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers.

#### **4.3 WHO ARE THE TRAFFICKERS?**

Mrs Agun (NAPTIP) stated that, unlike in Eastern Europe, people involved in anti-trafficking work in Nigeria have no information indicating that travel agencies or other otherwise legitimate travel businesses are being openly used for trafficking or people smuggling.

Mrs Agun (NAPTIP) and Grace Osakue (GPI) stressed that the people who recruit trafficking victims locally are often fairly close to the victims. They may be people of some social standing in the community, friends of the family, or even relatives. Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) confirmed this, and explained that sometimes parents may be unaware that it was an aunt or cousin who recruited their daughter. He stated that when people are able to force their own relatives into the trafficking system, it must be considered a corruption of the traditional spirit of fostering in West Africa.<sup>19</sup> He also stressed that this is the result of a collapse in the values system, and of broken family ties. Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi, Executive Director of the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) has put it this way:

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<sup>19</sup> See Pilon 2003, chapter 1 "The "Foster" Children Phenomenon in West Africa".

*Traffickers have capitalised upon, for example, the culture of the extended family system where poor family members send their children to rich family members to be cared for and educated by the rich family members in the cities which in essence was to break the cycle of poverty in the family. Over the years the children who are fostered to their rich relatives are no longer cared for but rather placed in various forms of labour or used as domestic servants in be children under exploitative conditions and abuse. (Olateru-Olagbegi 2004:2/3)*

Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stressed that the more important traffickers, both Nigerians and foreigners, appear to live in Europe, and that, accordingly, there is a need for more extensive cooperation between the Nigerian and European police forces to catch those who profit most from trafficking: “The seven convictions that are the result of NAPTIP’s work so far concern only small middle men, i.e. local recruiters. We must find the backers, the ones financing the business.”

#### **4.4 THE “JUJU” ISSUE**

The traffickers’ use of *juju* religious rites and rituals to ensure that female trafficking victims feel obliged to pay off their debts to avoid possible supernatural consequences is often mentioned as a particularly Nigerian aspect of trafficking.<sup>20</sup> Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) explained that NAPTIP has raided one of the shrines in Edo to stop this, and that witness protection has been given to some “*juju*-doctors” who have cooperated with NAPTIP and exposed traffickers.

Grace Osakue (GPI) underlined that the dynamics of *juju* are constantly changing, and that an internationalisation is taking place within this “traditional” sector: “These shrines now have branches internationally, and members in other countries in the world. It’s a booming business, and the picture we have of a native doctor is changing.” She mentioned that GPI has used religion in their work to break the hold native doctors have on people: “We use religion by opposing Christ to the traditional spirits, then the rituals will no longer have a hold on you.” Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (WOCON) agreed that the use of “orthodox” Christian (or Islamic) tenets (i.e. in line with more traditional theology) could be effective in order to break the power of the *juju*. Exorcism could also work, but this needs to be done by Nigerians. She was of the opinion that the police should involve groups from civil society when combating *juju*, e.g. when raiding shrines.

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<sup>20</sup> Most written sources on this issue mention this aspect. See e.g. Carling 2006, Norli 2006:41, Pearson 2002:165.

#### **4.5 LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF *ITALIOS***

Sister Florence (COSUDOW) mentioned that during the 1990s, people tended to focus on the fact that many *Italios* came back relatively well-off. With time, however, the general population in Nigeria has become more aware of the difficult conditions these women experience in Europe. Several sources stated that one of the main reasons for this was the various awareness campaigns run by Nigerian authorities and NGOs.<sup>21</sup> The Nigerian media and film industries (“Nollywood”) have also covered this issue extensively.

#### **4.6 PRESSURE FROM FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY**

Even though there is now greater understanding among Nigerians that the conditions for Nigerian women in Europe are difficult, there is still a great expectation that migrants returning from abroad generally should not come back empty-handed. Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stated that although “the girls come back with a lot of frustration and pain, they want to go back [to Europe] as soon as possible”, because their families expect them to come back with money. This problem is, of course, even worse where the women are forcibly returned to Nigeria from Europe before they have been able to repay their debt to the traffickers (see section 5.4.2).

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<sup>21</sup> See section 5.7.2 below.



## 5. ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS IN NIGERIA

### 5.1 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND COOPERATION

Nigeria was one of the first African countries to sign the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.<sup>22</sup> Nigeria has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that cover trafficking-related issues with both Spain and Italy,<sup>23</sup> and bilateral agreements with the United Kingdom (November 2004) and Benin (June 2005). U.S. Haruna, Head of NAPTIP's Legal Services and Prosecution department, stated that negotiations are currently being held with Niger.

Various multilateral regional agreements have also been signed, including the 2001 ECOWAS<sup>24</sup> Action Plan on Trafficking. A further, regional agreement on trafficking in persons was signed by nine countries, including Nigeria, in July 2005, and an ECOWAS workshop on trafficking is being held in Libreville, Gabon in May 2006, ahead of an ECOWAS conference on the issue in Abuja in July 2006.<sup>25</sup> Carol Ndaguba, Executive Secretary and Chief Executive of NAPTIP, explained that from a Nigerian perspective, regional cooperation on this issue is crucial: "If not all countries are fighting the problem, one country's efforts are almost useless."

