

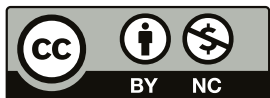
## A magnifying glass with a black handle and frame is positioned over a map of Europe. The lens is centered on the country of Albania, which is colored in a light blue-grey. The word 'ALBANIA' is printed in large, bold, black capital letters across the center of the country. Above it, the capital city 'Tirana' is marked with a red dot and labeled. To the north, the border with North Macedonia (labeled 'MACEDONIA (F.Y.R.O.)') and Kosovo is visible. The surrounding map shows parts of Italy, Greece, and the Balkans, with various cities and geographical features labeled in a smaller font. The background map is slightly out of focus, emphasizing the details within the magnifying glass.



# Albania: Trafficking

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## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

## Background

The following report, *Albania: Trafficking*, presents country of origin information (COI) on trafficked Albanian men, women and children. This research was initiated in response to a need identified by legal representatives and practitioners in the field of asylum for information on the conditions experienced by trafficked men, women and children in Albania. Research terms of reference were developed in consultation with legal representatives to shed light on under-researched issues. This project also presented an opportunity to update and expand on the scope of Asylos and ARC Foundation's 2019 report [Albania: Trafficked Boys and Men](#). For a consolidated overview of this report's key findings, we recommend downloading the Summary produced in conjunction with this report from our [website](#).

## Context

In July 2023, the Government of the United Kingdom passed the Illegal Migration Bill into law. Under the Act, the majority of asylum claims of new arrivals to the UK are deemed 'inadmissible', and the legislation foresees a duty on the Home Secretary to remove individuals with such claims to their home country or a safe third country, regardless of the merits of their case. In December 2022, the UK government announced an agreement with the Government of Albania to increase returns of Albanians, including those identified as victims of modern slavery within the UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM).<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, a report by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee published in June 2023, concluded that:

*"While claims for political asylum should not normally be entertained, there are unquestionably cases of Albanian citizens being trafficked to the UK, from within Albania or from within other European countries, where appropriate safeguards must be in place before they are returned to Albania."*<sup>2</sup>

## Methodology

This research was conducted by a team of Asylos staff and volunteers and comprises interviews alongside material gathered through desk research.

Research was conducted in line with Asylos's internal COI research training and handbook and adhering to accepted COI research standards, including elements of the EASO country of origin information report methodology (EASO, 2012), the ACCORD COI training manual (ACCORD, 2013) and the Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI (European Union, 2008).

## Desk research

Research terms of reference were devised with input from practitioners working in the field of asylum in the UK (see [Annexes](#) for the research terms of reference). The desk review was coordinated by an Asylos staff member working with a team of volunteer researchers and involved consulting a list of agreed sources, including English and Albanian language sources. Albanian sources were reviewed by a volunteer with native level Albanian language skills. The desk review incorporated a review of English language material published between 31 March 2021 – 6 December 2023, and Albanian language material published within the shorter research time frame 31 March 2021 – 15 June 2023, due to resource and time constraints. In the case of annual reports, such as the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons report, only the most recent report has been included, in the interests of brevity and inclusion of the most up to date information.

Each researcher reviewed and submitted relevant information from an allocated selection of sources. Additional relevant sources identified during the research were added to the list of sources consulted. Submitted information was reviewed by an Asylos staff member and filtered to ensure its relevance. It should be noted that some desk review material draws on information from the same primary sources, including, among others, some interlocutors that Asylos has interviewed for this research. Every effort was made to avoid instances of false corroboration, however readers should nevertheless maintain an awareness of the primary sources upon which cited information in this report is based.

<sup>1</sup> GOV.UK, [UK-Albania Joint Communiqué: Enhancing bilateral cooperation in areas of interest](#), 13 December 2022

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, [Asylum and Migration: Albania: Second Report of Session 2022-23](#), 12 June 2023



## Interviews

Asylos sought to identify potential interlocutors to interview for this research with reference to those cited in UK case law, those having published academic material on the issue in question, those recommended on the Electronic Immigration Network (EIN), and the Refugee Rights in Exile Programme, and contacts recommended through Asylos' professional networks.

Asylos aimed to interview interlocutors working in the UK and Albania with a range of expertise, including academics, representatives of local and international civil society organisations, individuals with lived experience of having been trafficked and receiving rehabilitation and reintegration services in Albania, representatives of national and local government, the police, and journalists.

Interviews were conducted by Asylos staff members and Asylos research volunteers, between May and July 2023. Each individual who agreed to be interviewed was sent an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, and a set of interview questions (see [Annexes](#) to access the interview questions). Interview questions for interlocutors with lived experience of trafficking were limited to their personal experiences of rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania. All other interlocutors were presented with the same set of structured questions, which closely reflected the research terms of reference. They were encouraged to indicate any questions that were outside their knowledge or experience, either in advance of the interview or during the interview.

Interviews were conducted either via videoconference, or through written communication. In the case of individuals with lived experience of trafficking, rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania, interviews were facilitated by staff at two shelters in Albania. In one instance an interview was conducted via videoconference with a member of staff at the shelter who translated questions and answers, meanwhile a member of staff at the other shelter conducted the interview in Albanian on behalf of Asylos, and shared written responses with Asylos.

Following interviews, further information was sought from interlocutors where clarification was needed, and these clarifications were received between September and December 2023.

Transcripts and written contributions can be found in the [Annexes](#).

## Drafting and peer review

Asylos staff members and research volunteers drafted the report, incorporating information from the interviews and desk research. The report was peer reviewed by internal and external stakeholders. Each interviewee was sent the report and their transcript or written contribution and offered the opportunity to make any amendments they wished during a sign-off period.

## Presentation of findings

Findings are presented in reverse chronological order under each sub-section. Material obtained from the desk research and interviews are placed under separate sub-headings in each section to aid navigation. Excerpts from interviews included in the report may have been subject to minor edits to aid readability, however the meaning of the text has not been changed.

The structure of the report is designed to ensure that findings are set out in a clear and comprehensible way, minimising repetition and allowing for the inclusion of new themes that emerged through the research process. Readers should note that where new themes emerged from the COI research process the full list of sources / all interlocutors may not have been consulted on that particular theme. Emergent themes are clearly indicated in the body of the report.



## Limitations

- Despite attempts to incorporate a range and diversity of interlocutors, Asylos was unable to secure interviews with members of local or national government, the police, or journalists, constituting a limitation of this research.
- Despite significant efforts, Asylos was unable to secure an interview with an interlocutor with specific expertise on corruption, constituting a limitation of this research. Readers may wish to consult a recently published review by the former Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration of the UK Home Office's Country Policy and Information Note on human trafficking in Albania, which underscores the role of organised crime in trafficking in Albania and refers to relevant evidence on this issue that Asylos' research did not capture.<sup>3</sup> This is likely due to Asylos' limited capacity to review Albanian language sources (see next point).
- The original time frame for the desk review of published material was 31 March 2021 – 15 June 2023. Additional desk research was carried out for English language sources, extending the time frame to 6 December 2023, to ensure inclusion of the most up to date information. This was not possible for Albanian language sources due to time and resource constraints (see [Desk research on page 6](#)).

## A note on language

The term “victim of trafficking” or “VoT” is commonly used by sources cited in this report. It is terminology that is used in the European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings,<sup>4</sup> and as noted in a report by the Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, the term “victim” may be used by law enforcement, the justice system and some NGOs due to its legal implications.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding this, Asylos recognises that other terminology is preferable in other contexts, for example, someone with “lived experience of trafficking” or potentially “survivor of trafficking”.

## Acknowledgements

We extend our deep gratitude to all interviewees who kindly shared their expertise and time with Asylos in the production of this research, particularly those with lived experience of trafficking and rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania and those working to support them.

This report was researched by Emily Wilbourn, Fatima Ali, Sophie Kloos, Laurence Hamieh, Bonnie Stuart, Anna Magyarlaci, Andrew Moore, Paola Faraci, Ebunoluwa Iyamu, Lizzy Galliver, Lisa Incledon, Baya Faure, Carol Bohmer, Cristina Juverdeanu, Ilvana Dedja, and Rongpang Longchar.

Thank you to colleagues at Clifford Chance for assisting with desk research.

Special thanks to Sophie Kloos, Jo Pettitt, Fatima Ali and several other colleagues at Asylos for their invaluable guidance throughout the project. We extend our sincere thanks to all peer reviewers of this report.

## Disclaimer

This COI report is intended as background reference material for legal representatives and those assisting asylum seekers. The COI report should be used as a tool to help identify relevant COI. Legal representatives are welcome to submit relevant excerpts cited in this document to decision makers (including judges) to assist an asylum seeker's case. We are COI research experts and adhere to strict research principles of providing relevant, objective, transparent, timely and reliable source material. We therefore strive to include discoverable relevant information, whether or not supportive of any individual case. **It is imperative that legal representatives and those assisting asylum seekers read the whole COI report and consider whether, having done so, the report is on balance likely to support the specific case in which it is proposed to rely upon it. Please also note that it may be appropriate for legal representatives to seek additional individualised information.**

<sup>3</sup> Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, “[Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Albania and Pakistan \(October 2023\)](#)”, February 2024, p.37

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, “[Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)”, 2005

<sup>5</sup> Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, “[A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking](#)”, October 2022, p.18



The information cited in this document is illustrative, but not exhaustive of the information available in the public domain. It is not determinative of any individual human rights or asylum claim. Submissions should always be complemented by case-specific COI research. While we strive to be as comprehensive as possible, no amount of research can ever provide an exhaustive picture of the situation. It is therefore important to note that the absence of information should not be taken as evidence that an issue, incident or violation does not exist.

## Feedback

If you would like to suggest additional research areas or sources to include that would assist in supporting your clients, please do share them with us. If you would like to provide feedback, please contact: [info@asylos.eu](mailto:info@asylos.eu).

## Acronyms

**BIRN – Balkan Investigative Reporting Network**

**CESC – Commercial sexual exploitation of children**

**CPU – Child Protection Unit**

**CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child**

**CSO – civil society organisation**

**DCM/CMD – Decision of the Council of Ministers**

**DV – Domestic Violence**

**GPO – General Prosecutor’s Office**

**GoA – Government of Albania**

**IOM – International Organization for Migration**

**MHSP – Ministry of Health and Social Protection**

**MIU – Mobile Victim Identification Unit**

**MoI – Ministry of the Interior**

**NACR – National Agenda for Child Rights**

**NCATS – National coalition of anti-trafficking shelters**

**NRCTV – National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims**

**OC – Organised Crime**

**OCG – Organised Crime Group**

**OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**PVOT – potential victim of trafficking**

**SARPC – State Agency for the Rights and Protection of Children**

**SECTT – Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism**

**SOCTA – serious organised crime threat assessment**

**SOPs – standard operating procedures**

**SPO – Special Prosecutor’s Office**

**SPAK – Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime**

**THB – Trafficking in Human Beings**

**UNCAT – UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

**UNDP – United Nations Development Programme**

**UNHRC – United Nations Human Rights Council**

**UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund**

**UNODC – United Nations Office on Drug and Crime**

**USDOL – United States Department of Labour**

**USDOS – United States Department of State**

**VET – Vocational Education Training**

**VOT – Victim of Trafficking**



## Sources consulted

### Databases

[EUAA](#)

[ecoi.net](#)

[Asylos research notes](#)

[Reliefweb](#)

[UNHCR Refworld](#)

### Intergovernmental

[Council of Europe - Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

[Council of Europe - Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(CoE - GRETA\)](#)

[Council of Europe - European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CPT\)](#)

[European Commission](#)

[Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#)

[United Nations Children's Fund](#)

[UN Commission on the Status of Women](#)

[UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)

[United Nations Committee against Torture \(UNCAT\)](#)

[United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#)

[UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#)

[UN Human Rights Committee](#)

[UN Human Rights Council](#)

[UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#)

[UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights](#)

[UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#)

[UN Security Council](#)

[UN Women](#)

### Governmental

[Albanian State Police/Ministry of Interior](#)

[Republic of Albania General Prosecution Office](#)

[Congressional Research Service](#)

[Danish Immigration Service](#)

[Immigration Refugee Board of Canada](#)

[Migrationsverket – Swedish Migration Agency](#)



[Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons \(Belgium\) \(CGRS\) \[CEDOCA\]](#)

[UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office](#)

[UK Home Office](#)

[United States Department of State \(Trafficking in Persons report\)](#)

[United States Department of State \(Human Rights report\)](#)

[United States Department of Labor \(Findings on the Worst forms of child labor reports\)](#)

## NGOs and Think Tanks

### [Amnesty International](#)

#### [Balkan Investigative Reporting Network](#)

The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network is “a network of non-governmental organisations promoting freedom of speech, human rights and democratic values in Southern and Eastern Europe” (see [About BIRN](#)).

#### [Center for Security Studies \(CSS\)](#)

CSS describes itself as “a center of competence for Swiss and international security policy. It offers security policy expertise in research, teaching and consultancy.”

#### [Center for Strategic and International Studies \(CSIS\)](#)

CSIS describes itself as “a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world’s greatest challenges.” (see [About CSIS](#))

#### [Central Asia-Caucasus Insritute \(CACI\)](#)

CACI describes itself as “a joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center. The Center is independent and privately funded, and has offices in Washington, D.C., and Stockholm, Sweden. The Center is affiliated with the American Foreign Policy Council, and with the Stockholm-based Institute for Security and Development Policy.” (see [Mission](#)).

#### [Child Rights Information Network](#)

CRIN describes itself as “a creative human rights organisation with a focus on children’s rights.”

#### [Christian Michelsen Institute](#)

CMI describes itself as “an independent development research institute in Norway. With a staff of 100 people, we address issues that shape global developments and generate knowledge that can be used to fight poverty, advance human rights, and promote sustainable social development.” (see [Who we are](#)).

#### [Conciliation Resources](#)

Conciliation Resources describes itself as “an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies.” (see [Who we are](#))

#### [European Centre for Minority Issues](#)

ECMI states that it “conducts practice and policy-oriented research, provides information and documentation, and offers advisory services concerning minority-majority relations in Europe.” (see [ECMI Mission](#))

#### [Fair Trials International](#)

#### [Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime](#)

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is an “independent civil society organisation” that “provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches, which serve as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organised crime” (see [Our Story](#)).



### Human Rights First

Human Rights First describes its mission as “to ensure that the United States is a global leader on human rights. The organization works in the United States and abroad to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law.” (see [About Us](#))

### Human Rights Watch

### Hungarian Helsinki Committee

### Institute for War and Peace Reporting

### International Committee of the Red Cross

### International Crisis Group

### International Federation for Human Rights

### International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

### International Organization for Migration

### International Society for Human Rights

ISHR states that “The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) and its national branches are independent non-governmental human rights organisations (NGOs) which base their work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The ISHR seeks to promote international understanding and tolerance in all areas of culture and society.”

### Minorities at Risk Project

MAR states that “MAR tracks 284 politically-active ethnic groups throughout the world from 1945 to the present -- identifying where they are, what they do, and what happens to them. MAR focuses specifically on ethnopolitical groups, non-state communal groups that have "political significance" in the contemporary world because of their status and political actions [...] The MAR project was initiated by Ted Robert Gurr in 1986 and has been based at the [University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management \(CIDCM\)](#) since 1988.” (see [About MAR](#))

### Minority Rights Group International

### Save the Children

### World Economic Forum

### Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar

According to the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) the “Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar (WB-OCR) is an initiative of the Balkan Security Platform (BSP). BSP is a network of civil society organisations (CSOs) from the WB6 (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) specialised in security issues, which work together towards construction of peaceful and democratic environment in the WB6 and Europe by greater involvement of civil society and citizens in developing and influencing security policies” (see KCSS website, [The Western Balkans Organised crime radar \(WB-OCR\)](#))

## Academic

### Anti-Trafficking Review

### Journal of Human Trafficking

### Crisis State Research Centre

### Google scholar



## Media

[Albanian Daily News](#)

[Balkan Insight](#)

[BBC News](#)

[Deutsche Welle](#)

[Fair Observer](#)

[Gazeta Shqiptare](#)

[Koha Ditore](#)

[Koha Jone](#)

[Panorama](#)

[Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty \(RFE/RL\)](#)

[Reuters](#)

[Rilindja Demokratike](#)

[Shekulli](#)

[Tirana Times](#)

[Zeri i Popullit](#)

[Inter Press Service](#)

[The New Humanitarian](#)

[Vice News](#)

## Civil Society Organisations

[Albanian Helsinki Committee](#)

### ARISE

Arise is an anti-trafficking organisation with headquarters in London and New York and with a presence in Albania, India, Nigeria and the Philippines.

### ARSIS [Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS)]

ARSIS describes itself as an “Association for the Social Support of Youth is a Non Governmental Organization, specializing in the social support of youth that are in difficulty or danger and in the advocacy of their rights.” (see [About ARSIS](#))

### Caritas Albania

### Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance

CSDG describes its mission as “to improve democracy, governance and policy making in Albania by generating evidence based research, monitoring public attitudes and opinions, and by promoting an informed engagement of the citizen.” (see [Mission and Goals](#))

### Centre for Youth Progress (CYP), Kukes

CYP describes its mission as “To promote positive youth development by increasing the effectiveness of youth workers, youth-serving organizations, and youth leaders throughout Albania.” (see [About us](#))



## Different & Equal

Different and Equal is “a nonprofit organisation dedicated to providing high quality reintegration services for victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and to improving the legal, institutional and social context to prevent and counter these violations of human rights” (see [About Us](#)). Different and Equal operates one of the four shelters of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in Albania.

## People’s advocate institution (NHRI)

### The Institute for Democracy and Mediation

IDM states that it “was established in November 1999 as a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the advancement of societal capacities, skills and knowhow. IDM generates knowledge and expertise for inclusive policy making, evidence-based alternatives to bolster democracy and sustainable development.” (see [About Us](#))

### The People’s Advocate

The People’s Advocate describes itself as follows: “People’s Advocate (Ombudsman) defends the rights, freedoms and lawful interests of individuals from unlawful and incorrect acts or omissions of public administration bodies as well as third parties acting on its behalf. It has as its mission the prevention of potential conflicts between public administration and the individual” (see [About Us](#))

## Vatra

According to Vatra’s website, “‘Vatra’ Psycho-Social Center is an Albanian non-profit organization, which provides services and expertise for the prevention and protection of victims of human trafficking, victims of domestic violence and all forms of gender-based violence, as well as their children” (see [About Us](#)). Vatra operates one of the four shelters of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in Albania. A staff member representative (J) and a beneficiary (K) of Vatra were also interviewed by Asylos as part of this research.

