

HAMZA FORCED INTO STEALING

My name is Hamza, I'm 21. I am Moroccan. Eight years ago, I left my home country to prove to my family that I could be a success abroad. In reality, nothing went as I'd planned.



When I was 13, like my friends in my neighbourhood, I left Morocco for Spain in hope of a better and easier life. First of all, I went to Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in North Africa, where I lived in the street. To get across the Mediterranean, I hid under a lorry which was boarding a ship heading for the south of the Iberian peninsula.

Once I arrived, I was taken to a hostel and looked after, and I met up with other young Moroccan men and boys in the same situation as me. Some of them told me about Barbès, a district in Paris where young people like us could easily make money before coming back to Spain to get their documents. The plan seemed safe.

So, I got on a train to Paris and went to Barbès. That was where I met Walid. He came from the same town as me and he invited me to his squat which he shared with other young men. The next day, he introduced me to some Algerians who were older than us. They welcomed me like a younger brother and said they were going to protect me and help me find my way. But for this, I had to bring them jewellery. In exchange, they promised they would give me enough money to live, to buy clothes and even to send to my family back home.

As I didn't know how to go about this, they sent me to the Trocadero and explained to me how to steal jewellery from tourists.

"They put pressure on me to bring in more and more jewellery"

So as I wouldn't be scared, they gave me a drug which they called "Madame courage". Everyone was taking it. And, it was true: I wasn't afraid of the crowd or of the police.

The attitude of the older guys changed quickly. I had to pay now to get "Madame courage" and they put pressure on me to bring in more and more jewellery. They would threaten me. Once, some of them got together to beat me up. I was afraid and I was more and more dependent on the drugs, to steal, sleep, to stop the pain... So I worked day and night to get more money... It was a vicious circle. I didn't see how I could break out of it... One night, in desperation, I tried to kill myself, right there in the street.

A passerby called the emergency services and I was taken to hospital. I was treated by a psychologist and I told him everything. He put me in contact with a specialist association which helped me get my papers, find a place in a hostel and start going to school.



KEY POINTS

Being coerced into crime is a form of human trafficking. It consists of forcing an individual to commit crimes and offences in order to take the profits obtained. The crimes involved vary: pick-pocketing, stealing by snatching or at cash points, burglaries, sale of prescription drugs, cigarettes or stolen goods, charity scams...



WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Young people of different nationalities (11 detected in 2021) are coerced into committing crimes. While there is no one single profile for victims, they have characteristics in common. They are mainly foreign and male, underage or young adults, sleeping rough or without a permanent address, either because they are unaccompanied minors or because they live solely within their own families or communities. They endure physical, psychological and/or sexual violence, demonstrate numerous high-risk behaviours and are highly mobile, including cross-border.

However, many young French men and boys, working on behalf of drug dealers as look-outs,



are also victims of human trafficking. Many describe recruitment and control methods that are similar to what is observed in relation to young non-French nationals. The victim can be exploited by family members, which, in addition to facilitating recruitment, only increases the control exercised over them. He or she can also be exploited by organised crime groups which use violence and drugs to maintain control.



HOW CAN THEY BE IDENTIFIED?

The fact that these young people are unaware that they are victims but claim to be delinquents, their suspicion of institutions and the conflicts of loyalty they experience make this phenomenon difficult to grasp.

Going out into the street to meet with children and young people to create a relationship based on trust is the vital first stage in finding victims, understanding their difficulties and ways of life and accompanying them towards protection. The profiles of those young people being exploited are varied and each situation of trafficking is unique. A combination of factors makes it possible to raise the alert and identify a potential victim.

WHY DOES THIS SITUATION OCCUR ON THE SIDELINES OF MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS?

This form of exploitation is particularly lucrative for those doing the exploiting. It allows them to have the exploited victims bear all the risk of criminal charges, telling them that the fact that they are minors means there is less risk of prosecution.

During major sporting events, the large number of tourists makes an ideal target for criminal groups who exploit minors to commit crimes.

Criminal organisations will be tempted to recruit massive numbers of new victims from among vulnerable minors in order to seize this opportunity.