According to Carol Ndaguba (NAPTIP), Nigeria is trying to sell the idea of a centralised anti-trafficking agency to its neighbours, as it is felt that NAPTIP has already proved to be effective. She stated that having sister agencies in the region would also make cooperation easier. While negotiating the bilateral agreement with Benin, for example, the process had been tough simply because of the number of different Beninese agencies and government institutions involved, and the need for internal coordination among them.

U.S. Haruna (NAPTIP) explained that the agency has been given a wide mandate, so that it can negotiate directly with other countries (in cooperation with relevant Nigerian ministries, where necessary). The agency is focussing on the situation of Nigerians, including trafficking victims, in Saudi Arabia (a destination country) and Morocco (mainly a transit country). Cooperation with countries in Central and Southern Africa is also being given priority.

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.unodc.org/palermo/>.

<sup>23</sup> As these MOUs preceded the establishment of NAPTIP, the Nigerian Ministry of Justice headed the earlier negotiations with Italy and Spain. Since being set up, NAPTIP has been the relevant agency for bilateral MOU cooperation.

<sup>24</sup> The Economic Community Of West African States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

<sup>25</sup> Carol Ndaguba (NAPTIP) stated that she hoped Norway would send an observer to the Abuja conference in July.

Mr Haruna went on to say that Nigeria generally strives to agree bilateral agreements with relevant countries, as such agreements are more far-reaching than the Palermo Protocol.

Ayalew Abai, UNICEF's representative in Nigeria, strongly endorsed Nigeria's efforts at international level, stating that such inter-country cooperation and bilateral agreements are crucial. He also said that UNICEF has high hopes for regional cooperation through ECCAS<sup>26</sup> and ECOWAS.

## 5.2 NATIONAL LEGISLATION

The Palermo Protocol has been incorporated into Nigerian national legislation through the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law – Enforcement And Administration Act of 14 July 2003. Amendments to the Trafficking in Persons etc. Act came into force on 7 December 2005:

*The amendments, which came into effect on December 7, 2005, according to [Carol Ndaguba], did not only extend its powers beyond investigations to include prosecutions, she stated that it provides for forfeiture of assets of convicted traffickers traceable to the proceeds of the crime.*

*Added to that, the amendments, she said, also created a Victims Trust Fund, where forfeited assets of convicted offenders are collected for the rehabilitation and restitution of victims. Forfeiture of assets, as provided in the new law, Mrs. Ndaguba stated, has universal application.*

*Under the amendments, the Executive Secretary said, NAPTIP's cases can now be prosecuted at State and Federal High Courts and those of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, as against the previous practice, where they were only entertained by state High Courts. (Ifijeh 2006)*

### 5.2.1 The Trafficking in Persons etc. Act of 2003 and the issue of double jeopardy

Section 25 of the Trafficking in Persons etc. Act states the following:

*Where a person is convicted outside Nigeria for an offence relating to trafficking in persons, he shall, on his return to Nigeria after serving his sentence in that country, be liable to be tried in Nigeria for bringing the image of Nigeria into disrepute, and shall on conviction, forfeit his assets to the Federal Government in addition to serving a term of imprisonment not exceeding two years.*

According to some legal interpretations, this constitutes double jeopardy, i.e. being prosecuted twice for the same crime.

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<sup>26</sup> The Economic Community of Central African States: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (WOCON) acknowledged that this was an issue, but stated that, in her opinion, the provisions of section 25 are a necessary part of addressing the problem.

### **5.3 NAPTIP – ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

NAPTIP was established pursuant to the Trafficking in Persons etc. Act. In principle, it has no mandate to combat trafficking within Nigeria, but according to Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP), the agency sees a clear link between internal migration/trafficking and cross-border trafficking.

The agency has only been in operation for just under three years. In addition to an administrative department, NAPTIP has five other units, which deal with the following:

- investigation
- legal services and prosecution
- rehabilitation
- public enlightenment
- communication and media.

#### **5.3.1 Investigation, legal services and prosecution**

According to Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP), a large part of NAPTIP's budget goes towards investigations aimed at ensuring that former trafficking victims do not end up being re-trafficked. In his opinion, financial assistance from departing countries would help NAPTIP to protect trafficking victims, by supporting its investigations of traffickers. Carol Ndaguba (NAPTIP) pointed out that many suspected traffickers are arrested when they are with potential victims. More than 100 such arrests were made in 2005.

U.S. Haruna (NAPTIP) stated that the agency collaborates with the police and immigration and customs authorities. Once these agencies have carried out preliminary investigations, cases are transferred to NAPTIP for further investigation and eventual prosecution. He also highlighted the vital importance of cooperation with European police and prosecution authorities to investigations into trafficker networks.

