

Summary

Evaluation of the pilot on categorical accommodation and assistance for victims of trafficking in human beings

Research background

In response to a shortage of suitable shelter facilities, the Dutch government started a pilot project on categorical accommodation and assistance (CAA) for victims of trafficking in human beings (THB). The pilot was officially launched in June 2010, for the duration of two years, and offered specialised housing and assistance for fifty adult victims of THB, among three institutions.⁴⁵ The main objective of the pilot was to accommodate the victims' immediate needs for secure shelter facilities and to ensure their safety in order to stop the exploitation. It was expected that because of immediate, categorical housing and assistance in a safe environment, victims would be more willing to cooperate in law enforcement investigations and the criminal prosecution of traffickers. In addition, it was expected that the pilot would increase the transition to follow-up accommodation, provide insights into the needs of victims, and contribute to the development of an assistance methodology for the target group.

The aim of the present study was to examine the extent to which the pilot on CAA contributes to its objectives. To evaluate the pilot, a comparison was made with regular shelter facilities that accommodate victims of THB in addition to other groups such as victims of domestic violence.

Research problem and method

The research problem addressed in this study reads:

To what extent does CAA meet its objectives, and to what extent are there differences or similarities in the accommodation and assistance of victims of THB in CAA and regular shelter facilities?

The research problem has been translated into a series of research questions. The following methods were used to answer these questions:

- analysis of registration data of CoMensha on victims of THB;
- semi-structured interviews with representatives of shelters providing CAA and representatives of regular shelter facilities;
- analysis of data gathered via assistance plans and questionnaires concerning victims of THB who were accommodated in the pilot on CAA or in regular shelter facilities from the start of the pilot until September 2011.

Victims of THB were not questioned.

⁴⁵ In June 2012 CAA was extended until the end of 2014 and the available accommodation increased from fifty to seventy places. The extended CAA is not part of this evaluation.

Most important findings regarding the pilot on CAA

Registration, admission criteria and entry

In the Netherlands, victims of THB are registered by CoMensha – which is also responsible for the coordination of the first accommodation of victims. CoMensha keeps a waiting list for victims who cannot immediately be allocated to a shelter. At the start of the pilot, few victims were on this list; thereafter the number of victims increased. The existence of a waiting list did not necessarily imply a lack of accommodation in CAA at the time. After the pilot was implemented, admission criteria were redefined and CAA developed into an emergency shelter for foreign victims who had just escaped from trafficking or who had just been granted a 'reflection period'.⁴⁶ It is thus possible that there were victims on the waiting list who, due to the adjusted admission criteria, were not considered qualified for placement in CAA.

From the start of the pilot until the end of September 2011, a total of 154 female victims and 23 male victims were accommodated in the pilot (including exchanged clients). The vast majority of this group consisted of third-country nationals who arrived in the Netherlands less than a year ago. In accordance with the adjusted admission criteria, most of them were still in their 'reflection period'. When leaving the shelter, the majority had a residence permit. In comparison to the number of victims registered by CoMensha, relatively few Dutch national victims were accommodated.

Victims' assistance needs, service provision and security measures

Frequently reported needs were access to independent housing, legal assistance, and financial services. Physical and mental health needs were also mentioned, especially by female victims of THB. According to several respondents, male victims of economic exploitation have less need for accommodation, especially when they are financially responsible for family members in the country of origin.

Contrary to what was intended, no specific methodology was developed for the accommodation and assistance of victims of THB. Service providers employed an existing method (referred to as the '8 phase model') which was adapted to victims of THB. The method involves the use of individual assistance plans in which the individual's goals and the necessary means to achieve these goals were defined in co-operation with the victims. Given the diverse backgrounds of victims of THB as well as the variety in their experiences and needs, such person-specific assistance might well be the most appropriate approach.

Legal assistance in CAA consists of informing victims about the rights and obligations involved in immigration procedures (e.g. qualifying for the B9), preparing them for hearings during criminal proceedings, and introducing them to lawyers specialized in criminal law and immigration issues. According to the respondents, the legal and administrative assistance (e.g. preparing documents for immigration or social assistance) is time-consuming. As a result, there may be little time left for psychological and social assistance. At the time of the study, psychological assessments and psychotherapy were not part of the standard service which was offered.

One of the aims of CAA was to ensure the victims' safety; accordingly, the shelters involved in the pilot implemented several security measures for the victims and personnel. Yet, in practice, there seems to be little threat from traffickers. According to

⁴⁶ Non-national victims of THB are granted a reflection time of three months to decide whether they want to cooperate in law enforcement investigations and the criminal prosecution of traffickers.

respondents, victims of THB do *experience* feelings of insecurity and worry about the safety of their family members.

