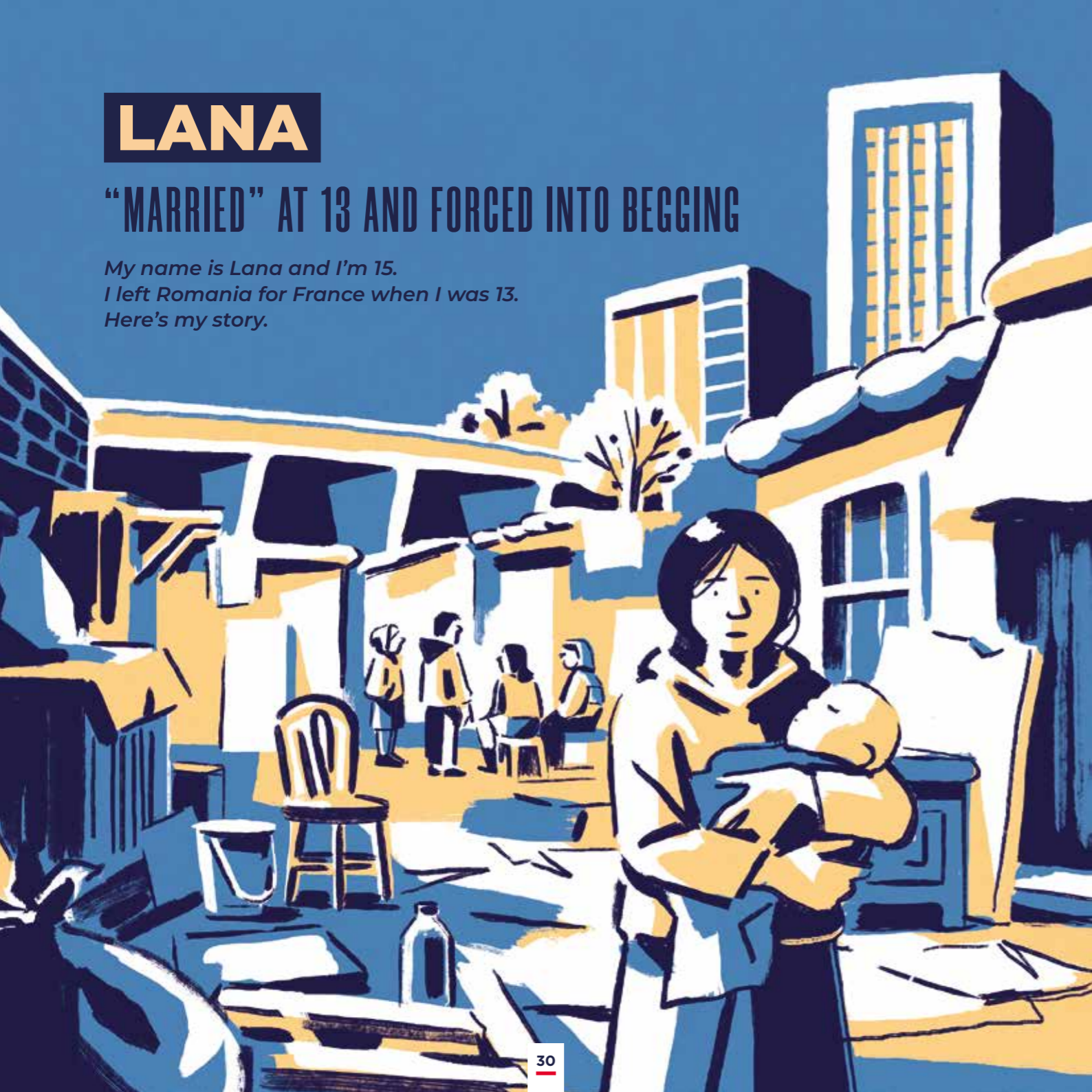


LANA

“MARRIED” AT 13 AND FORCED INTO BEGGING

*My name is Lana and I'm 15.
I left Romania for France when I was 13.
Here's my story.*



I was just a teenager when my parents decided to marry me off to Marius. He was 18 and living in France, in a family well-known for having done well. We were finding it hard to survive and this was a good prospect for us.

But, once in France, I found out that Marius lived in a shantytown, known as the “Platz”, in very bad conditions. Within the community, his family was feared and hated. The father seemed to be the boss here and took rent off all the families in the shantytown. Everyone was afraid of him.

As soon as I arrived, I was told that I had to look after the youngest children, the house, and beg in the street to make money. All this to repay the debt that I owed to my in-laws for the wedding. I tried to honour my parents, so I worked from morning until night, non-stop. But all the money was going to Marius' father. When I didn't bring enough home, he was violent with me, insulting me and hitting me.

My situation became even more complicated when Marius decided we should have a baby. He became aggressive and forced me to sleep with him. I ended up by getting pregnant. But my father-in-law still forced me to work. I had pains in the back, the stomach... But my in-laws refused to allow me to see a doctor. I wanted to run away. Only I had nowhere to go and I was scared of being rejected.

By the end of my pregnancy, I was exhausted. One day, I fainted and woke up in hospital. The doctor explained to me that I had to have a caesarian. After the operation, I returned to the Platz and immediately had to get back to work, and look after my baby.

“When I didn't bring enough home, he was violent with me, insulting me and hitting me.”

Until the day the police came to kick us out of the shantytown. Everyone ran for it except for me, I stayed put with my baby. I was afraid and I had had enough of that life. A policeman came to see me and I told him everything. I was very surprised when he explained to me that I could be protected by the courts and that associations could help me change my life. I

agreed and, after having filed a complaint, I was placed in a hostel and enrolled in a school. It's hard to rebuild your life but at least I am safe now, and surrounded by people who are helping me to move forward.



KEY POINTS

Forcing people to beg is a form of human trafficking whose purpose is to take the money obtained by the person being forced to beg. Victims are generally young, or even very young children, originally from Romania. They are often in France with their families or in-laws. An extremely high degree of insecurity and a life that is exclusively within the family or the community are characteristics shared by all victims.



WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

The exploitation is almost always within the family: the perpetrators are the parents, family members, parents-in-law or the spouse. Recruitment is therefore facilitated by this close family relationship which only reinforces the stranglehold exercised over victims.

Physical and psychological violence is often used to maintain this stranglehold and, in the context of exploitation by a spouse or partner, sexual violence can also take place.

The manipulation of certain community-based practices such as marriages with the payment of dowries or blackmail linked to children are also observed.

In certain cases, organised crime groups from Romania send poor families or children to France and demand the repayment of very substantial debts. In this case, the members of the family perpetrating the exploitation are also in turn exploited.

Children often fail to realise the seriousness of their situation which can appear to them to be natural: they think that they are helping out their families, taking part in the family business, and are completely unaware of the fact that they are victims.

Recently, young people from Sub-Saharan Africa and forced into begging have been identified, but there is still not much known about this type of exploitation and the criminal networks involved.



HOW CAN THEY BE IDENTIFIED?

As in the case of minors coerced into committing crimes, only outreach work in the streets makes it possible to make contact with these children, understand the entire complexity of their situation and start to build the trust which is primordial for any potential support work.

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

Major sporting events provide opportunities for perpetrators of trafficking who see the massive influx of tourists as a means of increasing their income. Criminal groups seize these occasions to develop their exploitation systems and recruit new victims from among those most vulnerable.