Carol Ndaguba (NAPTIP) emphasised that training law enforcement officers is a big priority, and explained that officers from federal and state prosecution authorities are seconded to NAPTIP. The staff at the NAPTIP head office in Abuja have mainly come from other federal agencies.

Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (WOCON) stated that prosecution of traffickers is very important. Godwin Morka, Head of the NAPTIP Lagos Zonal Office, said that the Nigerian authorities need more help from European destination countries in prosecuting traffickers: “We would like to see European countries bring back the victims, but *together with* the traffickers.” He stressed that being a relative of a victim does not protect a trafficker from prosecution: “When we find out that a parent or another relative is involved, we arrest them.”

According to Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP), the cooperation between NAPTIP, the police, and the courts is very efficient. U.S. Haruna (NAPTIP) explained that NAPTIP focuses on the federal judicial system, to avoid the congestion in the state high courts. Since the amendment of the Trafficking in Persons etc. Act, NAPTIP has been able to choose in which system a given case is prosecuted: “We can “shop around” to avoid court congestion.”

### 5.3.2 Rehabilitation

NAPTIP currently runs three shelters – in Benin City, Lagos and Abuja. These are all run in cooperation with other stakeholders (local NGOs, international organisations, and foreign aid agencies), and are partly financed by external donors.

The NAPTIP shelter in Lagos was set up in 2004. It is run in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM),<sup>27</sup> and has spaces for 120 people. (Its capacity can be expanded to 200, when needed.) Godwin Morka, who in addition to his NAPTIP role is also the head of the shelter, stated that some 80 to 85 per cent of the people housed at the shelter are girls and women who have been involved in prostitution, or who were intercepted while being trafficked for prostitution purposes. Some have been returned from Europe or transit countries, while others are victims of forced prostitution in Lagos. According to Mr Morka, the women and children housed at the shelter receive food, necessary medical treatment, and some counselling.

The Lagos shelter has space to set up skills-acquisition training programmes on the premises, but so far lacks the proper equipment (sewing machines, computers, etc.). Those who participate in such training programmes remain at the shelter for three months. Mr Morka expressed regret over the fact that the Lagos shelter currently houses 50 girls without an offer of skills training, as they need it to resettle properly in their communities.

Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) pointed out the undesirability of housing child victims of trafficking in the same NAPTIP shelters as young women who have been involved in prostitution. Carol Ndaguba (NAPTIP) stated that, in Abuja, NAPTIP transfers younger children to a different shelter, run by the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), in order to separate them from the women returned from Europe.

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<sup>27</sup> Considerable funding for the shelter comes from US government grants, and USAID has made a number of recommendations for the administration and improvement of the facilities. See USAID 2005:28-29.

### **5.3.3 Public enlightenment, communication, and media work**

NAPTIP's public enlightenment unit provides information for the general population on the difficulties trafficked women face abroad, and underlines that these are not merely the normal problems that migrants experience. As Funke Abiodun, Benin State Zonal Head of NAPTIP put it: "Some do not really know what's out there for them".

Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP), stated that the main goal for the media and communication unit was to cut the supply of young Nigerian women going abroad. One strategy is to focus on parents, spreading the message that their children are not responsible for providing for them. Another strategy is to bring trafficked women back to their villages, to talk to traditional leaders, chiefs and other influential local people.

### **5.3.4 NAPTIP's cooperation with other stakeholders**

All of the NAPTIP sources stressed the importance of cooperation with other stakeholders – local and foreign partners, state organs, and representatives of civil society.

Regarding cooperation with other state agencies, Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) explained that increased awareness of the issue of trafficking among customs officials and immigration officers has been very beneficial. Such officers are now more likely to contact NAPTIP when they observe groups of girls being moved around. On the other hand, the traffickers are reacting by becoming more daring.

A number of local NGOs are involved in the work against trafficking. Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stated that NAPTIP is selective when it comes to local NGO partners.

## **5.4 NAPTIP'S WORK WITH RETURNED VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING**

The delegation paid particular attention to the work NAPTIP does with women who return to Nigeria, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, after having been involved in prostitution in European countries.

### **5.4.1 Screening of women who are forcibly returned**

Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stated that many of the women who return to Nigeria have been forcibly expelled from Europe (and particularly from Italy and Spain). These women are interviewed upon arrival in Nigeria, to determine whether they are victims of trafficking and where and for how long they have been in Europe. Such interviews take place once NAPTIP is notified by the Nigeria Immigration Service that women have arrived from Europe. Some women who have returned from Europe – including women who have returned voluntarily – also seek out NAPTIP on their own initiative, to see what kind of assistance it can offer them.

According to Mrs Agun (NAPTIP), returned women are now being met by NAPTIP representatives at the airport. While not all women want NAPTIP's services, many do want to participate in the rehabilitation schemes that NAPTIP offers.

U.S. Haruna (NAPTIP) underlined that the interviews with returned women are very important to the NAPTIP investigation unit's investigations of traffickers.