## Interlocutors consulted

### Ana Majko, Initiative for Social Change ARSIS (NISMA ARSIS)

Ana Majko is the Executive Director of the [Initiative for Social Change ARSIS](#) (NISMA ARSIS), an Albanian-based organisation focused on strengthening child protection mechanisms in Albania, community empowerment, designing and piloting new services, capacity building in child protection, advocacy and lobbying and policy development in cooperation with public and nonpublic institutions. The NISMA ARSIS emergency shelter accommodates children at high risk, including child victims and potential victims of trafficking.

Ana Majko is engaged in program development and implementation of projects for the most vulnerable groups nationwide. She is a co-author of the in-service modules for child protection, an author of several publications and presentations in national and international conferences, a researcher in different studies with a focus on children at high risk and victims of abuse, and activist in child rights protection in Albania.

The information provided by Ana Majko for the purposes of this research is based on both an interview conducted by Asylos, and, due to time constraints at the time of the interview, subsequent written responses to a number of questions that could not be covered during the interview. The full interview transcript and written responses can be accessed [here](#). For further information about Ana Majko, please see her full bio in the [Annexes](#).

### Dr Anta Brachou

Dr Anta Brachou is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the [Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse](#), and previously worked for a UK-based NGO, providing support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking in the UK. Dr Anta Brachou’s unpublished PhD thesis is entitled ‘*Human Trafficking from Albania to the UK: Interrogating the efficacy of the 4Ps Paradigm of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Partnerships*’. Adopting the ‘4Ps paradigm’, the research sheds light on the efficacy of processes and practices in place in Albania that seek to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators. Given the surge in the number of Albanian potential victims of trafficking in the UK, the study also interrogates the interstate cooperation and partnerships between Albania and the UK. Furthermore, the thesis explores the recurring trafficking narratives as presented in the UK and provides a nuanced explanation of the current situation.



The information provided by Dr Anta Brachou for the purposes of this research is based on an interview conducted by Asylos. The full transcript and Dr Anta Brachou's resumer can be accessed in the [Annexes](#).

#### **Anxhela Bruci, Arise Albania Coordinator**

Anxhela Bruci is the Arise Albania Coordinator, contributing to Arise's efforts to build multi-agency networks to address trafficking in Albania. [Arise](#) is an anti-trafficking organisation with headquarters in London and New York and with a presence in Albania, India, Nigeria and the Philippines. The information provided by Anxhela Bruci for the purposes of this research is based on an interview conducted by Asylos. The full interview transcript can be accessed in the [Annexes](#).

#### **Different and Equal**

[Different and Equal](#) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing high quality services for the protection and reintegration of victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and to changing the legal, institutional and social context to counter these abuses. Different and Equal's main activities include: victim identification and referral; provision of comprehensive, long-term, reintegration services (residential and community based); awareness-raising in communities about trafficking in persons, sexual abuse and domestic violence and the rights of the victims; prevention of sexual violence and trafficking through support to vulnerable groups; training and capacity building of state and civil society partners; research and evaluations; technical assistance in drafting laws and legislation to protect victims of trafficking, victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse; and advocacy around the rights and protection for trafficking victims, victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Different and Equal submitted written responses to questions provided by Asylos for the purposes of this research. The full transcript of written responses can be accessed in the [Annexes](#).

#### **Dr Klea Ramaj**

Dr Klea Ramaj is a recent PhD graduate from the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and also holds an MPhil in Criminological Research from the University of Cambridge, with her MPhil thesis focusing on the return and reintegration experiences of Albanian victims of human trafficking. Klea Ramaj is the author of the research article "[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)", published in May 2021 in the Journal of Human Trafficking, 1–22, based on field research conducted in 2019.

Klea submitted written responses to questions provided by Asylos for the purposes of this research, and her responses are based on her 2019 field research as well as research she conducted independently, consulting online sources. The full transcript of written responses and Dr Klea Ramaj's CV in the [Annexes](#).

#### **Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers**

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers is a Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth. She has recently conducted research with young people at risk of criminal exploitation in Albania and has produced four related [Working Papers](#). Further information about Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers' professional background can be found [here](#). The information provided by Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers for the purposes of this research is based on an interview conducted by Asylos. The full interview transcript can be accessed in the [Annexes](#).

#### **Terre des hommes – Albania representative**

[Terre des hommes – Albania](#) describes its operations as follows, "Terres des hommes is the leading Swiss organization for children's aid founded in 1960. Tdh operates in Albania since 1993 in the field of child rights, child protection, migration, and juvenile justice. Terre des hommes' area of expertise ranges from psycho-social interventions to empowerment of local, regional, and national level governmental institutions and key stakeholders and strengthening of the child protection, juvenile justice system and social inclusion system for migrants in Albania." Current and recent work by Terre des hommes – Albania includes cooperation regarding counter-trafficking efforts at the transnational level, supporting local anti-trafficking organisations in Albania, and doing trafficking prevention and awareness raising work at the community level. Information for this report was provided by a representative of Terre des hommes – Albania in an interview with Asylos. The full interview transcript can be accessed in the [Annexes](#).



### Tjeter Vizion

**Tjeter Vizion** is an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation, established in Elbasan in 2002. It provides services for women, minors and disadvantaged youth. Tjeter Vizion operates a shelter in Albania for minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking and is a member of the Albanian National Referral Mechanism, and the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking shelters. Adriana Kasa, Program Manager at Tjeter Vizion, submitted written responses to questions provided by Asylos for the purposes of this report. The full transcript of written responses can be found in the [Annexes](#). Adriana Kasa's full CV can also be found in the [Annexes](#).

### UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist

**UNICEF Albania** describes its work as follows: "UNICEF Albania supports government reforms, civil society initiatives and research that help all children to enjoy their human rights." A Child Protection Specialist from UNICEF Albania (referred to throughout the report as "UNICEF Child Protection Specialist") was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report. The full interview transcript can be accessed in the [Annexes](#).

### Vatra Psycho-Social Centre (Vatra)

**"Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre** is an Albanian non-profit organisation, which provides services and expertise for the prevention and protection of victims of trafficking, and domestic and community violence, according to Albanian legislation. "Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre started its activity in 1999. The target groups supported by "Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre include vulnerable groups, especially women, girls, young people and children.

The main activities of "Vatra" include:

- Preventing trafficking in human beings, violence, and sexual abuse (through sensitizing campaign in overall Albania, supporting with services children, girls, and women in the vulnerable situation)
- Identification of victims and potential victims of human trafficking through outreach work from mobile teams in 5 regional of Albania.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration services for victims of trafficking, sexual abuse, and violence especially women, girls and their children.
- Capacity building for representatives of local government institutions and other NGOs
- Lobbying and advocacy (Contribution to the drafting and improvement of Albanian legislation and policies)

Vatra Psycho-Social Centre operates a shelter in Albania for victims and potential victims of trafficking, is a member of the Albanian National Referral Mechanism, and a member of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters. A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Centre was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report. The full interview transcript can be accessed and further information can be found about Vatra in the [Annexes](#).

### Beneficiaries of Vatra and Different and Equal

Individuals with lived experience of trafficking and receiving rehabilitation and reintegration services from Vatra and Different and Equal, respectively, were interviewed for this research. To protect their identities, no real names have been used and no personal information, beyond that which beneficiaries chose to disclose in interviews, has been included. Interview transcripts can be found in the [Annexes](#).



# 1. Trafficking Profiles

## 1.1 Victims of trafficking – profiles

· Refer also to [1.2 Prevalence by profile / type of exploitation on page 23](#).

### Desk review material

Arise, an international anti-trafficking NGO that works in Albania, commented that:

“Young Albanians are vulnerable to human trafficking, with complex, powerful organised crime groups able to exploit a lack of economic opportunities. Recent historical tumult has meant high levels of irregular migration, leaving many Albanian migrants without formal protections and at high risk. Albanians have been subject to criminal exploitation and debt entrapment in the UK as a result of these processes.”

Source: Arise, “[Youth Exploitation in Albania](#)”, 2 December 2023

The European Commission’s report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

“Albania remains a country of origin, transit and destination of trafficking in human beings. Albanian women and children are subject to trafficking mostly for sexual exploitation to neighbouring countries and EU Member States, while the second and third purposes for trafficking are forced labour and criminal exploitation [...] Children placed in institutions and children from the Roma and Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking”.

Source: European Commission, “[Albania 2023 Report](#)”, 8 November 2023, p. 45

In a statement by the Albanian anti-trafficking network United Response Against Trafficking (URAT) (a coalition of religious congregations and nonprofit organisations in Albania) that was published on Arise’s website, marking World Day Against Trafficking in July 2023, it was noted that:

“The trafficking of men and boys is very widespread, despite being less considered or discussed. The experiences of trafficked men and boys include various forms of trafficking. Men and boys are exploited for forced labour, sexual exploitation, the use and involvement in low-level criminal activities (theft and distribution of narcotics), and for forced begging.”

Source: United Response Against Trafficking in Persons in Albania- URAT (Author), Arise (publisher), “[World Day Against Trafficking: Men and Boys](#)”, 31 July 2023

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report stated that:

“As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Albania, and traffickers exploit victims from Albania abroad. Traffickers exploit Albanian women and children in sex trafficking and forced labor within the country, especially during tourist season. Traffickers use false promises such as marriage or employment offers to exploit victims in sex trafficking. Traffickers commonly force children to beg or perform other types of compelled labor, such as selling small items, and also force children into criminality, including burglary and narcotics distribution. Traffickers exploit Albanian children, mainly from the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, for seasonal work and forced begging. Isolated reports state traffickers exploit children through forced labor in cannabis fields in Albania and some traffickers are likely involved in drug trafficking. Traffickers exploit Albanian victims in sex trafficking in countries across Europe, particularly Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (UK). Albanian migrants who seek employment in Western Europe are vulnerable to exploitation in forced labor and forced criminality, particularly in the UK. Foreign victims from European countries, the Gambia, and the Philippines are exploited in sex trafficking and forced labor in Albania. [...] Migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees traveling, being smuggled, or voluntarily resettled in Albania, particularly women and unaccompanied children, are vulnerable to trafficking. Experts report children with mental and physical disabilities were increasingly vulnerable to trafficking.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023



As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, a number of interlocutors interviewed by the UK Home Office (AWEN, Caritas, a Mobile unit (Kukes), the Ministry of Interior, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Albania (BIRN), and the Tirana Municipality), provided some information relating to the profiles of victims of trafficking:

“Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) [...]

**Q.** Are you aware of male VOT?

**A.** We know from the anti-trafficking coalition that boys are being trafficked for work and begging.

[...]

Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** You say you work with Roma, is that a big issue in regard to trafficking?

**A.** It depends on the category of trafficking. Roma are exploited for begging in the street.

[...]

Mobile unit, Kukes, 7 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** What is the profile of VOT/PVOT – male / female?

**A.** They are mostly female VOT, but there are a few male. In addition to working on site and reaching out to remote areas we work with the customs service at the border because we know there is a lot of trafficking going on there, especially in the summer.

An issue we encountered in the summer at the border was related to minors crossing from Albania to Kosovo.

[...]

Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Those returned, are they mostly men or women?

**A.** Based on statistics its mostly women and girls, returning to Albania.

[...]

BIRN Albania, 12 October 2022 [...]

The state mechanism invested a lot in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but the focus was girls being trafficked for sexual exploitation. Many girls were promised engagement and marriage and were moved mainly to Italy and Belgium where they were exploited. Albanian mentality accepted that women were sexually exploited, and that this was immoral. This is why a system was established and embraced in the referral of potential victims of trafficking (PVOT), due to social attitudes.

Something different is happening now, in that boys are being trafficked to work in cannabis houses in the UK, but locally this is not seen as immoral.

[...]

Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]

From the information we have from the Police, in general the male victims of trafficking are young boys who have suffered exploitation for forced labour outside Albania, in EU countries.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022.

IOM reported in 2022 on the presence of trafficking in Albania, noting that both adults and children are trafficked and that trafficking occurs within the country, the region and towards other states. The report equally noted the types of trafficking that occur and observed the challenge of identifying trafficked individuals.

“Albania is a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficked adults and children. Trafficking is reported to take place both inside the country, within the region and towards other states. Identification remains a challenge, especially within the refugee and migrant population. Identified victims are trafficked for a wide range of purposes, including sexual and labour exploitation, domestic servitude, slavery, forced marriage, forced begging, and forced criminality.”

Source: IOM, “[IOM Strategy for Albania \(2022-2025\)](#)”, October 2022, p. 10

A July 2022 article in Gazeta Shqiptare pointed to the vulnerability of children to trafficking:

“Human trafficking, including children, continues to be a concern in Albania, despite the decrease in the number of trafficked persons and the increase in measures to prevent the phenomenon. According to UNICEF’s expert on the anti-trafficking program, Sonila Pema, around 13,000 people have been identified as trafficked or at risk of being trafficked throughout the country. [...]

The most vulnerable/target group are the children who are being trafficked by their parents towards the UK or other EU countries. INSTAT data show that only in the past year, 109 children were registered as possible victims of human trafficking, three children were trafficked and 67 thousand children sought asylum in the EU. " [In-house translation. The author is an Albanian native speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: Trafikimi i qenieve njerëzore, përfshirë fëmijët, vazhdon të jetë shqetësim në Shqipëri, megjithë uljen e numrit të personave të trafikuar dhe shtimin e masave për parandalimin e fenomenit. Sipas ekspertës së UNICEF-it për programin e antitrafikimit, Sonila Pema, në të gjithë vendin janë evidentuar rreth 13 mijë persona të trafikuar ose në rrezik për t'u trafikuar. [...] Pjesa më e rrezikuar për trafikim janë fëmijët, një pjesë e tyre trafikohen drejt Anglisë apo vendeve të tjera të BE nga vetë prindërit. Të dhënat e INSTAT-it tregojnë se, vetëm gjatë vitit të kaluar, u regjistruan 109 fëmijë si viktimë të mundshme të trafikimit, tre fëmijë të tjerë të trafikuar, ndërsa 67 fëmijë kërkuar azil në vendet e BE.

Source: Gazeta Shqiptare, "UNICEF ngre alarmin: Shqetësim për trafikimin e qenieve njerëzore në Shqipëri, "viktimë" edhe fëmijët!", 18 July 2022

A qualitative study was authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF about the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania, and was based on interviews with trafficking survivors, and representatives of government agencies and NGOs. The study mentioned trafficking of boys and men, citing a 2015 report by Different and Equal:

"Although they are less likely object of studies and research, men and boys are also trafficked, within Albania and to foreign countries. The ethnic composition of male victims has changed over time: previously, most identified male trafficking victims were Roma or Egyptian, but in more recent years, ethnic Albanian males have been identified.<sup>8</sup> [...]

<sup>8</sup> Different and Equal, 2015, Falling through the cracks! The trafficking of men and boys in Albania."

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania](#)", May 2022, p.17

In a February 2022 submission to the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, the Albanian NGO Different and Equal reflected on the migration-trafficking nexus, pointing out the vulnerability of foreigners and migrants to trafficking:

"Foreigners and migrants remain a group endangered by trafficking, considering the increasing number of migrants who use Albania as a transit country to EU countries. In recent years there are data on the increase in the number not only of Albanians who emigrate abroad but also of foreign migrants who come to Albania for various reasons. [...] Migrants remain the most vulnerable category to be exploited and trafficked by criminal groups. Migration affects all genders but a gender approach helps us to properly address the phenomenon. A typical example is the situation of women and girls who are victims of domestic violence who in an effort to escape violence or even for a better economic solution seek to emigrate, risking their future even more. Divorced women seek the permission of the other parent to emigrate with their children, risking their children in this case."

Source: Different and Equal, "[Input for the Special Rapporteur's report on 'contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities'](#)", February 2022, p. 2-3

UNICEF noted in its 2022 'Albania Child Notice' report that:

"A key issue to emerge from different findings is that trafficked children in and from Albania experience multiple forms of exploitation. These may include one or several issues: sexual exploitation (including prostitution, still a statutory crime for children according to the Albanian Criminal Code); enforced begging; other kinds of forced labour (which may also involve crime) and early marriage."

Source: UNICEF, "[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#)", 2022, p.96

A 2021 article in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* explored the rehabilitation and reintegration challenges faced by Albanian victims of sex trafficking and forced begging upon their return to Albania. The report, based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – found the following with regards to the profiles of those assisted to return to Albania:



“Statistical data on returned Albanian trafficking victims are not available. Evidence from the interviews revealed that most assisted returned victims were females who had been trafficked for sexual purposes (either through forced prostitution or sham marriages) and children who had been trafficked for forced begging. Destination countries where victims returned from included neighboring countries (e.g., Greece, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) and Western European countries (e.g., Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland).”

Source: Klea Ramaj, [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), Journal of Human Trafficking, 7 May 2021

A report by Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime about commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Western Balkans discussed ‘Roma vulnerabilities’, children begging and selling on the streets in Tirana, and reports of male children vulnerable to sexual exploitation:

#### “Roma vulnerabilities

Roma children are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation. Already in 2014, for instance, the European Commission issued a report on SECTT [Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism] looking specifically at the vulnerabilities recognized and faced by Roma children on the move in Kosovo. The report revealed how some children were forced to move between Albania and North Macedonia, usually during the summer, or between Albania and Kosovo in summer and winter.[...] However, reports on Roma children and CSEC [Commercial sexual exploitation of children] in the Western Balkans by either international or non-governmental organizations are rare. The ones that do exist are often outdated – as is specific demographic data on Roma communities. [...] [...] low levels of education and social mobility make many Roma children vulnerable to various forms of exploitation – both within the community and by organized criminal networks operating in the Western Balkans and beyond. Previous research and articles in the media have often focused on Roma children being exploited in forced begging and pickpocketing.[...] Children (primarily boys) are often trafficked from suburban to urban areas for the purpose of begging in the streets.<sup>94</sup> For example, in Tirana, Albania, hundreds of children are estimated to make a living out of begging, selling items in the streets and shoe-polishing.<sup>95</sup> However, there have also been reports of male children living on the streets being vulnerable to sexual exploitation in nightclubs as both dancers and for sex work.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> A typology of child trafficking in Albania, OSCE, 17 July 2020, <https://www.osce.org/presence-in-albania/45754>

<sup>95</sup> Interview with a representative of the national child protection mechanism and a representative of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Tirana, November 2020.