Follow-up accommodation, independent housing and complaints against traffickers

Accommodation in the pilot on CAA was specifically meant for the first three months. In practice, almost half of the female victims of THB left CAA within three months after arrival; the majority of the male victims stayed longer than six months.

Possibilities to return to the country of origin were discussed with foreign victims of THB, but most of them did not want to return. Only a small percentage of the foreign victims returned to the country of origin directly after leaving CAA. Accordingly, providers tried to arrange follow-up accommodation in a shelter or independent housing. In practice, most of the female victims were accommodated in a different shelter facility after leaving CAA, while the vast majority of the male victims moved out to live on their own.

For female victims, difficulties in finding follow-up accommodation were the main reasons for their prolonged stay in CAA. There seems to be a shortage of follow-up accommodation for victims who leave CAA, in part because regular shelters tend to allocate a limited number of places to foreign victims of THB. Arranging independent housing for victims of THB also proved to be problematic because of a shortage of affordable dwellings. For male victims, this was one of the reasons for their prolonged stay, aside from cumbersome legal and administrative procedures. Every half year, Dutch municipalities have to allocate a number of houses to foreigners who obtained a residence permit. Until January 2012, foreign victims of THB with a so-called 'B9 status' were not part of this agreement.

The vast majority of victims accommodated in CAA filed a complaint against their traffickers.

Similarities and differences between CAA and regular shelters

Similarities

- The main purpose of the assistance offered in CAA as well as in regular shelter facilities is the 'empowerment' of victims of THB. According to the respondents in both types of shelters, the uncertain resident status of foreign victims is a problem when offering assistance. The legal and administrative procedures are time-consuming and the shelters' assistance approach, which is commonly future-oriented, may be difficult to apply as it is not certain that foreign victims can stay in the Netherlands.
- Although the possibility to return to the country of origin is discussed in CAA as well as in regular shelters, most foreign victims of THB do not want to return. Only a small percentage of the foreign victims returned to the country of origin after they left the shelter.
- In CAA as well as in regular shelters, security measures were implemented to ensure the safety of victims and personnel. In practice, providers in both shelter facilities encountered little threat from traffickers. Victims do, however, experience feelings of insecurity.
- For almost half of the female victims and the vast majority of the male victims the length of stay in CAA was longer than three months. The latter corresponds with the situation in regular crisis facilities where almost half of the victims stayed longer than three months. In CAA as well as in regular crisis facilities, a prolonged

stay is associated with cumbersome legal and administrative procedures, limited availability of follow-up accommodation, and problems in finding affordable housing.

- Irrespective of the type of shelter, the vast majority of foreign victims filed a complaint against their traffickers. According to the providers, the ability to obtain a residence permit and access to amenities were important reasons for foreign victims to file a complaint, aside from a need for justice.

Differences

- CAA has developed into an emergency shelter for foreign victims who just escaped from trafficking or were just granted a 'reflection period'. Regular shelters also provide follow-up accommodation, but tend to allocate a limited number of places to foreign victims of THB.
- An important aspect of the assistance in CAA is the support during legal procedures. Compared to CAA, most regular shelters accommodate a limited number of non-national victims of THB; in some of these shelters the expertise in legal procedures concerning the B9 is limited or there are only a few staff members who have a good understanding of these procedures.
- The vast majority of victims in CAA consisted of third-country nationals who were still in the 'reflection period' upon arrival; the majority of foreign victims in regular shelters already had a residence permit at the time of arrival in the shelter.
- For psychological assessments and diagnoses, victims of THB are referred to trained professionals. While providers of CAA had to rely on contacts in their network, some regular shelters could rely on internal services (e.g. their own psychological staff), though these may not all be specialized in victims of THB.

Concluding remarks

The present study provides an overview of the characteristics of victims of THB who were accommodated in the pilot on CAA as well as the assistance provided in these shelters. In addition, the report offers an analysis of the situation after leaving the shelter, e.g. return to the country of origin, follow-up accommodation or independent housing in the Netherlands. Furthermore, figures are presented on the number of victims who file a complaint against their traffickers. For all these aspects, a comparison is made between the pilot on CAA and regular shelter facilities. Based on the present findings, no conclusions can be drawn on the effectiveness of CAA compared to regular shelter facilities. To draw such conclusions, registration data should be more consistent and more accurately kept, and victims of THB should be randomly assigned to the different types of shelters.