#### **5.4.2 The situation of women who are still in debt to their traffickers**

According to Orakwue Arinze, NAPTIP tries to ascertain whether women who are forcibly returned are still in debt to their traffickers, as this makes both them and their families vulnerable to pressure from the traffickers and their middlemen in Nigeria: "We take them back to the areas where they are from, and then monitor them and their situation."

Sister Florence (COSUDOW) stated that when the women themselves do not pay their debts, the traffickers go to their families. She stated very clearly that "the families of trafficked women need protection against the rich and influential traffickers". Families that may already have mortgaged their houses and/or land to finance the deposit for the original trip to Europe may very well be exposed to further pressure from the traffickers.

Eki Igbiniedion (Idia Renaissance) stressed the general need for a dignified and safe return for women coming back from Europe, as such women are often afraid of those who trafficked them.

##### **5.4.2.1 Formal responsibility for protection cases**

Funke Abiodun (NAPTIP) stated that the Nigerian police's anti-trafficking unit refers protection cases of returned prostitutes in need of protection to NAPTIP: "Our police force is not yet properly equipped to deal with the necessary protection." Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stressed that "NAPTIP has the authority to both investigate and prosecute [in cases where prostitutes and/or witnesses are threatened]." He stated that, as at March 2006, NAPTIP has brought 46 cases of trafficking before federal and state high courts, of which seven have resulted in convictions thus far. The prison sentences imposed have all been around three years long, and none of those convicted has been sentenced only to pay fines. "We have had a good response from the courts and the judiciary," he added. "We have worked closely with the courts about the new [trafficking in persons] law, so now they are familiar with it."

Funke Abiodun pointed out that cases are often held behind closed doors, to avoid the stigmatisation of trafficking victims.

Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (WOCON) stated that, in the late 1990s, traffickers sometimes attacked NGOs working locally for the benefit of trafficking victims, but this was no longer a problem. In her opinion, the establishment of NAPTIP, and the clear indication it gave of the importance the government attaches to the issue, have contributed to the improvement in this area.

#### **5.4.3 Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitating trafficking victims is key to preventing them from entering the local sex industry or seeking to return to Europe.

The delegation visited the three shelters run by NAPTIP in Benin City, Lagos and Abuja. The people housed in the shelters were mainly children trafficked for forced labour in the region, including Nigerian children returned from neighbouring countries, children intercepted while being moved within Nigeria with the intention of forcing them to work, and children from neighbouring countries who had been brought to Nigeria to work.

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance) emphasised that it is crucial that the local community participates in victim rehabilitation. She stated that adjustment programmes involving both the returned women and their parents are important.

Godwin Morka (NAPTIP) explained that there are some complex cases, where women's own families are behind them being trafficked: "In such cases, we must think of their safety and can't send them back there. We have to keep them [in the shelter] for longer, for their own safety." Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (WOCON) confirmed that traffickers/recruiters are often related to trafficking victims.

#### **5.4.3.1 Health issues**

According to Sister Florence (COSUDOW), in addition to other medical complications, mental problems are a big concern in relation to trafficking victims. Rosanna Paradiso, Head of the Turin office of the Transnational AIDS/STI Prevention Among Migrant Prostitutes in Europe Project (TAMPEP), confirmed that psychological issues are a challenge, as trafficked women are generally in a desperate situation.

Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, founder of WOTCLEF and wife of the Vice President of Nigeria, stated that a majority of returned trafficking victims are HIV positive. According to Babatunde Osotimehin, Chairman of Nigeria's National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA), sex workers in Nigeria (as elsewhere) are particularly at risk of HIV.<sup>28</sup>

The delegation was shown the medical check-up facilities in NAPTIP's Lagos shelter, and informed that such facilities are provided in all of the shelters run by NAPTIP.

#### **5.4.3.2 Counselling**

On visits to the shelters in Benin City, Lagos and Abuja, the delegation was informed that trafficking victims receive counselling. It was clear from the schedule displayed in the Abuja shelter that an hour a day was devoted to "moral lessons/anti-trafficking talk & counselling", six days a week. According to staff at the shelters, such counselling takes the form of both individual and group sessions. The delegation's impression was that the counselling focuses on information about rights, self-awareness building, and investigation of the victims' relationships with their families and the possibility of returning to them. This last consideration is clearly linked to establishing whether the family was involved in trafficking the victim.

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<sup>28</sup> For information on the Nigerian health sector, including the availability of treatment for people living with HIV and AIDS, see Skogseth 2006.

#### **5.4.4 Economic self-sufficiency**

In the long run, trafficking victims must not only be rehabilitated, but must also be able to sustain themselves in other ways than by prostitution (whether in Nigeria or abroad).

Sister Florence (COSUDOW) stated that families are often disappointed in the returned women, as they have not fulfilled the expectations that their dependents in Nigeria had of them (see section 4.6): “There is a real danger of rejection, and this makes it necessary to focus on issues of economic empowerment – both to make the women self-sufficient and to enable them to assist their families financially.” Rosanna Paradiso (TAMPEP) explained that “because of the social pressure returnees face, personal empowerment is important. If you return empty-handed, then you are nothing for your family.”