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with a representative of a governmental protection unit, a representative of the national child protection mechanism and a representative of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Tirana, November 2020.”

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, [“EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans”](#), May 2021, p.32

In a press release from February 2021, Nisma-ARSIS reported on the case study of “Deni”, a child victim of trafficking:

“The case of ‘Deni’ victim of human trafficking: The case of the minor Deni, from the city of Shkodra, one of the next victims of exploitation, as first noticed by the field teams of the Municipality of Tirana. Malnourished, with signs of abuse on his body, the minor was taken under immediate care by the Safe Emergency Housing Service, to receive all the necessary services, accommodation, shelter, health care, food, clothing and above all psychological treatment. [...] D.Xh. 14 years old says ‘I needed to stay close to people who protect me and understand me. I thought that those people were protecting me, but they wanted to take advantage of me all the time.’” [In-house translation. The author is an Albanian native speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: “Rasti të miturit Deni, nga qyteti i Shkodrës, një prej viktimave të radhës të shfrytëzimit nëpër rrugët e qyteteve të ndryshme u pikas fillimisht nga skuadrat e terrenit të Bashkisë Tiranë. I paushqyer, me shenja abuzimi ne trup, i mituri u mor nën kujdes të menjëhershëm nga Shërbimi i Strehimit Emergjent të Sigurt, për të marrë të gjitha shërbimet e nevojshme, akomodim, strehim, kujdes shëndetësor ushqim, veshmbathje dhe mbi të gjitha trajtim psikologjik. [...] D.Xh. 14 vjeç shprehet “Kisha nevojë të qëndroja pranë njerëzve të cilët më mbrojnë dhe më kuptojnë. Mendoja se ata persona më mbronin por kanë dashur gjatë gjithë kohës të përfitonin prej meje.”

Source: Nisma-ARSIS Press Release, [“The case of “Deni” victim of trafficking”](#), 11 February 2021



## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

**“Age:** According to National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelter [NCATS] statistics, 78 of the victims’ or 66 % of the new cases entered in the [rehabilitation] program during 2022 were minors, while 34 are adults [the ‘program’ refers to the rehabilitation programme offered by the NGOs of the NCATS, see section 3.1.2 Rehabilitation and reintegration assistance for further information].

**VoT/PVoTs accompanied by their children:** According to NCATS statistics, 18 of the victims or 16%, were accompanied by their children when they [...] entered [...] the program. 31 children of the victims of trafficking are assisted together with their mothers, [of the] new cases VoT/PVoT referred during this year.

**As regards to country of destination/exploitation:** According to NCATS information and statistics, the places where they have been trafficked to are mostly Albania, Kosovo, Italy, Greece, Montenegro, Belgium, France.

- 89% of the cases have been exploited internally in Albania, in different cities of Albania (Tirana, Vlora, Durres, Fier, Berat, Shkodra, Peshkopia, Kukes, Elbasan, etc)

- 11% of the cases have been trafficked /exploited in other countries: 3 in Italy and Kosovo; 2 in Greece and Belgium; one in Montenegro and France. One of the victims has been exploited both in Albania and in Greece.

**As regards to country of origin:** According to NCATS information and statistics, 98% of the victims identified and assisted at NCATS centres were Albanians, trafficked within Albania or abroad. The cases are from all over Albania: Tirana, Shkodra, Vlora, Elbasan, Durres, Kukes, Diber, Fier, Berat, Korce, etc.

Albania was the country of destination for 2% of foreign victims identified. There were 2 foreign victims, one from Syria and one other from Montenegro (with Kosovo citizenship but born and living in Montenegro), identified in Albania.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article “The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”, published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Based on my 2019 study [including interviews with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], the age of girls and women trafficked for sexual purposes ranged from 11 to 56 years old, however all the interviewees claimed that the sex trafficking age has decreased, with most recent referred victims being adolescents.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation, discussed profiles and data related to victims of trafficking in Albania:

“[...] all the data that I will provide further, they are based on all the organizations that work in Albania in anti-trafficking fields. So Vatra is a member of National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in Albania. There are four members of this coalition, and all these members have the same responsibility, duty, and activities that Vatra has. [...] One it is in Tirana, Different & Equal. The other one, it is in Elbasan. It is Other Vision [Tjeter Vizion] [...] And the other member is a state center. It is National Reception Center for victims of human trafficking [...] members of this coalition, works together [...] we provide data regarding human trafficking.[...] And we provide as well as coalition data for other international reports [...] If we can talk about profile and regarding the data that we have, so I can refer to 2022 because we have completed data regarding this. [The interlocutor clarified the following statistics relate to service data from the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters] [...] during this year, 118 new cases of victims and potential victims of human trafficking. All these victims have been identified based on standard operating procedures in Albania. And they have been referred for services to our shelters, so the shelters of the coalition [NCATS]. The sources of referral are different from local state and non-state institutions and organizations that refer to us the victims that are identified. 73% of the cases [...] were females and 27% were males. [...] 66% were minors.



So the most part of the victims are minors. 37% of the cases have been from [the] Roma community and Egyptian communities that are small communities here [in] Albania. And the other part from [the] larger Albanian community. 16% of them have been identified [as having] mental health problems before or during involve[ment] in trafficking. And 16% of them have been accompanied by children. [...] 89% of the victims identified have been trafficked within Albania. So the internal trafficking, [...] is mostly pervasive. [...] And only [...] 2% have been identified as trafficked abroad so in other countries. [In further written clarifications, the interlocutor confirmed that all statistics in this paragraph relate collectively to the NCATS statistics, rather than Vatra's own service statistics]"

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

A child protection specialist from UNICEF Albania who was interviewed for this report described the profiles of victims of trafficking as follows:

"[...] what we know is that it's mostly children and women. Nonetheless, they are not the only ones, but they're counted as the majority of the cases that [...] have been identified and that [...] have been provided with services. [...] we know that especially women and girls are used for sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse. And we also know that it is not only women and girls, in some cases also young boys [...] it's mostly girls aged 14 to 18 and very young women, 20 up to 24, in most of the cases are related to sex trafficking. [...] And we also know that boys and young men and boys have been trafficked in order to be used or exploited in criminal activities abroad. [...] what we know about boys and men is that in many cases, it involves the use of bonded labor. When the trafficker, they offer them how to illegally take them to especially EU countries and once they get there, they are requested to pay the cost of their trip with labor. And on many occasions, as far as we know, they're are linked to criminal organisations or criminal activities in the foreign country where as documented in some of the cases they have been used to either sell drugs in the streets or harvesting cannabis among other illegal criminal activities."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Regarding the profiles of victims of trafficking receiving services from shelters in Albania, interviewee Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

"[...] the ones that are mainly supported and hosted in the shelters in Albania are women from different age groups. The most vulnerable population actually in Albania belongs to the marginalized communities like the Roma children, the Roma women, but of course, that is not to say that men are not vulnerable; it's just that it's much more difficult to identify men. Men are less willing to come across and identify as victims of trafficking in Albania." With regards to Albanian victims of trafficking in the UK, the same interviewee stated: "[...] when I worked in practice in the UK, and I'm talking 2017 to 2020, the majority of victims from Albania also, as they appeared in the UK NRM, were women. So Albanian women who reported that they were victims of sexual exploitation. So sexual exploitation was also the main form of exploitation at the time. From the UK NRM statistics this year and last year, that trend has completely changed because now Albanian men and young boys are the main victims of trafficking that are referred into the UK NRM. And [...] the type of exploitation is forced criminality."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"[...] when it comes to victims of trafficking in Albania, we can not say that there is a specific profile because, in this way, we might do more harm to specific profiles that are not included. But generally, what we have seen – and this is from my direct work with survivors of human trafficking - is usually girls and women, the majority of them victims of sex trafficking. Most of the women that I've worked with, they've been trafficked abroad, usually in Italy, some of them in Belgium; and others trafficked to Italy, Belgium, and the UK. The UK was not the first country trafficked to. It was the second or the third country. And then they were returned back to Albania [...] the specific profile is usually girls and women aged from 18 up to 35 years old. But usually, it's 18 to 25 or 28 years old. But we've had also cases aged 35 or 35 plus, but less common."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023



## 1.2 Prevalence by profile / type of exploitation

\*Methodological note: among the sources consulted during the research time frame, information frequently related to the numbers of individuals identified, including those formally identified through the Albanian National Referral Mechanism (NRM) as victims of trafficking, and numbers drawn from service data by organisations working directly with victims and potential victims of trafficking in Albania. It should be noted that those formally identified through the NRM, and those counted in the service data of organisations assisting victims and potential victims of trafficking in Albania, do not present the totality of trafficked Albanians, as not all victims and potential victims are identified, and not all victims and potential victims access assistance. See [2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism & victim identification on page 92](#), and [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 130](#) for further information on the National Referral Mechanism and how victims of trafficking are identified, and limitations in victim identification. Refer also to [3.1 Assistance from shelters on page 170](#) and [3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations on page 212](#).

### Interview material

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“[N]o one can respond to you in Albania regarding in statistics, unfortunately. Because if we talk officially, we don’t have officially data or indicators published that you can refer to. This is, I think, maybe needs to be in all the sectors where the children are-- where the social services are provided. There is somehow an improvement on how they track, identify to whom they serve. But I think the trafficking, we still do not have a database or a dashboard of statistics on how many trafficked children or adults we have. This is sure.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[...] all the data that I will provide further, they are based on all the organizations that work in Albania in anti-trafficking fields. So Vatra is a member of National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in Albania. There are four members of this coalition, and all these members have the same responsibility, duty, and activities that Vatra has. [...] And we provide [...] coalition data for other international reports such as TIP Reports. That is every year. So at the end of the year, we provide data for our activity. And we give inputs to TIP Report or to EU progress reports. [...]. All these victims have been identified based on standard operating procedures in Albania. And they have referred for services to our shelters, so the shelters of the coalition. The source of referral are different from local state and non-state institutions and organizations that refer to us the victims that are identified [...].”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

### 1.2.1 General – statistics on trafficking

• Refer also to [2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism & victim identification on page 92](#).

### Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023,<sup>6</sup> outlined the numbers of victims and potential victims identified by government and NGOs:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these, 61 were potential sex trafficking victims; 35 potential labor trafficking victims, including 26 forced begging victims; and 14 potential victims of forced criminality. Thirty-two of the victims were women, four men, 48 girls, and 26 boys; there were two foreign victims from Syria and one victim from Kosovo.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

<sup>6</sup> According to the US Department of State Methodology, the 2023 Trafficking in Persons report covers government efforts undertaken from April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023. See: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>



As part of a UK Home Office fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, UNICEF provided Ministry of Interior statistics relating to trafficking prevalence.

“UNICEF, 5 October 2022 [...]

Ministry of Interior statistics provided by UNICEF

Number of victims of human trafficking, by gender, age and form of exploitation

Victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking

	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Victims of trafficking</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Albanian</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Females	1	7	4	1
Males				2
<b>Foreign</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Females	1		1	
Males				
<b>Potential victims of trafficking</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Albanian</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>81</b>	
Females	58	69	55	95
Males	35	21	24	58
<b>Foreign</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	
Females		4	2	1
Males		2		
<b>Total victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Reason</b>				
Sexual exploitation	36	65	48	59
Forced labour and begging	27	26	27	66
Street situation	22	7	2	7
Forced marriage	3	1	2	1
Illegal border crossing	1		1 promise for school <sup>7</sup>	
Low criminal acts <sup>8</sup>		4	6	15
Other	6			11

<sup>7</sup> The meaning of “promise for school” is unclear.

<sup>8</sup> The meaning of “Low criminal acts” is unclear.



## Child – victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking

	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Child victims of trafficking</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Albanian</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Females	1	1	1	
Males				2
Age group:				
0-6 years				
6-18 years	1	1	1	2
<b>Foreign</b>				
Females	1		1	
Males				
Age group:				
0-6 years				
6-18 years				
<b>Child potential victims of trafficking</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Albanian</b>	<b>67</b>			
Females	35	44	34	52
Males	31	21	23	58
Age group:				
0-6 years	4	2	5	3
6-18 years	63	64	52	108
<b>Foreign</b>		<b>1</b>		
Females		1		
Males				
Age group:				
0-6 years				
6-18 years		1		
<b>Total child victims of trafficking and potential child victims of trafficking</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Reason</b>				
Sexual exploitation	17	32	24	23
Forced labour and begging	24	23	25	61
Street situation	20	4	1	7
Forced marriage	1		1 promise for school	
Illegal border crossing	1			
Low criminal acts (exact meaning unclear)	1	3	6	14
Other	3	5	1	7

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 13-15



## Interview material

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“If we can talk about profile and regarding the data that we have, so I can refer to 2022 because we have completed data regarding this [...] during this year, 118 new cases of victims and potential victims of human trafficking. All these victims have been identified based on standard operating procedures in Albania. And they have referred for services to our shelters, so the shelters of the coalition. The source of referral are different from local state and on-state institutions and organizations that refer to us the victims that are identified [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

## 1.2.2 Children – statistics on trafficking

## Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, stated that:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these [...] 48 [were] girls, and 26 [were] boys [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the General Directorate of State Police and a Mobile unit Kukes (managed by Tjeter Vizion), during which the interviewees shared information relating to the prevalence of trafficking of children:

“General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022 [...]”

As regards child victims of trafficking (VOT) we have identified only 4 cases of children being trafficked. [...]

**Q.** With regard statistics, was it 4 minors identified this year (2022)?

**A.** Yes this year. [...]

Mobile unit, Kukes, 7 October 2022

**Q.** Do you have any statistics of VOT or PVOT, in the past year?

**A.**[...] In 2021, during the second phase we worked more intensively so we referred 42 cases to the responsible authorities and it is that authority that categorises as PVOT or VOT. So far in 2022 we have referred 15 cases.

**Q.** Were the 42 cases all minors?

**A.** Mostly minors and these were boys and girls, but we don’t have here the exact number. When it came to adults they were considered PVOT and they were all female.

Boys are mostly exploited for forced labour, girls are usually caught illegally crossing from Albania to Kosovo, the border police return them but they are mostly exploited for prostitution. They are taken to night clubs and exploited there.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 33-34, 55

The USDOS human rights report for 2022 noted the following statistics:

“The Ministry of Interior reported that, as of July, 40 of the 60 identified victims or potential victims of trafficking were minors.”

Source: US Department of State (USDOS), [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania](#), 20 March 2023

The Country Office Annual Report 2022 by UNICEF indicated that the majority of victims and potential victims identified were children, and also noted a number of barriers to identification:

“According to the most recent reported data, child victims (0–17 years) and potential victims of human trafficking constituted 70 per cent of the total (112) number of victims and potential victims of human trafficking, out of which 46 per cent (52) were female (INSTAT/Ministry of Interior, 2022). A range of deeply rooted social norms continue to act as barriers to early identification, speaking up, reporting and denouncing violence in the society, or to demanding remedies for violations of child rights. A key issue is the culture of tolerance towards violence, stigmatization of victims and discrimination against survivors, particularly girls and women but also boys and young men (UNICEF Albania, SitAn, 2021)”

Source: UNICEF, “[Country Office Annual Report 2022 Albania](#)”, undated

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, commented that:

“[...] A significant number of the referred victims of trafficking are minors. This age group remains to be the favourite of recruiters and traffickers as it is the most vulnerable one.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Tjeter Vizion and Vatra Psycho-Social Center indicated in written communication and an interview, respectively, that of those assisted by the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in 2022 (of which both are members), 66% were minors.

Sources: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023; Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“I can say from our work in House of Colors in the emergency shelter and in our daily services we provide for these groups with our partners like UNICEF is that, in average, we have 15 to 20 cases per year, children, who majority of them are potential victims of trafficking. Not all of them have the status of trafficking, but potential victims, meaning that they have some risks or indicators that are related to trafficking. For example, children in street situation or children who has been identified from police cooperation with us as potential victims of trafficking.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

### 1.2.3 Boys and men – statistics on trafficking

• Refer also to [1.6 Stigma affecting trafficked men and boys on page 63](#).

### Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, stated that:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these [...] four [were] men [...] and 26 [were] boys [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

In a statement by the Albanian anti-trafficking network United Response Against Trafficking (URAT) (a coalition of religious congregations and nonprofit organisations in Albania) that was published on Arise’s website, marking World Day Against Trafficking in July 2023, it was noted that:



“The trafficking of men and boys is very widespread, despite being less considered or discussed. The experiences of trafficked men and boys include various forms of trafficking. Men and boys are exploited for forced labour, sexual exploitation, the use and involvement in low-level criminal activities (theft and distribution of narcotics), and for forced begging.”

Source: United Response Against Trafficking in Persons in Albania – URAT (Author), Arise (publisher), “[World Day Against Trafficking: Men and Boys](#)”, 31 July 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the General Directorate of State Police and a Mobile unit Kukes (managed by Tjeter Vizion), in Albania in October 2022, during which the interviewees addressed questions on the prevalence of trafficking of males and children, respectively:

“General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** How many males are trafficked?

**A.** We haven’t identified any males at all, this year or in previous years.

[...]

Mobile unit, Kukes, 7 October 2022 [...]

In 2021, during the second phase we worked more intensively so we referred 42 cases to the responsible authorities and it is that authority that categorises as PVOT or VOT. So far in 2022 we have referred 15 cases.