Another important issue is that many of the returned women do not have a place to stay when they go back to Nigeria. Rosanna Paradiso stated that the ANIMA<sup>29</sup> project tries to prevent stigmatisation of returnees by finding alternatives to centralised shelters. In one case, a house was rented for a small number of returned women.

Godwin Morka (NAPTIP) said that skills training for trafficking victims is important, but that in some cases NAPTIP also provides training for mothers in the villages, so that they can generate a separate source of income and are not forced to re-traffic their children.

##### **5.4.4.1 Skills acquisition**

Several local Nigerian NGOs run skills acquisition centres, at which young people are taught basic skills that enable them to find employment. For young women, many such centres teach hairdressing, catering, sewing, computer literacy, etc. Some of these centres, including one visited by the delegation in Benin City (run by Idia Renaissance in collaboration with UNICEF), accept former victims of trafficking to Europe.<sup>30</sup> According to Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance), former trafficking victims receive such skills training free of charge. In her opinion, such training is more effective than higher education, as there is high unemployment among university graduates.

##### **5.4.4.2 Microcredit schemes**

If skills training is the first step, the second is helping former victims to set up their own small businesses, as the skills taught in skills acquisition centres often favour entrepreneurial projects, rather than paid employment.

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<sup>29</sup> ANIMA stands for **A**lbania-**N**igeria-**M**arocco, and is an Italian project supporting the return of migrants to their home countries. ANIMA runs several projects in different places in Nigeria.

<sup>30</sup> It was also stressed by several sources that teaching young women skills that enable them to find employment makes them less vulnerable to traffickers. See also section 5.7.



Rosanna Paradiso (TAMPEP) described how the ANIMA project has worked with the Live Above Poverty Organization (LAPO), which offers microcredit in several states in southern Nigeria. Forty-three former prostitutes who have returned from Europe have received microcredit through LAPO to assist them in setting up small businesses.

According to Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance), the Edo State government has also supported microcredit schemes for returned victims of trafficking.

Godwin Morka (NAPTIP) supported the idea of providing microcredit assistance to victims of trafficking, but stated that NAPTIP does not currently have sufficient funding for such schemes. He also raised the issue that giving loans to victims of trafficking again puts them into debt.

## **5.5 EFFICIENCY OF NIGERIAN EFFORTS AT FEDERAL LEVEL TO STOP TRAFFICKING**

Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar (WOTCLEF) was of the opinion that there is considerable political will to deal with the trafficking issue in Nigeria and, as the wife of the Vice President of Nigeria, she is certainly well placed to identify the issues on which the country's political elite is focussing. The fact that both Mrs Titi Abubakar and the first lady of Edo State, Eki Igbinedion, have focused their influence and political activities on NGOs active in this area (WOTCLEF and Idia Renaissance respectively), is in itself an indication of the importance this issue currently has in Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

Gbemisola Akinboyo, a UNICEF Child Protection Project Officer, stated that it is very clear that the trafficking issue is seen as an important one all the way up to presidential level. It was her impression that "the special assistant to the president really has his attention on the trafficking issue".

According to Rosanna Paradiso (TAMPEP), there is clear political will in Nigeria to deal with the trafficking issue. In her opinion, the challenge largely lies in overcoming Nigeria's general problems: endemic corruption in the public sector, a high crime level, and logistical problems (not least in Lagos).

Bukhari Bello, Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission (NHRC), stated that the NHRC has faith in NAPTIP, but that the agency is too small to confront such a big issue. In his opinion, NAPTIP needs more resources, and should focus on capacity building and efforts to monitor Nigeria's porous borders with neighbouring countries more closely, making cooperation with the Nigeria Immigration Service crucial. The NHRC has only been contacted in a few trafficking cases, all of which have been referred to NAPTIP.

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<sup>31</sup> One of the sources pointed out that the close association of these NGOs with "first ladies" can be a liability. NGOs that are dependant on the support of "first ladies" face losing e.g. funding and endorsement when those ladies' husbands leave office. This is an important consideration, as Nigeria's vice president and governors are up for re-election next year. For more on the subject of the political activities of African "first ladies", see Messiant & Marchal 2004 and Coquery-Vidrovitch 2004.

## 5.6 STATE-LEVEL LEGISLATION

Nigerian legislation is notoriously complex, and federal law and the constitution are sometimes contradicted by legislation passed in one or more of the country's 36 states and the federal territory of Abuja.

According to Ayalew Abai (UNICEF), implementation of legislation at federal level does not necessarily mean automatic implementation at state level, so "at times, it is like working in 37 countries instead of one."

### 5.6.1 The Edo State anti-trafficking law of 2000

In 2000, before the federal Trafficking in Persons etc. Act was passed, Edo State introduced a law that amended sections 222, 223, 225, 226 and 233 of the Edo State Criminal Code. Grace Osakue was very critical of this legislation, stating that the "Edo State anti-prostitution law criminalises prostitutes, and really creates problems for us on the ground. It makes our work difficult as neither victims nor native doctors will cooperate with us." Elsewhere, she has explained the problem this way:

*In Edo State, a law amending the sections of the Criminal Code on trafficking in persons was passed in year 2000. The law however criminalizes prostitution as a result of which victims of trafficking have become less willing to bring their traffickers to book and traffickers, their agents and other service groups such as native doctors are now cautious in their dealings. While this state of things may seem advantageous, criminalizing of prostitution has been shown elsewhere to only increase the abuses that sex workers experience and not reduce the incidence of prostitution. Rather than seek to punish the trafficked girl who in reality is a victim, the law further victimises them by disregarding the International Protocol that the consent to being trafficked is void because no one can consent to becoming a slave. (Osakue 2005)*

This view is backed by Anti-Slavery International (an NGO):

*In fact, the Edo State law criminalising prostitution has had significant negative effects for trafficked women who are now regarded as criminals on their return to Nigeria if they have been involved in prostitution. Under section 223b, any person who knowingly offers herself for prostitution may be punished by up to two years' imprisonment. (Pearson 2002:159)*

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance), on the other hand, was of the opinion that the Edo State law has actually led to a reduction of the trafficking problem.

## 5.7 PREVENTIVE MEASURES

NAPTIP, local and international NGOs, and UN agencies are all involved in campaigns and efforts to raise general awareness of the trafficking issue.

### **5.7.1 The educational system**

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance) stressed the importance of education, as young, illiterate girls are traffickers' main target group. Her organisation has granted scholarships to 250 children at both primary and secondary levels, to enable them to stay in school.

Grace Osakue (GPI) explained that her organisation focuses on prevention through empowerment of girls, and campaigns for this issue to become part of the primary school curricula of the Edo, Delta, Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom states. Starting early is crucial, she stressed, as many girls drop out during secondary school. Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar (WOTCLEF) confirmed the importance of focussing on young children at primary school level.

### **5.7.2 Awareness-raising**

Grace Osakue stated that GPI runs different programmes – both inside and outside the education system – to promote the empowerment of girls and young women, so that they will be less vulnerable to traffickers and other forms of exploitation. These programmes focus not only on educating the target group, but also on providing training for teachers, parents and other people involved in helping girls and young women to develop social skills.

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance) focused on the need for effective information dissemination, especially “to inform parents about what their children actually go abroad to do”. She believes that people are better informed now about what actually goes on than they were some years ago, when many thought that going to Europe was an easy way to success. However, she confirmed that there is still a long way to go in terms of boosting general awareness of the dangers awaiting those who are trafficked.

Idia Renaissance has used a number of methods in its publicity work, including youth clubs in both primary and secondary schools, traditional town criers who spread information about trafficking, and ward<sup>32</sup> representatives who can convey information in local dialects. The organisation's message is that “people should be sceptical when someone offers their children jobs and the like. People are encouraged to contact Idia Renaissance when recruiters, or even relatives, make promises of greener pastures elsewhere in the region or in Europe.”

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<sup>32</sup> The lowest administrative level in Nigeria.

According to Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, WOTCLEF's awareness campaign was able to reach many people through the television drama series *Izozo* ("worthless"), "a weekly television programme which attempts to depict the operation of traffickers, how they lure innocent and vulnerable minors, and all the inherent risks and dangers associated with this evil practice".<sup>33</sup> She lamented the fact that this project has been shelved due to funding problems. Veronica Umaru, WOTCLEF's National Coordinator, explained that the organisation also uses many other strategies to reach local communities, such as local volunteers, advertising, and information campaigns.

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<sup>33</sup> See [www.wotclef.org/activities.html](http://www.wotclef.org/activities.html).

## 6. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SITUATION OF NIGERIAN VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

The issue of human trafficking in Nigeria is a complex one, and raises several important questions:

- “How do victims end up being trafficked?”
- “What are their current living conditions like?”
- “What are their future prospects?”

### 6.1 OVERSEAS DEMAND AND EUROPEAN LEGISLATION ON PROSTITUTION

Several sources pointed out that although the socio-economic situation in Nigeria is an important factor, the fact that there is considerable demand for Nigerian women in the European sex industry is also crucial. Without this demand, no Nigerians would end up working as prostitutes in Europe.

Sister Florence (COSUDOW) mentioned that she and others involved in anti-trafficking work in Nigeria have observed a number of delegations from European destination countries come to do research on the conditions in Nigeria that contribute to the problem of trafficking, and that this made her and other local activists wonder what can be done about stemming demand in Europe.

Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar (WOTCLEF) linked the question of European demand to the lack of anti-prostitution legislation in most countries: “Where you have no law, this is where the problem keeps popping up.” Gbemisola Akinboyo (UNICEF) echoed this view.