**Q.** Were the 42 cases all minors?

**A.** Mostly minors and these were boys and girls, but we don’t have here the exact number. When it came to adults they were considered PVOT and they were all female.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 35, 55

## Interview material

Different and Equal, Tjeter Vizion and Vatra Psycho-Social Center indicated in written communication and an interview respectively, that 27% of assisted cases in 2022 were boys or men, based on the most recent figures produced by the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters, of which all three organisations are members.

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023; Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023; Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

### 1.2.4 Women and girls – statistics on trafficking

## Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, outlined that:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these [...] [t]hirty-two of the victims were women, [...] 48 [were] girls, [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with representatives from a Mobile unit Kukes (managed by Tjeter Vizion) in Albania in October 2022, during which questions on the prevalence of trafficking of children were addressed:

“Mobile unit, Kukes, 7 October 2022 [...]

In 2021, during the second phase we worked more intensively so we referred 42 cases to the responsible authorities



and it is that authority that categorises as PVOT or VOT. So far in 2022 we have referred 15 cases.

**Q.** Were the 42 cases all minors?

**A.** Mostly minors and these were boys and girls, but we don't have here the exact number. When it came to adults they were considered PVOT and they were all female."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 55

### Interview material

Different and Equal, Tjeter Vizion and Vatra Psycho-Social Center indicated in written communication and an interview respectively, that 73% of assisted cases in 2022 were women and girls, based on the most recent figures produced by the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters, of which all three organisations are members.

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023; Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023; Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

## 1.2.5 Comparison – prevalence of trafficking among women and girls and men and boys

### Desk based material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, report noted that:

"The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these [...] Thirty-two of the victims were women, four men, 48 girls, and 26 boys [...]"

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the Ministry of Interior and Key Adviser in Albania in October 2022, during which the interviewees provided information comparing the prevalence of trafficking between women and girls, and boys and men:

"Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]"

You will see some marvellous achievements, in addition 70% to 80% of VOT are women and girls, meaning the rest are boys and men. So more needs to be done to help reintegrate them (boys and men) into the community.[...]"

Key Adviser, 12 October 2022 [...]"

**A.** 90% of the people we support are women, and if we refer to the total number of those identified it's mostly women, but this does not mean there are no men or boys who are VOT. The ones who work in drug houses are mainly boys and men but they don't admit that they were VOT even if they are identified as such, and they don't accept our support and assistance."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 58, 64, 100

### Interview material

Different and Equal, Tjeter Vizion and Vatra Psycho-Social Center indicated in written submissions and an interview, respectively, that 73% of assisted cases were females and 27% were males in 2022.

See Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023; Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023; Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted in relation to the prevalence of trafficked boys and girls that:



“I think that there is no difference between males and females, so between girls and boys. In this case, we had cases of women and girls, and we have also cases of boys identified as victims of trafficking. So there is not a big discrepancy or difference between them. And I can say that the number has been increased after the COVID situation. Maybe the reporting has been increased. Not that there has been less before, but maybe the reporting has been increased. [...] I think that up to now, it has been this mindset that girls are mostly victims of trafficking, so girls who are more exploited, especially for sexual exploitation, or who are more part of trafficking networks. But I think that, especially with the situation of children exploited in the street situation, we have a lot of males who have been identified as potential victims. So I don't think there is this high difference between them.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

### 1.2.6 Ethnic minorities – statistics on trafficking

#### Desk based material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 noted that:

“Children [...] from the Roma and Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p. 45

A qualitative study was authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF about the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania, and was based on interviews with trafficking survivors, and representatives of government agencies and NGOs. The study mentioned trafficking of boys and men, citing a 2015 report by Different and Equal:

“The ethnic composition of male victims has changed over time: previously, most identified male trafficking victims were Roma or Egyptian, but in more recent years, ethnic Albanian males have been identified.<sup>8</sup> [...]”

<sup>8</sup> Different and Equal, 2015, *Falling through the cracks! The trafficking of men and boys in Albania.*”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, [“Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania”](#), May 2022, p.17

The NGO Different and Equal, in its February 2022 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery highlighted the vulnerability of Roma and Egyptian minorities to trafficking:

“As in other countries, the vulnerable groups including [...] minorities (Roma and Egyptian minorities), [...] remain the most at risk of trafficking in Albania.

Regarding the question for the profile of the most vulnerable groups subjected to contemporary forms of slavery we would single out the Roma minority. [...]

Related to Roma minority 25% of the cases (including minors and adults) assisted at D&E program are from Roma community during 2021. They are exploited for sexual services (female victims), forced begging, committing criminal acts such as distributing drugs or stealing (minor male victims).”

Source: Different and Equal, [“Input for the Special Rapporteur's report on “contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities””](#), February 2022, p. 2

The “Albania Child Notice” report by UNICEF published in 2022 summarised a number of sources, including a report by Global Initiative Against Organized Crime, highlighting that Roma children in street situations are affected by trafficking:

“A Government-run survey in 2019 identified 272 children in street situations. Based on the provisions of a 2015–2017 national action plan for these children, immediate assistance and other community-led support was offered, including the option of placement into care.

The CE [Council of Europe] was concerned about the lack of authority's attention to this group of children and their trafficking risks, noting the predominance of Roma children amongst them. Up until July 2021, a CSO shelter reported



that 39 out of 45 children they supported had been in street situations and 15 out of 18 potential child trafficking victims were Roma. In another 2021 report, hundreds of Roma children in Tirana were making a living from begging and other street work; the report also referenced Roma boys among them as vulnerable to sexual exploitation in nightclubs. The COVID-19 outbreak increased concerns for children in street situations, as sources of family income diminished.”

Source: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#)” 2022, p.21

### Interview material

Different and Equal, Tjeter Vizion (in written communication) and Vatra Psycho-Social Center (in an interview), indicated that 37% of assisted cases in 2022 were from Roma and Egyptian backgrounds, based on the most recent statistics of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters, of which all three are members.

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023; Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023; Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In an interview with Asylos, a representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, further commented that:

“[...] these are people that probably are stigmatized and are judged by [...] for having such a culture of movement, and so they are always at risk of this movement. Probably, they are into marriage earlier than the others, and so probably the false marriages and forced marriages sometimes at young age are typical for Roma groups.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“I think that we made a joint study in 2014.<sup>7</sup> It’s a very old study for now. We are like nine years later. But it’s the only one which has official data, which somehow showed that, unfortunately, the majority of children identified as-- children in street situations [...] has been more children from Roma and Egyptian communities, unfortunately. So like a high proportion of them. I now believe that in 2023, there is not such a big difference on ethnicity in terms of being exploited or victims of trafficking. There are children from Roma and Egyptian communities, for sure, but also there are cases of-- majority, not Roma. So there is not such a big difference. Before, yes, but still, in street situation, there are high percentages from Roma and Egyptian communities as they are the most vulnerable groups still in Albania living in suburb areas, in poor conditions.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes - Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] Roma community is target for trafficking activities.[...]”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

<sup>7</sup> The interviewee referred to the following study: UNICEF & Save the Children (2014), “[National Study on Children in Street Situation in Albania](#)”, 2014



“[...] I would say that [Roma, Egyptians and other ethnic minorities] are the most vulnerable group, and also people in Albania, practitioners, and civil society, would say the same just because of how marginalised these communities are. They are very much excluded for various reasons from mainstream education; there is a lot of discrimination. There is support from the civil society, there are quite a few good organisations that work specifically with these communities, but of course, that is not enough to save and empower this community’s hence, they are very much vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

[...] There are a lot of Roma children who beg in the streets, both boys and girls.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 1.2.7 LGBTQI+ persons – statistics on trafficking

#### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, both Different and Equal and Tjeter Vizion noted that, based on statistics of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (of which both are members), one new case referred to the NCATS and assisted was from the LGBTQI+ community.

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023, Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation commented that:

“We don’t have this data regarding LGBT persons involving human trafficking, but [...] we know that they are at risk of being exploited, but we don’t have cases of people that have been identified. But in Albania and in other countries, they are at risk of being exploited for anything, and they are people that report high violence from the others between their groups. But we didn’t have cases.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] Men exploited mainly abroad for forced labor, and young men, mainly for criminality and a few cases of sexual exploitation, and these cases of sexual exploitation are mainly from the LGBTI community. Well, it’s not that we have – I mean, we have at Terre des Hommes worked directly with victims of trafficking, but this is the information from exchanging with the LGBTI shelter here in Albania. They have reported before coming to the shelter – members of community, after they have been kicked out of home, in order to survive they have had this experience before joining, the people coming to the shelter.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

### 1.2.8 Persons with disabilities – statistics on trafficking

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, noted that:

“Experts report children with mental and physical disabilities were increasingly vulnerable to trafficking.”

Sources: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023



## Interview material

Different and Equal, Tjeter Vizion and Vatra reported in written communication with Asylos and an interview respectively, that 16% of cases assisted in 2022 had mental health issues, based on statistics of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (of which all three are members).

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023, Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 21 June 2023; Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal and Tjeter Vizion both commented that:

“[...] there were some cases with mental health problems who have been exploited mostly for sexual purposes. Women and girls with mental health problems have been targeted by the traffickers because it is easier to manipulate them because of their mental state.”

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023, Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 21 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“[...] in terms of [trafficked] children with disabilities, we have no information at all. [...] There just isn't the data. [...] It's a very good point, I think, and needs to be explored in the near future, but no specific data on that.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[...] regarding disabilities, for example, because I've mentioned before that 70% of the people that have been identified for the first time have suffered from mental health problems, not necessarily to say that they are disabled, but for example, for mental disability or other physical disabilities but here, it is such a misunderstood data and identification, I can say, because sometimes people with mental disability are mixed together with people that have mental health problems. So it is a question of identification and diagnosis, I think. It is not a question of [supporting] or not people with disabilities. I think we have because in our center, for example, we have [supported them during] [...] so past year and now, actually, we have two people that are with mental disability, but they are as well accompanied by some mental health problems as well. But they are two girls that living in the shelter, and so we are supporting them with all necessary.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Persons with disabilities [...] is target for trafficking activities.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



### 1.2.9 Sex trafficking – statistics

#### Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, stated that:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these, 61 were potential sex trafficking victims [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The same report noted that:

“Traffickers exploit Albanian women and children in sex trafficking and forced labor within the country, especially during tourist season.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from Vatra and SHKEJ in Albania in October 2022, during which the interviewees provided information on sex trafficking in Albania:

“Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]”

A. [...] Based on our statistics for males, 3% of cases have been minor boys exploited sexually [...]

SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]”

Q. Why are they trafficked?

A. Women mainly for prostitution [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 68, 81

USDOL noted in its “2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor” report that:

“Children in Albania are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including [...] in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. [...]”

Albania is a source country for child trafficking, especially of girls. [...] Children are also subjected to trafficking, both domestic and abroad to EU countries, for commercial sexual exploitation [...]. <sup>(7)</sup> [...]”

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. February 10, 2022. [...]”

Source: US Department of Labor, “[2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Albania](#)”, 28 September 2022, pp. 1-2

#### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“Based on NCATS statistics, 55% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were exploited for sexual purposes. Almost all the cases were females, only one was adult male. 51% of the cases exploited sexually were minors (girls). 1 case was LGBTQI+ person.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023



Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“I think that up to now, it has been this mindset that girls are mostly victims of trafficking, so girls who are more exploited, especially for sexual exploitation, or who are more part of trafficking networks. But I think that, especially with the situation of children exploited in the street situation, we have a lot of males who have been identified as potential victims. So I don’t think there is this much differences between them. Situation’s quite the same. But for the sexual exploitation, maybe it’s more reported for girls and less for boys. Because we know that if you are part of the street, you are part of all kinds of abuses: violence, sexual exploitation. So I don’t think that males are an exception. But they are less reported or less identified if they’re visually evaluated more stronger or less affected.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same interlocutor also commented:

“What I know is, from the cases we have cooperated with another organization who were working with LGBT cases, is that most of the cases of LGBTIQ are sexual exploited.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated that:

“Among trafficked minors, it’s more sexual trafficking, unfortunately, in terms of group age like adolescence.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes - Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Majority women, girls exploited for sexual purposes.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“[...] it’s mostly girls aged 14 to 18 and very young women, 20 up to 24, in most of the cases are related to sex trafficking.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[H]istorically, that’s how we think about trafficking in Albania - the exploitation of women and girls - and is usually in the sex industry although I have also heard through the cases that I’ve shared with my colleagues in Albania that there could be involvement in criminality, although sexual exploitation is the most common one. The majority of people that are hosted in the shelters in Albania are also women. [...] initially, I thought it would be very young women, but then through the UK NRM, I saw women that were even above 50s sometime. But the one thing that was very common was the report on sexual exploitation. So they all reported being exploited, and sexual exploitation. [...] Women and girls, because, of course, we do have a problem with gender-based violence and the role of women in society is generally speaking. So they are in very much at risk to exploitation. [...] maybe the landscape for sex trafficking has changed. So it wouldn’t necessarily be on street prostitution like there used to be back in the days, although there are still some areas where you would see people from the Roma, Egyptian communities that would offer that kind of service on the street. A lot more is happening in apartments, massage parlours, online. But from what I know, from what I uncover from the research and the discussions with the civil society in Albania, women are the ones that are mainly exploited and involved in this industry.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023



### 1.2.10 Forced labour – statistics

• Refer also to [1.2.12 Forced begging – statistics on page 40](#).

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, stated that:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these [...] 35 [were] potential labor trafficking victims, including 26 forced begging victims [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The same report stated that:

“Traffickers commonly force children to beg or perform other types of compelled labor, such as selling small items [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with SHKEJ in Albania in October 2022, during which it was stated that:

SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Why are they trafficked?

**A.** [...] men for forced labour and drugs.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 68, 81

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, an official from Tirana Municipality observed that:

“Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]

From the information we have from the Police, in general the male victims of trafficking are young boys who have suffered exploitation for forced labour outside Albania, in EU countries.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.109

Citing a number of other sources, USDOL noted in its “2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor” report that:

“Children in Albania are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including use in illicit activities and forced begging [...] sometimes as a result of human trafficking. [...]”

Albania is a source country for child trafficking, especially of girls. Children are also sometimes forced into labor, such as begging and scavenging, by human traffickers and by their own families. <sup>(3,7)</sup> [...] Domestic child trafficking and forced begging have continued in recent years, particularly during the tourist season. <sup>(28)</sup> Albania lacks recent, comprehensive data on child labor, including in the agriculture and construction sectors. <sup>(7)</sup> [...]

**3** U.S. Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020-Albania. Washington, D.C., June 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/albania/> [...]

**7** U.S. Embassy – Tirana. Reporting. February 10, 2022. [...]

**28** U.S. Embassy – Tirana. Reporting. March 30, 2020”

Source: US Department of Labor, “[2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Albania](#)”, 28 September 2022, pp. 1-2



## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

“Based on NCATS statistics, 8% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were exploited for forced labour.”

The same interlocutor stated:

“Males were exploited mostly for forced criminal activities (drug distribution and stealing); begging and forced labour. [...] 44% were men and boys and 56% were women and girls. 56% of the cases were boys and girls (minors) and 44% were women and men.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated:

“The situation on child trafficking in Albania remains problematic. Referring to the GRETA Report for Albania 2020:

*‘The proportion of child victims of trafficking remains high (around 48%). Children are mainly exploited in begging by their parents or close relatives, or trafficked for the purpose of committing criminal activities, including work on cannabis farms in Albania. Children from the Roma and Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. There has been an increase in the number of Albanian children subjected to forced labour in Kosovo and the UK. Some Albanian children who travelled with their parents to the Netherlands, France and Germany were reportedly left there unaccompanied and vulnerable to exploitation.’<sup>1</sup>”*

<sup>1</sup> GRETA, “Evaluation Report Albania, Third evaluation round, Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings”, 15 December 2020, p.8

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Males were exploited mostly for forced criminal activities (drug distribution and stealing); begging and forced labour.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“In youngsters, it’s exploitation in the street for begging and selling, so begging, selling, and washing cars. [...] So begging, selling small products in the traffic lights and in the main streets, and also substance abuse distribution.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Men exploited mainly abroad for forced labor [...]”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained:

“We know that especially babies or very young children are used for child begging in the streets. [...] young children are used in some areas in the country, especially where there is a high number of tourists.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[...] for forced labor, we have considered mostly minors that have been involved in forced begging. We have a small percentage of young people involved in criminal activities. So exploited for force criminal activities such as selling drugs-- or narcotics [...] and then stealing.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Interviewee Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“I don’t think this comes up as a stand-alone issue as much in Albania. I didn’t find that that was singled out as a type of exploitation when I did my [P.h.D] research [the P.h.D fieldwork was conducted in 2018 - 2020], but that doesn’t mean to say that it doesn’t happen. I think it happens a lot; it’s just that we are not progressive enough, perhaps, to recognize forced labor as a type of exploitation.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 1.2.11 Forced criminality – statistics

#### Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, stated:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. Of these [...] 14 [were] potential victims of forced criminality.[...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The same report stated that:

“Traffickers [...] force children into criminality, including burglary and narcotics distribution.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from Vatra and SHKEJ in Albania in October 2022, during which it was stated that:

“Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]”

**A.** [...] Based on our statistics for males, 3% of cases have been minor boys exploited sexually, 7% forced begging and forced labour, 13% criminal acts such as burglary, distributing drugs, 16% forced labour, 61% forced begging. [...]

SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Why are they trafficked?

**A.** Women mainly for prostitution, and men for forced labour and drugs.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 68; 81



In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network stated:

“BIRN Albania, 12 October 2022 [...]

The state mechanism invested a lot in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but the focus was girls being trafficked for sexual exploitation. Many girls were promised engagement and marriage and were moved mainly to Italy and Belgium where they were exploited. Albanian mentality accepted that women were sexually exploited, and that this was immoral. This is why a system was established and embraced in the referral of potential victims of trafficking (PVOT), due to social attitudes.