### 6.2 THE STRUCTURE OF NIGERIAN CRIMINAL NETWORKS

Nigerian criminal networks, including networks involved in trafficking and human smuggling, are notoriously loosely organised, which makes them especially difficult to break up:

*Nigerian organised criminals are a prime example of organising according to a network model. This distinguishes them from e.g. hierarchical organisational models common among e.g. Chinese or Italian groups. Central persons in Nigerian networks are persons with special skills who have nurtured important contacts (e.g. with public officials), or have taken the initiative to gather a small group of people to organise criminal activities. Although these people may have a great influence, they rarely have a clearly structured organisation underneath. Short term alliances are formed for specific projects, and the network as such is in constant change. Despite the fact that West African criminal networks are important in large parts of the world, they are not known by any particular name.*

*The loose organisational form of the Nigerian networks is often very efficient and makes it more difficult for the police to fight crime. Firstly, the central persons are less visible than in other groups. This is reinforced when the networks for particular projects often include persons who are not Nigerians. Secondly, the effect of putting the central persons out of action is not necessarily too great. While hierarchical groups may tumble like a house of cards, the Nigerian groups rapidly restructure into new constellations.*  
(Carling 2006)

Orakwue Arinze explained that an important reason for the loose structure of Nigerian organised crime networks is quite simply the general lack of trust Nigerians have in each other, which makes them reluctant to enter into binding relationships with people they do not know very well or to whom they are not related.

### **6.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIGRANTS TO ENTER EUROPE**

Several sources linked the presence of Nigerian prostitutes in Europe to the lack of opportunities Nigerians, and especially unskilled workers, have to emigrate and improve their lives by settling outside of Nigeria. Immigration legislation and control mechanisms, especially in Europe, have a clear impact on the trafficking issue.

#### **6.3.1 Legal opportunities**

Nigeria's Immigration Comptroller-General, C.J. Udeh, is of the opinion that providing work permit quotas for unskilled workers from Nigeria, thereby establishing a platform for controlled migration, would contribute to reducing the number of illegal migrants to Europe: "We have suggested such schemes for Spain and other countries. Norway may not be suitable because of the small population, but having such a scheme on an EU level will benefit all European countries, as the labour issue involves them all." Rose Uzoma, Deputy Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Immigration Service, stated that such schemes have already been set up in Italy and Spain.

#### **6.3.2 Illegal opportunities**

As the opportunities for legal migration to Europe have become fewer, the attempts made by non-Europeans to enter and settle in Europe as illegal immigrants have increased. This increase in the number of people trying to enter Europe clandestinely, as most trafficked Nigerians do, has been met with more rigorous controls in the European countries that usually serve as entry points. Most Nigerians seek to enter through Italy and Spain (from Libya and Morocco<sup>34</sup>), but some also come in via Greece (from Turkey), and Austria and Germany (from neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe).

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<sup>34</sup> The plight of African migrants in transit in Libya and Morocco has been widely covered by the local media in the migrants' countries of origin, and Nigeria is no exception.

The steadily increasing controls have become more and more of a challenge for the traffickers, who are continually forced to come up with new ways of smuggling people into European countries. This means, of course, that the journey becomes ever more dangerous and costly for those who want to be smuggled into Europe.

Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stated that increased controls on intercontinental airline passengers travelling from West Africa to Europe has led to a change in how illegal Nigerian immigrants, including trafficked women, enter Europe. Many more are going overland than by airplane, particularly since 11 September 2001, which adds to the cost of being smuggled into Europe. These additional costs are added to the already substantial debts of the trafficked women. Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (WOCON) confirmed this situation.

#### **6.4 OPPORTUNITIES TRAFFICKED WOMEN HAVE TO REMAIN IN EUROPE LEGALLY**

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance) suggested that Norway should consider allowing some trafficked women to remain in Norway: “We suggest a similar law as the one in Italy, where women who actively cooperate with the authorities to persecute madams and traffickers are given some sort of regulated stay. This is not intended as an option for all, only for those who contribute to break up the traffickers’ networks.”<sup>35</sup>

#### **6.5 THE LOGISTICS OF FORCED RETURNS**

Stories of how illegal immigrants are treated during deportation from Europe are covered in detail in the Nigerian local media and, according to several sources, it is well known locally that some of those deported – especially women – have been involved in prostitution in Europe. It is probably safe to assume that this issue is also widely discussed among illegal immigrants in Europe, and stories of how the authorities in European countries behave towards illegal immigrants, including trafficking victims, are sure to have an influence on their choices and behaviour – and not least on their attitude towards European state authorities.

The level of contact and coordination between European and Nigerian authorities also needs to be addressed.

##### **6.5.1 Coordination between European countries and NAPTIP**

While in Benin City, sources mentioned a recent situation where women returned from Italy had not been met by NAPTIP officials when they arrived in Nigeria. This was of great concern to NGO sources like Sister Florence (COSUDOW), who expressed fear that the traffickers or their helpers could well be waiting for the women at the airport, to threaten them. In addition, Rosanna Paradiso (TAMPEP) warned that the traffickers are well organised.

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<sup>35</sup> The Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police is currently considering a change in legislation along such lines. See Andreassen 2006.

It is crucial that NAPTIP is not only notified about upcoming returns to Nigeria by e-mail or fax. As Rosanna Paradiso explained, the electricity supply can be interrupted for hours, sometimes days, and e-mails and faxes can be delayed, or do not arrive at all. European countries that are returning women who have been involved in prostitution should therefore not put them on a flight to Nigeria before they have received a clear confirmation from NAPTIP that the women will be met at the airport upon arrival.

### **6.5.2 Treatment of Nigerian women while they are being returned**

Rosanna Paradiso (TAMPEP) stated that “we still receive many requests from immigration authorities [in European countries] regarding forced returns. In this respect, we have to remember that our own governments do make mistakes from time to time when returning people.”

Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) explained that many of the women NAPTIP has met after their return from Europe have been angry because the police did not let them bring their belongings when they were forcibly returned to Nigeria. Some told NAPTIP that they had been able to hide away money from their madams, sometimes considerable amounts, but that they had been unable to retrieve this money from their homes because the local police would not let them retrieve their belongings before putting them on a plane to Nigeria. He also pointed out that women who are treated badly when being forcibly returned seem less inclined to cooperate with NAPTIP.

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance) stressed that women who are deported should be allowed to take their personal belongings with them to Nigeria, and that they should be treated with dignity: “These women are victims, not criminals.” She also warned that mass returns should be avoided: “These are stressful for the women, and it makes things problematic for us as we want to prepare for training, etc.”

## **6.6 FEASIBILITY OF VOLUNTARY RETURN SCHEMES**

Eki Igbinedion (Idia Renaissance) stated that women will be motivated to return to Nigeria from Europe only if they feel that they are returning to better conditions than those they left behind when they originally went to Europe: “If they return to nothing, they will want to return to where they were deported from originally. Job security is a key issue. However, I will not sit here and assure you that all [victims of trafficking] can return and find jobs, as very few of the jobs they generally have skills for can secure them the income that they are used to.” She stressed that skills acquisition training and microcredit schemes<sup>36</sup> could compensate for this to a certain extent.

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<sup>36</sup> See section 5.4.4.



Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) said that the rehabilitation of trafficking victims can be a considerable challenge, due to a lack of motivation on the part of the victims themselves: “Returned victims are often hard to deal with, they are rowdy, and many just want to go back to Europe. These often do not remain in the shelters for more than interviews about their traffickers and some counselling. However, the programme is voluntary, and we don’t keep people here by force.”

Veronica Umaru (WOTCLEF) noted that if returned women have a relatively positive experience upon their return to Nigeria, word of mouth will spread, and this will contribute to more women becoming interested in going home on their own initiative.

C.J. Udeh (Nigeria Immigration Service) emphasised that a return assistance programme is very important in order to provide incentives for return, and suggested that it was possible to run skills training and similar things in Norway, before trafficking victims are returned to Nigeria.

Marc Fiedrich, Head of Sector (Good Governance) of the European Commission’s Delegation to Nigeria, stated that the European Commission is considering whether to support efforts to prevent trafficking, especially by assisting Nigerian authorities to break up trafficker networks. He was sceptical of reintegration schemes, as he thought few women who are prostitutes in European countries would want to return to Nigeria to become tailors, hairdressers, etc. Despite the hardships these women face in Europe, the opportunities they have there to provide for their families in Nigeria, and themselves, are considerably better than they would have in low-income professions at home (like the ones facilitated by the skills acquisition courses set up for returned prostitutes). This means that, if given the choice, few would go back to Nigeria.

## **6.7 SCEPTICISM FROM TRAFFICKED WOMEN TOWARDS NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES**

In meetings with NAPTIP and other Nigerian authorities, Liv Jessen (the Pro Centre) explained that the Nigerian women her organisation meets in Oslo are generally very sceptical towards Nigerian authorities, because of widespread corruption in the Nigerian public sector. Godwin Morka (NAPTIP) admitted that the agency was aware of such attitudes, and Orakwue Arinze (NAPTIP) stated that building trust with returned victims is crucial to NAPTIP’s efforts to secure their help with investigations and the breaking up of trafficking networks.

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- Abuja Headquarter/Shelter
  - Carol N. Ndaguba, Executive Secretary/Chief Executive
  - U.S. Haruna, Head – Legal Services and Prosecution
  - Ladun A. Aiyegbusi, Head – Public Enlightenment
  - Orakwue Arinze, Head – Communication and Media
- Benin City Coalition Office/Ofure Residence Shelter
  - Funke Abiodun, Head – Zonal Office
  - Mrs Agun – Head – Coalition
- Lagos Zonal Office/Shelter
  - Godwin E. Morka, Head

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- Sister Florence

Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), Benin City ([www.gpinigeria.org](http://www.gpinigeria.org))

- Grace Osakue, Founder

Idia Renaissance, Benin City ([www.idiarenaissance.org](http://www.idiarenaissance.org))

- Eki Igbinedion, Founder and wife of the Governor of Edo State

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