Something different is happening now, in that boys are being trafficked to work in cannabis houses in the UK, but locally this is not seen as immoral. [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.103

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated that:

“Based on NCATS statistics, 12.5% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were exploited for forced criminality in Albania. 64% were boys, 22% were girls, 7% women and 7% men.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated:

“The situation on child trafficking in Albania remains problematic. Referring to the GRETA Report for Albania 2020:

*‘The proportion of child victims of trafficking remains high (around 48%). Children are mainly exploited in begging by their parents or close relatives, or trafficked for the purpose of committing criminal activities, including work on cannabis farms in Albania. Children from the Roma and Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. There has been an increase in the number of Albanian children subjected to forced labour in Kosovo and the UK. Some Albanian children who travelled with their parents to the Netherlands, France and Germany were reportedly left there unaccompanied and vulnerable to exploitation.’<sup>1</sup>”*

<sup>1</sup> GRETA, “Evaluation Report Albania, Third evaluation round, Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings”, 15 December 2020, p.8

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Males were exploited mostly for forced criminal activities (drug distribution and stealing); begging and forced labour.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted the following:

[...] I think part of criminal networks as substance abuse distribution, and in the same time for thefts or small criminal acts. And they recruit them. So they hire children because they are below the age of criminal responsibility so it’s easier for them to be identified, to be exploited, and not to be kept by police or to be somehow prosecuted by police [...]

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023



The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“[...] in Albania, we know that some children, are used for illegal migration involving forced criminality abroad at a very young age. It is promised to their families or relatives that they will be sent to a third country, especially in the EU where they’re going to be supporting with some labour in exchange of an income. And then they’re exploited for illegal migration basically.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] when they are in a bit older age, like 10 to 14 years old, they’re used also for criminal acts such as theft, mainly. In these ones, they come from Roma minority. [...] young men, [are exploited] mainly for criminality”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“We have a small percentage of young people involved in criminal activities. So exploited for force criminal activities such as selling drugs-- or narcotics, [...] and then stealing.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

### 1.2.12 Forced begging – statistics

#### Desk review material

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, outlined the numbers of victims and potential victims identified by government and NGOs:

“The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. [...] 35 potential labor trafficking victims, including 26 forced begging victims [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The same report indicated that Romani and Balkan-Egyptian children are exploited for begging:

“Traffickers exploit Albanian children, mainly from the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, for seasonal work and forced begging.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”

The 2022 USDOS human rights report drew a link between street children, begging, and trafficking:

“Displaced Children: [...] There was a large population of unaccompanied, displaced children who were homeless, particularly in the Romani community. Some children begged, and some became trafficking victims. Since the law prohibits the prosecution of children younger than 14 for burglary, criminal gangs at times used displaced children to burglarize homes.”

Source: US Department of State, “[Albania 2022 Human Rights Report](#)”, 20 March 2023



As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with representatives from the General Directorate of State Police in Albania in October 2022, during which the interviewees mentioned that, of the children that had been identified as victims of trafficking, they had mainly been trafficked for forced begging:

“General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022 [...]

As regards child victims of trafficking (VOT) we have identified only 4 cases of children being trafficked. These children come from the Roma community. They are mainly exploited for begging on the streets.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 33

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Albanian Women Empowerment Network noted that boys are trafficked for begging:

“Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) [...]

**Q.** Are you aware of male VOT?

**A.** We know from the anti-trafficking coalition that boys are being trafficked for work and begging.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.38

Caritas stated in an interview with the UK Home Office that Roma are exploited for begging.

“Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** You say you work with Roma, is that a big issue in regard to trafficking?

**A.** It depends on the category of trafficking. Roma are exploited for begging in the street.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.50

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted:

“Based on NCATS statistics, 12.5% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were exploited for forced begging. 69% of the cases were boys and 31% were girls”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 July 2023

The same interlocutor further stated:

“The situation on child trafficking in Albania remains problematic. Referring to the GRETA Report for Albania 2020:

*‘The proportion of child victims of trafficking remains high (around 48%). Children are mainly exploited in begging by their parents or close relatives, or trafficked for the purpose of committing criminal activities, including work on cannabis farms in Albania. Children from the Roma and Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. There has been an increase in the number of Albanian children subjected to forced labour in Kosovo and the UK. Some Albanian children who travelled with their parents to the Netherlands, France and Germany were reportedly left there unaccompanied and vulnerable to exploitation.’<sup>1</sup>”*

<sup>1</sup> GRETA, “Evaluation Report Albania, Third evaluation round, Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings”, 15 December 2020, p.8

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023



In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Males were exploited mostly for forced criminal activities (drug distribution and stealing); begging and forced labour.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[...] mostly minors that have been involved in forced begging [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Interviewee Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] for the forced begging, I would single out the Roma and Egyptian community. And, I mean, the trafficking would be internal in a sense that they would move around from one city to another. And sometimes the trafficking would happen across border to Kosovo, which is our neighbouring country. I think that sometimes doesn't get the attention that it should because there is a lot of cross-border trafficking to Kosovo both in terms of sexual exploitation but also children going to beg, especially during tourist season. And that is also linked to the coastal town. So whenever it's summer and the coastal towns get a lot more people as tourists, you would see [...] children who are there to beg.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 1.3 Risk factors associated with trafficking

#### Desk review material

Arise, an international anti-trafficking NGO that works in Albania, commented on the factors making children vulnerable to trafficking:

“In Albania, and everywhere in the world, traffickers take advantage of the personal vulnerability of the children they exploit. This personal vulnerability of children can be further exacerbated by the vulnerability associated with the child's situation and circumstances.”

Source: Arise, [“Youth Exploitation in Albania”](#), 2 December 2023

The same organisation published a statement made by the United Response Against Trafficking in Persons network in Albania (URAT) (a coalition of religious congregations and nonprofit organisations in Albania), which was released in April 2023:

“URAT Joint Statement - April 2023

[...] 2. The vulnerability is multi-faceted and complex

Even if geographically positioned at the heart of Europe, Albania has been a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking for decades. The main push factors contributing to the trafficking of Albanians are poverty, oppression, lack of human rights, lack of social or economic opportunity, political instability and other related factors.”

Source: United Response Against Trafficking in Persons in Albania- URAT (Author), Arise (Publisher), [“4 things the Albanian anti-slavery sector wants you to know”](#), 21 April 2023



In a submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Arise described profiles vulnerable to trafficking:

“Marginalised communities in Albania are severely vulnerable to human trafficking [...] Simultaneously, a ‘mass exodus’ of young people has taken place across Albania, which continues to the present day. Waves of young Albanians are leaving the country, for a number of reasons – including a lack of job opportunities, low incomes for those in work [...] These young people are being targeted by human traffickers, both before and during their journey. [...] The majority of Albanians leaving the country are not trafficked, but for legitimate victims, better prospects overseas are obviously illusory. Young people are trafficked into a variety of dangerous, exploitative circumstances, including forced criminality. Many cases include elements of smuggling - where the eventual victim will pay for illicit transport only to be subjected to exploitation.”

Source: Publisher: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Author: Arise, “[Arise Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#)”, April 2023

As part of a UK Home Office fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, interlocutors provided information that is relevant to the risk factors associated with trafficking. A General Directorate of State Police commented that:

“General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022 [...] The modus operandi is similar to other Western Balkan countries, so the recruiters take advantage of the difficult financial situation that women and girls are in. They target vulnerable women and girls going through family hardships, for example, parents divorced and financial hardships. These women and girls mostly come from rural areas where there is little development, as opposed to in urban areas. [...] As regards child victims of trafficking (VOT) we have identified only 4 cases of children being trafficked. These children come from the Roma community.[...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 33

A Caritas representative described factors associated with the risk of trafficking:

“Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...] Q. Can women live independently in Albania, either with or without children? [...] A lot of rural people are coming to Tirana, some of them are divorced or their husband is outside the country or they have a lot of social issues and are living alone. The poverty has increased, this is a big indicator and has a big impact on trafficking. Trafficking is a good and fast way to earn money. For single women with children this is a big issue, we are receiving a lot of requests for financial support and support with housing costs. [...] Q. Would you say the barriers for women are economic? A. And social, for living independently. Some are not very educated. They may feel afraid of life in Tirana, sometimes they want to be integrated immediately. They can be the first to be trafficked. [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 51

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission in Albania, officials from Kukes Municipality noted the phenomenon of male trafficking has increased recently, and they linked human trafficking to the economic situation:

“Kukes Municipality, 7 October 2022 [...] Q. Do you have any information about male VOT? A. Male VOT is a new phenomenon, which has increased recently. Also I want to say that the main cause of HT [human trafficking] is due to a difficult economic situation. Please bear in mind that there are good Albanians out there, we are not happy with the negative instances, but Albania and Kukes are generally peaceful. So it’s not necessarily as portrayed by the media.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 62



Similarly, in an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission in Albania, Mary Ward Loreto pointed to the link between poor economic conditions and human trafficking:

“[...] Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]

[...] The Home Office says Albania is a safe and prosperous country but that is incredible. It is certainly not safe. There might be good practices, but it is not safe.

Albania is safe for tourism; Albania is safe to live in if you are not vulnerable. If you are vulnerable and poor you are not safe, basically you are in survival mode, the only alternative you see is to escape your country. We haven't had a census since 2011. The population then was 3 million, now it is assumed we are 1.5 million, and 1 million of those live in Tirana. There is huge internal migration into cities to find a better way of life and also a legal way into Germany. [...] The basic minimum wage in Albania is 33,000 lek a month (about 300 euro), and cheapest rent is 200 to 250 euro a month, leaving only a 100 euro to live on and with rising cost of living, it is almost impossible to live, it is moving into starvation level really. And that is for people in good jobs working in call centres. Call centres are the biggest employers for the youth. Wages in factories are even less – in sweat shops you earn 150 euro a month. But there is no alternative. And in the south they are not even declaring employees so they are not protected and recruited on the black market.

I see many families in the north that are on a debt register to market owners because they have no money. So the debt can go up to 300 to 400 euro. The mindset of the people who live here is that they have to go somewhere else. There is a lot of apathy and learned hopelessness which is relevant to the situation. Some have jobs, but some don't see any opportunities and so have to go somewhere else and they don't have enough to pay for legal migration.

The economy is one of the main factors for human trafficking but there are also other social issues such as domestic violence, these are areas difficult to change. There is the stubborn patriarchal mentality, and other issues, they are not developing.

Victims of domestic violence receive services but they are so minimal that the victims are now victims of system as well as being vulnerable to human trafficking.[...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 95- 96

A September 2022 Vice News article on Albanian asylum seekers in the UK noted the following factors associated with trafficking from Albania:

“Albanians are being driven to risk their lives crossing the channel by a perfect storm of rising poverty, corruption and psychological trauma which has been leveraged by increasingly efficient trafficking gangs. [...] At the start of the year, as the situation for ordinary Albanians became worse and more decided to take drastic action and leave, traffickers decided to profit from the desperation.”

Source: Vice News, “[They’re Vilified As Being Aggressive Criminals. But They’re Risking Everything To Escape Poverty And Trauma](#)”, 23 September 2022

In September 2022, a survey on knowledge, attitudes and practices of youth regarding human trafficking in four regions of Albania and among Roma was published, in preparation for the programme ‘Transforming National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania’, implemented by a coalition of six international and local organisations: UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. Among the findings, the summary report on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of Roma youth noted that:

“Survey results show that there is a gender-biased perception among surveyed Roma youth of the groups of people at risk of human trafficking [...] The group considered by surveyed Roma youth as being most at risk are girls younger than 18 years. Sixty-six per cent of surveyed Roma youth consider this group as being a great deal or very much at risk of being trafficked, compared to 77 per cent of the total survey population across the four regions. Roma youth think that the second most at risk group of being trafficked is national minorities. [...] There are differences in knowledge of at risk groups between male and female surveyed Roma youth [...] but no conclusive comments can be made regarding the differences. More such females than males (43% and 35%, respectively) know that girls under 18 years of age and women 18 years and older are at risk of trafficking. Meanwhile, more males than females know that men 18 years or older are a great deal or very much at risk of being trafficked (22% and 15%, respectively).”

Source: Deanna Davy, Blerina Metanaj, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, [“Survey on knowledge, attitudes and practices of youth regarding human trafficking in four regions of Albania: Second wave. Summary of findings for Tirana, Dibër, Kukës and Shkodër Regions”](#), September 2022, p. 4

A qualitative study was authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF about the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania, and was based on interviews with trafficking survivors, and representatives of government agencies and NGOs. The report drew on 2019, 2018 and 2016 reports to highlight the following about the vulnerability factors associated with trafficking:

“The drivers of human trafficking in Albania are broad, multiple and often overlapping. A number of vulnerability factors come into play in human trafficking in Albania, including harmful social and gender norms, poverty, low levels of education, mental health issues, forced marriage arrangements, and limited options for safe and legal migration.<sup>9</sup> Other factors include discrimination against minority groups, such as Roma, who are often trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>10</sup> [...]”

- <sup>9</sup> Hynes, P. et al, 2018, ‘Vulnerability’ to human trafficking: A study of Viet Nam, Albania, Nigeria and the UK; University of Bedfordshire and International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2019, ‘Between Two Fires’: Understanding vulnerabilities and the support needs of people from Albania, Viet Nam and Nigeria who have experienced human trafficking into the UK.
- <sup>10</sup> United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2016, Gauging public opinion on human trafficking in Moldova and Albania employing survey experimentation to inform effective prevention and awareness programs, p. 10.”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, [“Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania”](#), May 2022, p. 8

In a February 2022 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, the Albanian NGO Different and Equal, outlined trafficking risk factors relating specifically to the Roma community:

**“2. What types of personal, situational and structural factors push minorities into contemporary forms of slavery in your country/community?”**

Response: The majority of the victims of contemporary forms of slavery that comes from Roma community have comes from dysfunctional family relationships. Their parents were violent, negligent, expel their children from home and in most cases had a low level of education. They had low-income families where one of the parents or both are unemployed. The structure of the households and their size are also characterized by more cohabitation between generation and a higher number of members. In most of the cases parents are separated or divorced and having conflicting relationship with stepfather or stepmother was the reason to escape from home. Sexual abuse, incest from family members. ‘I was sexually abused by my stepfather, and when I told my mom what had happened to me, she didn’t believe me and even told me that I was mad...’ Besa, 19 years old. Early marriages, child labour and mobility, may also render Roma children more vulnerable to trafficking. Such practices make parents less aware of the risks and the problems when children are expected to work to contribute to the family income instead of regularly attending school. Entrusting a child to a relative, friend or acquaintance who promises to find him/her work, may appear acceptable to parents who are unaware of the actual conditions that will be encountered in a foreign country.

**3. Are there wider political, economic, social, religious and cultural factors making persons belonging to minorities vulnerable to these practices?”**

Response: Roma people face every day with discrimination and exclusion in many spheres of life. Unemployment is particularly high among this community, and those who are employed occupy most often low paid positions. Poverty is widespread and many people do not have access to necessities such as electricity or even clean water. [...]”

Source: Different and Equal, [“Input for the Special Rapporteur’s report on ‘contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities’”](#), February 2022, pp. 3-4

The anti-trafficking NGO Arise carried out five interviews with frontline partners, including SHKEJ, Women at the Well, NISMA, Different and Equal, and Mary Ward Loreto Foundation, in the preparation of its March 2021 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. Arise noted in its submission the vulnerability of children to trafficking due to a variety of factors:

“[...] 2. The nature and extent of criminal groups’ involvement in contemporary forms of slavery.

**A.** Prevalent vulnerabilities amongst Albania’s population that are exploited by traffickers:



[...] Children in orphanages are also targets given their economic and social vulnerability.

[...] Age:

66% of the victims and possible victims of trafficking D&E worked with in 2020 were between 11 and 17 years old. D&E also reported increased vulnerability in children since the pandemic began due to a reduction in teaching hours and pressures in the home. These factors have resulted in children spending more time on the internet and/or in the street, where they are more easily targeted by

organised criminal groups. The interviewee from NISMA identified the increased financial and emotional pressures on families due to the pandemic as factors driving young people to seek independence outside the home. This means more time spent on the streets and greater vulnerability to being targeted by organised criminal groups.

[...] Covid-19 as an aggravator of all these vulnerabilities:

Bregu highlighted that the closure of schools and support services and increased strain on remaining resources since the pandemic has reduced the support available for vulnerable children.

Lockdowns have also restricted the freedom of victims to flee and seek protection.”

Source: Arise, “[Submission on the Role of Organised Criminal Groups with regard to Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#)”, March 2021, pp. 3-4

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted a variety of factors associated with vulnerability to trafficking:

“Based on [our] experience, regarding the profile of victims of trafficking, we can say that there are several factors that affect their vulnerability and increase the risk of being exploited and falling prey to trafficking [...]

Regarding gender: we can say that girls are more at risk than boys in terms of their recruitment and exploitation.

**Age:** is another factor because mainly young people and children are at risk, whom traffickers deceive and recruit more easily in various ways. For example, promises of marriage, promises of employment, seduction by means of gifts or significant payments in income. Traffickers use the misuse of social networks by young people and children to deceive and recruit them.

**Family:** Mostly victims of trafficking come from families with severe social and dysfunctional problems. The composition of families with many members, alcoholic parents, violent, addicted to narcotic substances, families with one parent or they may also be orphans, negligent parents, parents with low education or no education at all, unemployed parents or parents who have problems with their mental health. Here we can also mention early marriages. Families who are homeless and in very difficult economic conditions.

**Education:** The education of the victims is mostly at very low levels and in some cases they haven’t gone to school. This makes them more vulnerable to trafficking because they lack information on how to protect themselves or seek help if they feel threatened.

**Ethnicity:** Some of the victims are from the Roma and Egyptian communities, which are very vulnerable communities for a number of factors.

**Their place of birth/residence:** Mostly the victims of trafficking are residents who have lived in deep areas of Albania where there has been a significant lack of socio-economic services or live in peripheral and informal areas of large cities in communities with acute social problems where poverty and unemployment are very high levels.

**Occupation:** Employment is important because being unemployed and with little income increases the risk of being recruited by traffickers.

[...] **mental health:** People with mental health problems are the most at risk because they are easier to manipulate and more vulnerable due to their vulnerability in relation to mental health

**Domestic or gender-based violence:** Also, violence is a factor that greatly affects their vulnerability to trafficking, because due to violence, adults and children often end up in street situations and are included by traffickers in exploitation networks.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“According to the experience of the NCATS including [us], the extremely poor socio-economic situation of the families was recognised by child protection workers as a push factor in all the petty crime/ begging cases. That children are rendered into such circumstances by adults who are meant to protect them could be viewed as a considerable betrayal of the child’s trust. Further, life on the streets exposes children to the acquaintance of adults who may exploit them further. Under international law definition, these cases constitute the worst forms of child labour and possible child trafficking.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, gave an overview of the factors associated with trafficking:

“Starting with the factors, because the factors somehow impact the overall profile of what kind of groups of trafficking we have in Albania, [it] is related mostly to poverty. [...] social economic reasons are the most present because children who are victims of poverty, [...] or who are living in a very bad living conditions are more vulnerable of being part of risky situations like networking in criminal networks, being exploited from their parents or other family members, abandoning school, and all these elements which impacts their somehow pathway toward trafficking. So I think in Albania most is poverty, social and economic reasons, but also a lax system of-- also a weak system of how we prevent vulnerability to being trafficking. So in parallel way, you can be a victim not only because of poverty but because the infrastructure that provides guarantees to children especially, it’s a little bit fragile and needs a lot more support on that. [...]

There are children from rural areas, for example, who have come to the capital of Tirana from rural areas, from other municipalities, who have been transferred recently, living in very-- we called suburb areas but these are informal areas [...] with a lack of social services. So the larger those communities there, the higher is the risk of being exploited or becoming victims of trafficking.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article “The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”, published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Based on my 2019 study [including interviews with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters, offering rehabilitation and reintegration services to trafficking victims: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], familial poverty, domestic violence, a dysfunctional family, lack of parental supervision, lack of familial support, lack of social support, low educational attainment, lack of professional skills, involvement with risky peers.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Victims of trafficking in Albania come from vulnerable families. [...] I do not mean only economically for risk. This is one factor, but not the predominant factor, I would say, because poverty is everywhere, but not everybody is a victim of trafficking. So we have found other elements that accompany these cases, especially in our work for prevention, but also considering [...] the profile of the victims identified, we can say that they come from vulnerable families, meaning either war, but also dysfunctional families, families having other members of the family like adults - I’m especially talking about children here - who have mental health issues and therefore not capable to properly take care of their children, families with a severe presence of violence and abuse in the family, the ones who have members of the family [who abused] of alcohol and drugs. So mainly, let’s say dysfunctional families [...]



[...] The truth is that they end up being exploited by criminal gangs, but this is as reports from UK say, local organizations there. But here, we don't hear-- I mean, the local communities, you don't hear much about exploitation, you hear about the gangs and the money that they make. So if we talk about factors is, yeah, everybody goes economic reasons. Fine, but then the fact that they can end up in trafficking is not very clear to them. The other thing is that about trafficking approach-- I mean, when I talk about-- there is a study from a French researcher talking about Albanian especially minors being involved in criminal gangs that are clan based or the extended family based, like they might have a criminal business [...] In their clans, it would be children from the same extended families and they organize the trip, and then these children, they have [...] loyalty to the family clan so willingly or unwillingly, they are a part of it. When I say willingly, I mean being brainwashed [...] and therefore willingly, as children are never willingly being involved in trafficking, but either they are brainwashed and are part of this voluntarily or sent by families, or they are recruited as such by the leaders of the family clans. That is another form of recruitment."

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

"[T]he risk factors are but not limited to poverty, low educational enrolment, lack of opportunities to higher education, especially after high school. We also know that gender inequality and violence against women, including domestic violence and family breakdown are risk factors. We also know that lack of income, scarce livelihood opportunities are risk factors. Poverty, in general, is one of the main reasons. [...] We also know that children from Roma and Egyptian minorities are also reportedly at high risk of child trafficking, due to a combination of the above factors. They have always been a marginalised community. We know that especially Roma and Egyptian children often live or work in the streets, therefore they are considered as a high risk and vulnerable group due to the particularities of their working and family conditions."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation stated that:

[...] the factors are related to poverty and income. [...] low incomes and poverty and lack of employment and possibilities for employment here in Albania because [for the] most part the victims are looking for a better life as we can say and for possibilities of working. And these are some vulnerabilities that the traffickers exploit from the victims in order for them to be exploited then after. And there is as well over 80% of the victims so have been victims of domestic violence before [in further written clarifications, the interlocutor confirmed that this statistic referred to Vatra's own service data rather than the collective data of the NCATS]. So domestic violence, is a pervasive factor that influences the victims to leave their houses and to find some better places and some protection from the people that recruit victims of human trafficking. [...] So it is the economic and poverty and this is the domestic violence and based mostly on gender-based violence because mostly the part of the victims that are violated has been women and girls. [...] a big factor as well, is irregular migration. [...] we know because we have regional reports and we have collaboration with our partners in Europe as well, and there are a lot of immigrants, so people from Albania, that are moving from Albania to other countries. And one of the countries that is most affected by this is the UK [...] But other countries of Europe, for example, France and Scandinavian countries as well, Netherlands, Italy, and Greece remain the biggest country for having Albanian migrants. And this irregular migration is mostly undergone through smuggling so it is a risk factor for the people that are migrating."

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Interviewee Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, stated that:

"Albania at the moment is going through a lot of difficulties in terms of the social welfare and the political and social system that we have in place. So a lot of young people, but not only exclusively young people, feel very much that they cannot build a future in Albania. So they are desperately seeking to leave Albania. So that in itself is a risk because everyone wants to leave Albania, but of course, not everyone has the means, and more importantly, there are very limited legal pathways, especially in relation to the UK. So that, unfortunately, is now being exploited in a sense that

this desperation to leave Albania coupled with the fact that there are no legal pathways to enter the UK means that a lot of young people, mainly men if we were to refer to the UK NRM statistics, but also women, are embarking on these precarious journeys, which sometimes means that they are also exploited or they don't know exactly what's going to happen when they reach the UK.

[...] everyone would quote poverty [as a factor associated with the risk of benign trafficked], and I think that's the first factor. But it's not poverty in the sense that not all of the people or at least when we look at the people migrating to the UK, it's not that they live in absolute deprivation because to come to the UK, they have to have some means to even pay those precarious journeys. I think it's poverty in terms of hope. People are also desperate in terms of feeling hopeful and feeling very much helpless in Albania. There are very few jobs that are paid a decent living wage in Albania[...] So people think that they can not make a good living with whatever is available in terms of salary."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"Most of the girls and women I've worked with, they did not have higher education. Most of them, they've had nine years of elementary education, which is not high school. But it's pre-high-school education converted in the UK system, I think. And the majority of them were coming from rural or remote areas; not living in the central, or in the capital city, but coming from more vulnerable backgrounds. Not all of them, but most of them, they've also had previous experiences with their families, which were not very positive, either they were previously victims of domestic violence or they have seen their mothers experiencing domestic violence, and coming from dysfunctional families [...]. I think I touched more on the push factors, but we do also have some pull factors, which I think are important to emphasise. For example, at the moment, what we've seen with young girls, but also young boys for forced labour or debt bondage<sup>8</sup> is usually this glamorous lifestyle that is portrayed on social media. And we do see young people in Albania using a lot of TikTok or Instagram. Now it has slightly changed with the new agreement that TikTok with some UK charities have done to prevent some of the content, but we did see before that there was a lot of use of TikTok. But going back to the factors, the pull factors is the luxury lifestyle portrayed in the social media abroad but also the promise of better working conditions and a better lifestyle in general. Coming also to the push factors such as, for example, corruption, which is a push factor that can make someone vulnerable to human trafficking, either because they cannot access the services to be protected, social protection services from the public, or even accessing services from the police or the judicial system, that can be a huge barrier and a huge vulnerability to be exploited later on."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 1.4 Trafficker profiles

### Desk review material

In an April 2023 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the anti-trafficking NGO Arise pointed to the involvement of organised crime syndicates in human trafficking.

"Marginalised communities in Albania are severely vulnerable to human trafficking, predominantly organised by 'sophisticated' organised crime syndicates. Albanian organised crime groups are also engaged in drug trafficking across Europe, and have grown and expanded operation in recent years."

Source: Publisher: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Author: Arise, "[Arise Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#)", April 2023

<sup>8</sup> The International Labour Organization provides the following explanation of "debt bondage": "Debt bondage is another way many workers end up in a situation of forced labour. Debt bondage exists when labourers (sometimes with their families) are forced to work for an employer in order to pay off their own debts or those they have inherited. The victims of debt bondage, if they try to leave their employment, are usually caught and returned by force. Providing wages or other compensation to a worker does not necessarily indicate that the labour is not forced or compulsory." Source: International Labour Organization, "[Business and Forced Labour](#)", undated



In April 2023 the Albanian Daily News outlet reported on a case whereby, allegedly, a male child was bought from a family in Tirana by a trafficker:

“New details have been revealed Thursday regarding the arrest of 55-year old Kutjim Demiri in the Patisia neighborhood of Athens, after the Greek police executed an warrant issued by Interpol Tirana for the person [...] for the criminal offense “Trafficking of minors”, carried out in cooperation.

[...] According to Greek media, Demiri “bought” the 8-year-old child from a poor family in Tirana. It is learned that he paid 100, 000 ALL (about 900 EUR) to take the minor.

Then he illegally and violently transported the 8-year-old to Athens, where he forced him to beg in the central parts of the Greek capital.”

Source: Albanian Daily News, “[New Details on Man Who Bought and Use Little Boy Revealed](#)”, 27 April 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from Key Adviser and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Albania, during which the interviewees shared information relating to the profiles of traffickers:

“Key Adviser, 12 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Do the VOT or PVOT know their traffickers? Are they family or organised criminal groups (OCGs)?

**A.** Yes, in the majority of cases they know their trafficker, it is sad to say that traffickers can be close family or relatives, so a cousin for example. There are cases where PVOT pay OCGs to take them somewhere and be trafficked.

[...]

BIRN Albania, 12 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** In the UK we see claims from people with a fear of money lenders and organised criminal gangs (OCGs), so are there concerns regarding links to HT and OCGs?

**A.** A lot of stories that we have looked into with regard HT are linked to OCGs, but OCGs are mostly involved in drug trafficking.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 12; 105

The Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar is a civil society initiative born in response to the harm caused by organised crime to the citizens of the Western Balkans Six (WB6, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). Its 2022 research report titled “Little Black Book”, summarised the main characteristics of organised crime groups in the region. Their research relied on both primary and secondary data, using expert interviews, police announcements, official statistics, and national SOCTA [serious organised crime threat assessment] documents. With regards to Albania it established that:

“There are no official estimates of OCGs [organized crime groups] in Albania, but there are moves toward the development of SOCTA methodology, which is expected to be adopted soon.<sup>38</sup> According to the information from the most recent report of the Special Prosecution Office<sup>39</sup>, as well as information collected in the interviews, major crime types performed by the OCGs in Albania are, respectively, drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, prostitution (human trafficking), cybercrime, along with the money laundering. It has also been noticed that Albanian strongly organized OCGs, tend to expand their activities in diversified areas of businesses such as construction or hospitality industries. Based on the qualitative information gathered in the research process, it is estimated that there are between 15 and 30 established OCGs in Albania - mainly in Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkoder, Vlore, Kruje.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the highest number of group arrests is recorded from the police announcements in Albania – 43. This may also suggest that many OCGs are not registered or identified by the security sector, but it should be noted that not every group arrest presents an organized criminal group neither is there a guarantee that it will be prosecuted as organized crime.

OCGs may be more or less big, from 3-4 to 10-15 or 20 members. The largest groups which operate on an international level can have 50 to 60 members, like the ones in Italy<sup>41</sup>. It is suggestible that OCGs have been rapidly growing recently since past research recognized groups of up to 17 members (the Gang of Durrës).<sup>42</sup> In the police announcements, group arrests have the largest average of arrestees compared to others in the WB6 – 11.8; but individual cases of high-number group arrests may drive this. For example, there were two announcements of 101 and 71 suspects in illegal drug trafficking and fraud in a call centre, respectively.<sup>43</sup> However, it is noticeable that OCGs from Albania, along with OCGs from Montenegro and Serbia, have more members and form bigger groups than in the rest of the WB6. Regarding the gender structure of the OCGs in Albania, most of the members are men, around 80%, while

women do not play critical roles.<sup>44</sup> In the police announcements, men are even more prevalent, making up 89.5% of the suspects. The age of the members depends upon illegal activity. Drug couriers are typically in their teens, while others are between 30 and 40 years old. It has been noticed that individuals involved in the smuggling of weapons are older, aged from 40 to 50. Typically, leaders are well into their 50's, while members 25 to 30 years old low in the hierarchy. This is also confirmed in the police announcements, where the mean age is 34.5. The members of OCGs are Albanian and generally do not represent any particular minorities. An important trait of strong OCGs is trust and family ties. Family ties are not necessary to build trust between OCGs; however, the longevity of OCGs is largely based on the trust built on family ties.<sup>45</sup> [...]"

38 Further information is available at:

<https://cscwb.info/2022/05/20/workshop-on-socta-questionnaires-and-methodology-held-in-tirana/>

39 Special Prosecution Office (SPAK), 2021 Working Report, pp. 30. Available at:

<https://spak.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Raporti-perfundimtar-SPAK-PDF.pdf>

40 Since there is no official information on the estimation of the number of OCGs, we base our estimation on the qualitative data gathered through the research process. One of the interviewees, a representative of the investigative media, estimated about 27 strongly organised and powerful groups.

41 Interview with the representative from the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime. 42 Zhilla, F. Lamallari, B. Organized Crime Threat Assessment in Albania. Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2015. Available at:

[https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Threat\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Albanian\\_Organised.pdf](https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Threat_Assessment_of_Albanian_Organised.pdf)

43 Available at: <https://www.asp.gov.al/korce-finalizohet-faza-e-pare-e-operacionit-antidrogeknock-down/> and

<https://www.asp.gov.al/finalizohet-operacioni-policor-i-koduar-skema/>

44 Information based on the interviews.

45 This information is also based on the interviews since no other official information is available."

Source: Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar, "[Little Black Book of Organized Crime Group in Western Balkans](#)", 4 November 2022, pp. 20-21

The July 2022 Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) handbook for journalists on 'investigating organised crime and money laundering' stated that:

"Albanian crime groups have been long been associated with human trafficking and prostitution."

Source: BIRN, "[Handbook for journalists: Investigating Organised Crime and Money-Laundering in Albania](#)" 19 July 2022

A May 2022 report authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF, addressing the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers, which is based on semi-structured interviews with 30 trafficking survivors and 14 key informants, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with 31 representatives of government agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) – presented the following findings with regards to the relationships between victims and traffickers and the profiles of traffickers:

#### "Relationships between victims and traffickers

The study identified that most of the interviewed trafficking survivors (n=14; 47%) had been trafficked by an intimate partner (boyfriend, fiancé, husband). Eight survivors (27%) reported that their trafficker(s) were friend(s). Four survivors (10%) identified family members— parent(s) or grand-parent(s)—as their trafficker(s). Thus, 84 percent of the survivors had been trafficked by someone who was very close to them. Other traffickers that were identified were employers (n=2; 7%), landlords (n=1; 3%) and the intimate partner of a sibling (n=1; 3%).

#### Profiles of traffickers

Twenty-three of the 30 interviewed survivors (77%) identified their trafficker(s) as male, and five (16.5%) that their trafficker(s) was female. In all five cases, the female trafficker(s) were a friend or friends of the victim.

The interviewed survivors suggested that their traffickers had only received limited education. Only five interviewed survivors (16.5%) reported that their trafficker(s) were employed at the time of their exploitation.

Many interviewed female survivors trafficked by an intimate partner reported that they had met their partner (trafficker) in their local area.

Fourteen interviewed survivors (47%) reported that their trafficker(s) were operating in small or medium-sized organised crime groups, twelve (40%) that their traffickers had exploited other victims, six (20%) that their traffickers were also engaged in drug trafficking, and three (10%) that their traffickers were also engaged in theft or robbery. Four survivors (13%) reported that, in addition to human trafficking offences, their traffickers also engaged in drug trafficking and theft or robbery.



### Motivations of traffickers

All interviewed survivors reported their trafficker(s)' primary motivation for trafficking was financial gain. According to them, the traffickers were either very wealthy, or very poor. Those described as wealthy were also reported as engaged in other criminal activities. Those described as poor were also often described as having debts accrued through gambling or alcohol or drug addiction, which they attempted to repay through the exploitation of victims. [...]

### Trafficker Profile

#### Male trafficker 1

Pretends to be in a relationship with a victim but traffics them for sexual exploitation and typically:

- Has been exploiting multiple victims over a long period
- Traffics women and girls in order to accumulate wealth for himself
- Is only slightly older than the victim
- Has a low level of education
- Is often involved in other criminal activities (e.g., drug trafficking, burglary, theft, rape)
- Often has a record of arrests in Albania and other countries
- Often is connected to organized crime groups [...]

#### Male trafficker 2

Family member who traffics children for labour or sexual exploitation, or both and typically:

- Is likely exploiting only one or two family members (usually children)
- Traffics family members in order to pay off existing debts
- Is significantly older than the victim
- Has a low level of education
- Is often unemployed
- Is likely unconnected to organized crime groups, but may collaborate with other perpetrators (e.g., child sex offenders)
- Has significant debt from alcohol or substance abuse or gambling (or any combination of those) [...]

#### Female trafficker

- Likely recruits multiple victims
- Recruits victims in order to generate income
- Is of a similar age to the victim
- Has a low level of education
- Is unemployed
- Is herself a former sex trafficking victim
- Is often connected to organized crime groups. [...]"

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania](#)", May 2022, pp. 9-10 and 12-13

In its 2022 report "Albania Child Notice", UNICEF noted the involvement of parents in instances of child trafficking:

"Child trafficking is for multiple purposes with strong reported links to child labour and children on the street. Victims may experience multiple forms of exploitation. The involvement of parents and other relatives is reported [...]"

Source: UNICEF, "[Albania-Child-Notice-2021](#)," 2022, p. 21

An article published by the "[Multidisciplinary Research Journal "Olcinium"](#)" in 2022 on the relationship between corruption and organised crime in Albania, summarised the following with regards to a Europol analysis project on preventing and combatting of crimes involving ethnic Albanian criminal groups and associated organised crime groups:

"The Europol COPPER analysis project concluded that Albanian-speaking criminals operate as groups and networks, influenced by family affiliation and affiliation within the Albanian-speaking region. There has been an increase in Albanian-speaking criminals in several categories of crimes, including [...] exploitation of the sex industry, human trafficking, human smuggling, corruption [...]"



Source: Adrian Leka and Eraldi Ndoj, "The relationship between corruption and organized crime in Albania", Multidisciplinary Research Journal "Olcinium" [Multidisciplinarni Istraživački Časopis "Olcinium" Revista Kërkimore Multidisciplinare "Olcinium"], 2022 (10/2), p. 14

A May 2021 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime on commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans stated with regard to Albania that:

"Children from all across the country are approached and recruited online by criminal networks and then brought to touristic cities such as Vlora, Durrës and Saranda or to big cities such as Tirana, Shkoder and Elbasan for sexual exploitation in hotels and motels. Organized networks are reported to be involved and often lure the children with pictures of luxurious hotels and lifestyles as well as luring them with the promise of fast money. [...]"

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "[EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#)," May 2021, p. 24

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

"Based on [our] experience, regarding the profile of Albanian traffickers, we can say that they are of several typologies. There are those who are the most aggressive, the most violent and the most dangerous, to those who use children for certain illegal jobs by seducing and deceiving them.

Some traffickers were exploited by others in their childhood or come mainly from problematic families with acute social problems. They are mostly uneducated, unemployed and want to get rich quickly. The trafficker can be from the close family circle, such as parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, spouses/cohabitants, etc., but it can also be other completely unknown person who, after having studied the difficult situation of the other person, recruit him and then to exploit him."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that: "[...] for the children in such situation, mainly Roma, they are exploited either by their parents or by kinship or by the head of a clan who manages the whole settlement. The crime of trafficking actually is not a crime that is happening, like the criminals who commit this crime do only trafficking. It's more part of the organized crime. So the same gang that has this business of sexual exploitation, probably has the same business of drug dealing, and there they have other youngsters that they exploit."

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

"[...] what we know about boys and men is that in many cases, the use of bonded labor when the trafficker, they offer them how to illegally take them to especially EU countries and once they get there, they are requested to pay the cost of their trip. And in many occasions, as far as we know, there are linked to criminal organizations or criminal activities in the foreign country where as documented in some of the cases they have been used to either sell drugs in the streets or harvesting cannabis among other illegal criminal activities."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation outlined the profiles of traffickers in Albania:

“[S]o the profile of trafficker, it is mostly of an individual now at the moment, individual trafficker or exploiter or recruiter. But we all know that there are criminal groups behind this because they cannot act alone. So these are boyfriends or these are relatives that recruit and then exploit the victims or give or refer them to other people that are inside or outside Albania. So mostly, this is not very well evidenced in Albania because there are not so many convictions or we don't know exactly what is behind all these profiles of the traffickers. But most of the traffickers are individuals and few are groups that are acting together. So we know the existing are three forms of profiles of traffickers that are individuals, there are groups, and there are criminal groups [...] But these criminal groups are mostly for transnational trafficking so not into Albania. In Albania, there are individuals and groups that collaborate together. And most of the victims that are exploited for sexual exploitation, for example, are exploited in the hotels, or motels in the country. And for example, for the youth that are involved in criminal activity or begging there are groups of relatives or friends groups that [...] these young people and exploit them into trafficking.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Interviewee Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, described insights gained from her P.h.D field research conducted between 2018 - 2020. Referring to research interviews with one person accused of smuggling and two accused of trafficking crimes (not linked to the UK) and awaiting trial in Albania, Dr Anta Brachou stated:

“What was surprising [about two young males Dr Brachou interviewed as part of her P.h.D field research (2018 - 2020), whom she noted in further clarifications were being prosecuted in Albania for alleged crimes not linked to the UK] is that they kind of depart from this idea of the notorious traffickers that we usually read or see in the media. This very organized, highly structured organized crime groups. The two young boys, for example[...] they came from very poor backgrounds, not highly educated. If I remember correctly in both cases, their girlfriends had worked previously in the sex industry, and then when they met them, they kind of offered to help them out and offer support and protection. And whatever money they made, for example, they used it to pay rent. So it was not money that made them millionaires. [...]”

Also referring to the same interviews conducted as part of her P.h.D (fieldwork was undertaken between 2018 - 2020), Dr Anta Brachou stated:

“[...] two [...] young boys, they had the label-- they had been accused of trafficking [...] in both those cases, the guys denied the kind of the situation, and they did argue that there were no proof and that the police had actually produced false evidence. But of course, I was not there to assess their case from a legal point of view [...]

[...] when I spoke to the traffickers or the alleged traffickers, that's what they pointed towards. That it's very corrupt, usually the ones that should be on trial or should go through these legal proceedings are exonerated immediately, and then it's the little soldiers, if you want that, are caught, which are then used for statistics because statistics would look good.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that

“[...] I can confirm from the discussions with the girls and women I've worked with; the most common profile of a man trafficker is usually the one who is close to them -- not to the family, but to the area where the victim lives in. [...] But we also have women in the profile of a trafficker, and usually these women are of an older age compared to the victims they target. For example, we might have women traffickers aged 45 up to 55, 60. And most of them, they've usually been involved in the sex trafficking or they've been victims themselves or partners of the traffickers who have been involved in sex trafficking for years.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 1.5 Methods of exploitation / “recruitment”

### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons reports on Albania summarised the activities and “recruitment” methods of human traffickers in Albania in the following way:

“As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Albania, and traffickers exploit victims from Albania abroad. Traffickers exploit Albanian women and children in sex trafficking and forced labor within the country, especially during tourist season. Traffickers use false promises such as marriage or employment offers to exploit victims in sex trafficking. Traffickers commonly force children to beg or perform other types of compelled labor, such as selling small items, and also force children into criminality, including burglary and narcotics distribution. Traffickers exploit Albanian children, mainly from the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, for seasonal work and forced begging. Isolated reports state traffickers exploit children through forced labor in cannabis fields in Albania and some traffickers are likely involved in drug trafficking. Traffickers exploit Albanian victims in sex trafficking in countries across Europe, particularly Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (UK). [...] Traffickers adapt operations to the impacts of the pandemic and shift recruitment and advertisement tactics to online means, particularly social media.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

In an April 2023 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Arise described the increasing use of technologies to facilitate trafficking in Albania.

“Our Albanian partners described the centrality of technology for trafficking operations. An overwhelming focus was placed upon internet devices, and the utilisation of social media, fake online adverts, and fake employment agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic was identified as a catalyst for younger Albanians gaining increased access to the internet and online devices. This was, generally, a consequence to the temporary shift towards online learning through lockdowns. It was noted that, necessarily, the greatest shifts in terms of internet exposure occurred in the communities that had previously been subject to the lowest levels of internet access.

These young people, aged 10-16 at the time of the pandemic, were identified as the group most vulnerable to growing forms of online targeting. After gaining internet access, or even just increased internet access, higher numbers of young people have been introduced to social media. The anti-slavery organisations noted the distinct popularity of TikTok and Instagram. It was also noted that most online engagement, including social media activity, occurs without parental supervision.

Organisations have noted a dramatic increase in online trafficking over the last three years, driven by the harnessing of online forums, social media spaces, and fraudulent advertising.

[...] Social media platforms are used differently, as platforms provide various features useful to criminal groups. Snapchat, for instance, is used to take advantage for disappearing messages:

‘Snapchat is used mostly for sex trafficking, for example by enabling the feature for disappearing messages when the traffickers engage in conversations with the victim, these messages disappear after the chat and cannot be kept or used to testify against the trafficker or catch the traffickers.’ (Albanian anti-trafficking worker, April 2023)

TikTok, a video and broadcasting app, also gives traffickers opportunities to lure young potential victims: ‘The use of TikTok to promote luxurious lives is used as a pull factor to groom children and youth into debt bondage and human trafficking. TikTok has been particularly dangerous, because it doesn’t put any limits and people go live and interact or do live shows by receiving money.’ (Albanian anti-trafficking worker, April 2023)

[...] Traffickers also use online gaming forums, including Discord and Fortnite lobbies, to exchange personal details with young men. Once relationships were established, gang members would engage the young men in criminal activities, often with some level of coercion. Organisations shared case studies of this type of online targeting:

‘...children met “friends” on Fortnite and then exchanged numbers and personal information with each other. After a certain period, the victims received gifts and favours from the traffickers, and at a later stage were asked to return the favour by engaging in illegal activities such as theft, drugs smuggling and blackmailing.’ (Albanian antitrafficking worker, April 2023)”

Source: Publisher: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Author: Arise, “[Arise Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#)”, April 2023



In an update on a 36-month intervention/project, Western Balkans Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings, issued by the IOM on 8 February 2023, it was highlighted that:

“[...] the facilitation of trafficking and smuggling online is expected to become even more pronounced and lucrative in the coming years. While social media, mobile applications, and online gaming platforms are frequently used for various purposes, the use of cryptocurrencies by smuggling networks is and will complement the existing, traditional modalities of payment, such as Hawala system. Criminal business are capitalizing on opportunities offered by the online environment and the digital solutions already omnipresent in the modus operandi of migrant smugglers and traffickers.”

Source: IOM, “[Countering Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling in the Western Balkans: key regional actors gather in Budva, Montenegro](#),” 8 February 2023

A December 2022 news item published by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), discussed an event at which Albanian national and international experts discussed how to address technology-facilitated human trafficking:

“National and international experts gathered today in Tirana to discuss measures to combat technology-facilitate trafficking in human beings in Albania. The OSCE Presence in Albania and the OSCE’s Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings organized the roundtable. Participants from law-enforcement agencies, prosecutors, international and civil society organizations discussed how the national legislation, including within the National Referral Mechanism, is enhanced to address technology-facilitated trafficking of human beings. Special focus was given to what legal requirements are in place and what can be improved to ensure that online platforms do not facilitate illegal activities associated with trafficking in human beings, and measures to ensure rapid exchange of data between law enforcement and technology companies.”

Source: OSCE, “[Combating technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings in Albania in focus of roundtable organized by OSCE Presence](#)”, December 2022

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews during which interviewees outlined some methods of “recruitment” that traffickers use in Albania. The General Directorate of State Police commented that:

“General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022

[...] The modus operandi is similar to other Western Balkan countries, so the recruiters take advantage of the difficult financial situation that women and girls are in. They target vulnerable women and girls going through family hardships, for example, parents divorced and financial hardships. These women and girls mostly come from rural areas where there is little development, as opposed to in urban areas. So first the recruiters [traffickers] tend to develop romantic relationships with women and girls. Then they persuade them to move abroad and then they start trafficking them through extortion and other forms of exploitation. Lately we have observed new forms of recruitment through social media, Instagram, Facebook. They develop romantic relationships online and it moves into real life.

[...] Let me move to children that have been identified as VOT and who have been exploited for forced labour and begging in the EU and UK. We carried out investigations and found that it’s the parents of children taking them abroad to the EU and UK. So the end goal is for the children to claim asylum or be granted a status as a VOT.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 33

SHKEJ discussed how child trafficking can occur, in an interview with the UK Home Office:

“[...] SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** Have they been trafficked?

**A.** This is difficult to know because they don’t know they have been trafficked. With minors, they say they have not been trafficked, but that they have travelled by boat and never felt insecure as they were with family members. They think trafficking is only if you’ve been kidnapped. But we (SHKEJ) know this is trafficking or smuggling, but they do not think it is. Even when they have been outside the country they have always been in the company of people they know. But they have always been forced to beg or forced into labour. [...]

**Q.** You said a lot of children don't recognise been trafficked as they are taken by someone they know.

**A.** Children from Roma/Egyptian communities don't know they have been trafficked. You ask them what is trafficking and they still don't know. They are not recognising all the steps of trafficking. They don't say have been trafficked, instead they say that they have travelled abroad.

**Q.** Did you say that they are with their families?

**A.** Not always, a cousin or person from their community. They say I travelled with them and then they go begging with someone they know but they don't see it as forced labour, they think 'no, we're just working'. This is mostly within Albania. [...]

Since 2020 online trafficking has increased, for us it is very difficult to identify and control. Even traffickers are using online methods, they are no longer in the neighbourhood. After 2021 we opened a centre with 5 or 6 computers so we could monitor what the children did. Traffickers use the internet as a method to contact them. They go online to play games but they don't know how old the people they are speaking with are. So this is the difficulty they are facing now. We need to close internet points and have safe computers for children and so on."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 79, 81, 83

In an interview as part of the UK Home Office's fact-finding mission in Albania, Mary Ward Loreto described situations of debt bondage.

"Mary Ward Loreto , 11 October 2022 [...]

Another story that applies to many men is this. There are legitimate businesses being run, successful businesses paying taxes and inviting very young men to come and work for them. The men go and, the one I know of, he worked for a year and he was paid and had a good job, but due to costs of fares and the debt, he came after a year and he was used as a drug mule. So he came via a legitimate route, but after that he was recruited.

You have to understand about Albanian youth, illegal migration is booming to the UK. They go to the UK for a better future. Even though they know they're going to end up working in a cannabis house. They are promised they'll be paid £5,000 per month. They go to get money to open a business and so they can provide health care for their family and not be a beggar.

**Q.** Did you say that they are promised they will be paid £5000 a month?

**A.** Yes, in the cannabis houses, they need to cultivate the marijuana and keep it growing. To get there they pay £30,000 to a system of recruiters and smugglers. It's a well-established system. They are promised that after they pay back the money they owe for their journeys they will start to earn money. However, if they encounter problems, like the drugs being stolen, they must repay the loss. That is how they are kept in the loop of debt bondage.

For example, a boy had debts after borrowing money for medical expenses. He was trafficked to the UK to pay back the debt. He worked for 3 years to pay the debt and then the drugs were stolen so he was kept enslaved. He was rescued but didn't want to return as the traffickers in Albania knew his family well. While he was in the UK, those linked to the trafficking gangs raped his mother and sister and sent him photos of it. They did not want to denounce the attackers to the police as they feared they would be killed as they (gangs) are well known for revenge. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 95

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission in Albania, an official from Tirana Municipality noted that young boys suffered exploitation and forced labour outside of Albania as a result of false promises of decent employment:

"Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]

From the information we have from the Police, in general the male victims of trafficking are young boys who have suffered exploitation for forced labour outside Albania, in EU countries. They were deceived with promises of high-paying work and regular documentation and when they arrived at their destination, they were exploited for unpaid or minimally paid work, living in poor conditions, small rooms, many people in one room, and without documents. Passports are often taken from the users so that they do not leave. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 109

A September 2022 Vice News article stated that:

“Albanians are being driven to risk their lives crossing the channel by a perfect storm of rising poverty, corruption and psychological trauma which has been leveraged by increasingly efficient trafficking gangs. [...] At the start of the year, as the situation for ordinary Albanians became worse and more decided to take drastic action and leave, traffickers decided to profit from the desperation. When Boris Johnson was dumped by his party in July, some traffickers told people that Britain’s next Prime Minister would welcome Albanians.

Posts began appearing on TikTok and Instagram, offering transit into the UK with payment after arrival. Some advertised “Black Friday deals”; others juxtaposed their discounted crossing rates (between £3,000-£15,000) over photos of mainly young Albanians crammed into dinghies and sporting bright orange lifejackets. Albanian TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram is full of promises of jobs and visas. Videos of Big Ben and the Union Flag, interspersed with bundles of cash and stories featuring stamped passports, all promise a better life for Albanian youth. [...]

Over the past year, Albanian trafficking crews have acted quickly to take advantage of people’s desire to escape.

One advert claims its offer of visas is through entirely legal means and invites applicants to text a British number to get a callback. ‘Work conditions; regular documents, bank payment, English speaking, excellent salary,’ a post on Facebook claims. Another advert on a classifieds site targets people in the north where emigration is at an all-time high. It claims to offer work visas to those with family already in the UK, who know English and have IT skills.

‘The payment is very satisfactory knowing the standards of living in England, as well as the possibility of extending the contract’, it continues, inviting applicants to contact a rather suspicious email address.

Desperate Albanians paying between £5,000 and £15,000 to travel in traffickers’ vans through Europe or meet their traffickers in France and travel the last stretch crammed into a small boat or lorry. Once in the UK, some are told they now have outstanding debts and must work to pay them off. This work can include prostitution, working on illegal cannabis farms, or cleaning rooms in swanky London hotels.”

Source: Vice News, [“They’re Vilified As Being Aggressive Criminals. But They’re Risking Everything To Escape Poverty And Trauma”](#), 23 September 2022

A May 2022 report authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF, addressing the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers, which is based on semi-structured interviews with 30 trafficking survivors and 14 key informants, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with 31 representatives of government agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) – presented the following findings with regards methods and tactics used by traffickers to “recruit” victims:

#### “Recruitment tactics

The present study identifies a number of novel tactics used by human traffickers to recruit potential victims. [...] Traffickers also make efforts to groom the victim’s family by inserting themselves into the life of the victim and earning the family’s trust. Traffickers, especially young males, establish romantic relationships with sex trafficking victims (especially teenage girls), promising the victims marriage and children together. The report clearly highlights that one indicator of human trafficking in Albania today is the rushed nature of a romantic relationship. Traffickers quickly insert themselves into the life of the victim and their family, and then swiftly relocate them to another city or abroad. Social media are increasingly being used as a tool by male traffickers to identify potential young female victims with whom they can establish a false relationship before trafficking the women and girls for sexual exploitation in Albania or elsewhere. Female perpetrators play key roles in human trafficking offences: they act as the victim’s friend, but then lure them to the place of exploitation. Many female perpetrators are former trafficking victims themselves. For children who are trafficked by family members, recruitment tactics are not used but, rather, the notion of the child’s responsibility to financially support the family is manipulated in order to force children into exploitative labour.

#### Control tactics

Some of the control tactics identified in the study are those that have been identified previously in the literature on human trafficking. Traffickers use the control tactics of threat, violence, confinement and confiscation of identity and travel documents and mobile phone, to control their victims. In addition, they may keep the victims compliant through regularly drugging. The study uncovers some novel and important new findings with regard to traffickers’ control tactics. Known to the victim, the trafficker can manipulate them more easily (than those who are not known by their victims) through artificial debts and threats. Because the victim believes that they are in a relationship, or are close friends, with the trafficker, they comply when told that they have to service an artificial debt. Victims who know their trafficker are also easily controlled through threats against the victim’s family members because the victim knows that their trafficker is aware of their vulnerabilities, and has the address and other personal details of the family members. Traffickers known by the victim can also easily control them by separating them from their family.

For example, traffickers can create friction between the victim and their family members, and, later on, make the victim contact their family to tell them that they have moved abroad with their intimate partner or friend (trafficker) and wish to cut off contact with their family. This leaves the victim feeling that they have no family support, and thus nowhere to go and no one to help them. For interview participants who were trafficked when they were children, there was limited understanding when they were young that they were being exploited. The traffickers (often family members) simply exploited this lack of knowledge and understanding to keep the children obedient. Persistent threats of the child being forced to live on the street have a strong effect and prevent the child from fleeing situations of exploitation and abuse.

This study further identifies that there is a rapid escalation in control methods used by traffickers who are known to the victims. In the early stage of the victim's exploitation the trafficker appears to prefer subtler control methods, such as artificial debts and threats. However, when those preferred control tactics are no longer effective the trafficker adopts more forceful tactics, such as the use of violence, drugs and confinement of the victim to the place of exploitation."

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania](#)," May 2022, pp. 8 and 10-11

The same report suggested two typical male trafficker profiles and one female trafficker profile:

#### "Trafficker Profile

##### Male trafficker 1

- Pretends to be in a relationship with a victim but traffics them for sexual exploitation and typically: [...]
- Selects good looking young Albanian women and girls with little education
- Approaches their victim on social media, or recruits them in their local area
- Pretends to be employed and wealthy
- May lie to the victim about having a wife and children
- Pretends to be in love with the victim; promises marriage and children together
- Conducts a hurried relationship, inserting himself into the victim's family and gaining their trust
- Promises employment or adventure in a different city in Albania or abroad, to where they rush the victim.
- When in a different city or abroad:
- Pretends to have significant debt
- Invents friction between the victim and their family in order to reduce contact
- May use blackmail (e.g., threatening to post videos of the victim's sexual activities online)
- May threaten to traffic the victim's siblings
- May use traditional control tactics, such as violence and confinement.

##### Male trafficker 2

Family member who traffics children for labour or sexual exploitation, or both and typically: [...]

- May use threats of violence or homelessness.
- Female trafficker [...]
- Recruits victims through the local community, as well as social media
- Pretends to be the victim's friend
- Promises employment, financial gain, or adventure
- Purchases items, alcohol, hotel stays for the victim
- Invents artificial debts (linked to the purchase of items, etc.)
- May use traditional control tactics, such as violence and confinement."

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania](#)", May 2022, pp. 9-10 and 12-13



In its report “Albania Child Notice” published in 2022, UNICEF noted that:

“The Albanian Government said that female prostitution is the most common form of exploitation and that the most vulnerable among children are 14- to 18-year-olds. Various recruitment means are used, targeted at girls and young women in economic and other hardship. Direct deception and coercion, use of social networking to offer marriage or better lives, and offers of jobs such as in bar-work and dancing may be used initially, sometimes with physical and psychological violence later on. [...]”

Source: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021](#),” 2022, p.100

A May 2021 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime on commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans stated with regard to Albania that:

“Children from all across the country are approached and recruited online by criminal networks and then brought to touristic cities such as Vlora, Durrës and Saranda or to big cities such as Tirana, Shkoder and Elbasan for sexual exploitation in hotels and motels. Organized networks are reported to be involved and often lure the children with pictures of luxurious hotels and lifestyles as well as luring them with the promise of fast money. [...] SECTT [sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism] appears to be closely linked to internal child trafficking patterns as a form of trafficking of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation. However, it not only has ties to the hotel industry, but also to bars, restaurants, tour and event operators and, more widely, transportation companies.”

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “[EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#),” May 2021, p. 24

UNICEF noted in its Country Office Annual Report for 2021:

“Covid-19-related socio-economic shocks and the impacts of the pandemic significantly increased the risk of online grooming and sexual abuse and Internet-facilitated trafficking, resulting in higher levels of child labour and exploitation. Children and adolescents from the most vulnerable strata were further affected by the lack of access to critical services, including protection. Parents, caregivers and teachers found themselves largely unprepared to access e-Services that were previously available in person and help children to navigate the Internet safely. UNICEF partners confirmed that significant challenges inherited from 2020 have not been mitigated.”

Source: UNICEF, “[Country Office Annual Report 2021](#)”, undated, p.1

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

“Based on [our] experiences, false promises and offers are used a lot as recruitment method. Traffickers use a lot of manipulation of people and communication on social networks, promising them a better life, better job, better salaries or better careers and that in the end are nothing more than frauds and mistreatment by exploiting them. So some of the most frequent forms of recruitment are promises of marriage, promises of finding a well-paid job, promises of get-rich-quick and all kinds of seduction through social networks and fake virtual realities.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Based on information and statistics from the NCATS, including [ourselves], regarding methods of recruitment used by traffickers to recruit victims, the methods of recruitment were mostly due to the impact of social group in involvement in dangerous situations that lead then in exploitation, exploitation for begging by family members and other persons, exploited by boyfriend/cohabitant /husband and promise for housing, food, basic needs, and involved in criminal activity, false promise for job; recruited by social network.

- 26% recruited by social group involvement in dangerous situations that lead then in exploitation
- 17% Exploitation of vulnerable situation
- 16% recruited and exploited by boyfriend / cohabitant / husband;
- 10% recruited/pushed by family member (parents, brothers, sisters, relatives)
- 8% recruited with false promise of marriage
- 7% recruited with false promise for job
- 7% recruited/pushed for begging by family members and other persons
- 5% recruited from social network and promise for money”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted the following in relation to the targeting of children for the purposes of trafficking:

“I can talk only based on our experience on children that is related mostly to children in street situations, so children exploited for trafficking or at high risk of trafficking because if you spent the majority of time in the street, the circumstances of the street, the situation of the street somehow makes you the most vulnerable one for being a victim of trafficking. And most of them are exploited from their parents. So it’s a way of how they use their work in the street. And second one are, I think, children that are trafficked for online sexual exploitation. That is majority now; an increased high number especially after COVID due to lockdown and isolation. I think that online sexual exploitation has been somehow increased due to limitations in physical contact and presence. The online virtual way on how they identify potential cases of exploitation has been through online and virtual channels. And third it’s I think part of criminal networks as substance abuse distribution, and in the same time for thefts or small criminal acts. And they recruit them. So they hire children because they are below the age of criminal responsibility so it’s easier for them to be identified, to be exploited, and not to be kept by police or to be somehow prosecuted by police. So these are the main three big most present, I think, in the field of children [...]

If [traffickers] write to someone [online] and someone responds, this is the easy way how they can potentially identify vulnerable cases who be in contact with. The second one is the street, I think. So they are very vigilant on identifying children. We have a lot of children in street situation unfortunately still, even though we have a lot of new mechanisms trying to support the system and work on that. But still we have a high number of children in street situation. A part of them are from Roma and Egyptian communities. But I can say that it’s direct contact. So from the street situation is from the peer to peer. For example, if someone is part of a network, they can invite other friends and other children to be part of the network [who they are] friends with and online. [...] I think that if you are abandoning schools and you are not potentially being part of the school like in usual day and you are around school. So I think this is a new way of how they identify children that have this potential of vulnerability, I can say.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“It actually goes together, the form of exploitation, the profile of the victim, and the profile of the trafficker are like plasters that draw together. As I mentioned, for the children in such situation, mainly Roma, they are exploited either by their parents or by kinship or by the head of a clan who manages the whole settlement. The crime of trafficking actually is not a crime that is happening, like the criminals who commit this crime do only trafficking. It’s more part of the organized crime. So the same gang that has this business of sexual exploitation, [...] has the same business of drug dealing, and there they have other youngsters that they exploit.

[...] So the fake jobs for recruitment, like for work abroad as waiters, or not even waiters, as a babysitter or take care for elderly people. These are the two enticements now, not even working in the tourism industry or whatever.

[...] Labour exploitation in neighbouring countries for adult males, like mainly in agriculture and construction sectors in Montenegro and in Macedonia, predominantly because there has been this shift of migrant workers that went from Montenegro down to work in Croatia. The [...] Croatia being part of the EU, the government working the EU member countries. So the migration pattern, people following job opportunities, has fed also the trafficking. The problem here is the people do not identify it as trafficking, the fact that they are living all together very bad conditions, not having job contracts, receiving much less than what has been the oral agreement, and living horrible conditions, remove

their identity documents. [...] Not legal work, but they don't see it as an exploitation, but it is happening, especially in the cross border areas. And the recruiters in this case are people from the area who do the business, let's say, between the two countries.

[...] one phenomenon that is still continuing that maybe you might be seeing in the UK is arranged marriages of young girls. Because the remote areas, once they are at the age of 16, 17, they are engaged with men which have migrated. So that's why it is when the families arranged them, the girl is said, "You are promised to this guy who lives in very good economic circumstances in UK, you go there." blah, blah, so that they are brainwashed. Usually they are brainwashed, promised what a good life they were-- can imagine from some young girl coming from very remote areas so they don't know much about life, has been all her life at home and school would have heard about wonderful love stories for years. As I said, social media doesn't show the reality, actually it shows a nice picture of wonderful lives people are conducting and spreading happiness [...]. So they are promised a marriage, the marriage is arranged. They just know that this is the son of a friend of a friend who is [...] looking for a wife in Albania because they don't like foreigners. They're like Albanian wives because Albanian wives know their traditions. [...] And yes, there have been cases that our staff in the field has come-- in their prevention work in the awareness raising sessions that they have had in the field, they have come across these cases, and we've done our part in explanation and sessions in awareness raising about what is trafficking and how to identify signs of trafficking, either in the victims or in the discussions that are brought forward to marriage proposals. And arranged marriage is a phenomenon that is still happening."

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist described traffickers' methods as follows:

"[...] people who like to exploit their relationships with the victims. They know the victims, so they know what are the vulnerabilities [...]-- they know the dynamics in the relationships; what are the needs of the person, how can I control, exploit the victims."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained the "recruitment" methods of traffickers:

So [for the] most part of the traffickers per se exploit the vulnerabilities, as I told you, of the victims. And most of the victims, 60-- 26%, sorry, from the data we have, have been recruited by social groups. For example, from other friends that say that 'we offer you a good job'. So to recruit that, the social groups that create online or offline but they recruit the victims through promises for better jobs and better living. So [for the] most part of the victims are exploited, and are recruited by the so-called boyfriends. For example, boyfriends [...] offering love and affection in the beginning and then exploit them mostly through sexual exploitation into Albania. Or there are cases where [...] they travel go outside for a better life, and we don't have track or have data regarding these mostly girls that are recruited by this way. But there are a percentage as well, 10%, pushed by family members for being exploited. For example, parents, brothers, sisters, or relatives so pushed for being forced for begging, for criminal activity, for sexual activity as well. So these are members, relatives that are involved in this this recruitment. We have identified 8% recruited through false promises offers of marriage as well and 7% for false promises for jobs. And so pure promises for a job. And then 5% are recruited through social networking so it is Instagram or through agencies or working, etc.

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Commenting on the "recruitment" methods of traffickers, interviewee Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, noted that:

"[...] it's very difficult sometimes to differentiate in terms of trafficking and smuggling because I feel how things start is always word of mouth. So if someone wants to come to the UK, this doesn't even happen underground anymore. You say you want to go to the UK, and in the next 10 minutes, you'll have all the information or people will put you in touch with someone who knows someone who can facilitate the journey. So we operate by word of mouth. So that's one thing. And that's also the reason why sometimes it's very difficult to prove and have empirical evidence of how



things work. The other thing, again, it might not look as trafficking when you see it, but a lot of recruitment of people to embark on these precarious journeys happens on social media. [...] now that I have monitored social media, TikTok is booming with these recruitment pages. And it's not just that; you can also see how people interact. So there is also very much the correspondence that you see of people talking about these journeys, showing how they make these journeys, and also, importantly, what is very dangerous showing when they are rich here. So the message is usually that, "Yes, there is that challenge; yes, there is that precarity, but you will make it. So why not make the sacrifice?"

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that

"[...] they use methods, at the beginning, of luring the victim into love relationships. Usually, the lover boy method is among the most common forms for girls being trafficked. But also, in the case of boys, it's usually luring them into this luxurious lifestyle. In such cases, the trafficker will have a very expensive car, and they will be dressed in very well expensive clothes. And that can be one of the tools they can use to initially make contact with their potential victims. [...] "[...] also now we've seen an increase in debt bondage, for example – it's initially human smuggling – where Albanian boys, usually from the north or even from vulnerable areas in the south, they want better life conditions or just to provide for their families. And at the moment, in Albania, it's very difficult for youngsters to do that because unemployment rate is 27%. [...] [...] [W]hat we've seen with Albanian men and boys is usually forced labor or debt bondage as among the most common forms [of trafficking]."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 1.6 Stigma affecting trafficked men and boys

• Refer also to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 130](#).

### Desk review material

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Different and Equal noted that a considerable number of male trafficking victims were identified by the Mobile Units in Tirana and Shkodra, and observed that adult male victims of trafficking face some stigma, and difficulty in seeking help:

"Different and Equal, 5 October 2022

[...] **Q.** What about male victims, are police trained to identify male VOT?

**A.** Yes, although there are less cases identified by the police. Most are identified and referred by child protection workers and our mobile units. We have one established Mobile Unit in Tirana and one in Shkodra and a considerable number of males were identified by these mobile units.

**Q.** Do men experience the same levels of stigma?

**A.** If they are adults they face some stigma, less so with minors. Few men ask for help on their own. Only a few go to ask the police for help. Of all the cases of men, only 2 have asked for help. Others were asking for help on something else and by giving help we recognised that this was actually a situation of trafficking. So men feel they have to be strong and not ask for support and we see they are more resistant to receive counselling. We support the employment of males by collaborating with the Regional Employment Office and different business companies. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.19-20

In an interview with the Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, SHKEJ suggested that there is a lack of willingness among males to acknowledge that they have been trafficked:

"SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Do men who return from abroad face the same stigma?

**A.** No, or at least they pretend that there is no stigma. In Albania men need to be strong. They say they are men, and



they don't accept they have been trafficked or placed into labour exploitation. They would rather say that it was their choice.

This is my personal opinion outside of my work: my friends who have gone to the UK don't realise that they have been slaves sitting 6 months inside a cannabis house. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.81

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Mary Ward Loreto stated that men do not self-identify as victims of trafficking due to shame:

"Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** You mention that you have not seen many women returning to Albania, but in regard to men do you see them return even if they don't self-identify?

**A.** They don't self-identify because of the shame, so they return (to Albania) but with the intention of leaving again. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.94

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, an official from Key Advisor indicated suggested that men and boys feel more stigmatised than women and girls, and that they don't see labour exploitation as trafficking:

Key Adviser, 12 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Is it mostly women who suffer the stigma?

**A.** Stigma affects both men and women, boys and girls, I would actually say boys and men feel much more stigmatised than women. When we talked to our vocational students about human trafficking they recalled an old phenomenon in the 1990s when young girls were taken on boats to Italy for sexual exploitation. So they associate trafficking with sexual exploitation and feel insulted and never admit they are VOT. They cannot cope with the fact that trafficking has evolved and now displays in other forms and doesn't just equate with sexual exploitation. They don't think that they meet this category. They don't see labour exploitation as trafficking. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.100

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, an official from Tirana Municipality noted that men are not viewed as victims of trafficking:

"Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Are men seen as exploited when trafficked?

**A.** Since we haven't dealt much with male VOT we cannot provide accurate information, just our perception. Personally what we know is that the patriarchal mindset prevails here and men are not viewed as VOT, though maybe boys and minors could be."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.108-10

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, referred to a 2015 Different and Equal report on trafficking of men and boys:

"Please refer to our 2015 report, in relation to trafficking for sexual exploitation, in particular the following passage: 'Those who were sexually exploited are not ready to talk openly to police about their trafficking experience. Some of them fear the prejudices and stigma that may accompany this process, the fear that somebody from their family may come in contact with what has happened and the fear that they may know their different sexual orientation in some cases. Also, the topic of abuse or sexual exploitation of boys is considered as a cultural taboo for many societies, and for the boys it is extremely difficult to share this painful experience. In many cases, they decide to remain silent and



to consider this trauma as a dark and unexplored part of their past. Self-blame amongst the boys: According to the experience of the service providers, there are many boys that blame themselves for what has happened to them. In addition, we should take into consideration the assumptions about homosexuality when involved in prostitution (confusion amongst boys).<sup>1</sup>”

1 Different & Equal study “Falling through the cracks! The trafficking of men and boys in Albania”, 2015

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“I think stigma [experienced by boys and men] is present not only in professional networks or in state authorities, but especially in community level in terms of families, in terms of schools, in terms of community, local communities. So it’s not easy. Stigma is present, and prevention and informing is part of how we can work on that. And as I mentioned, it’s not that we are very well present in all the local communities. So I think it’s present and it needs a lot of efforts to fight against it.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Yes there is a stigma [...] We did have cases of minors from the LGBT communities who are stigmatised from their families and are not accepted in the family. The cases are independently reintegrated finding alternative ways from our NGO.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] I mentioned 100 cases; maybe only 20 are identified as victims of trafficking because, [...] you might have all of the signs [or] indicators [...] that you are a victim of trafficking, but then it is up to the individual themselves to declare him or herself a victim of trafficking because of the status. And only 20% or less than 20% of that are willing to be recognized as a victim of trafficking. Most of the cases are identified as potential victims of trafficking, which is another status, let’s say, given. There is no difference between the one and the other because in both cases, you display the indicators [and] [...] are entitled to the same benefits and support. The only difference is if you are a victim of trafficking, you will receive an allowance of £20 a month,<sup>9</sup> which is practically nothing [...] but in order to receive this, you need to go to the state offices. If you go to the state offices and say, “I have the status,” then everybody knows that you have been trafficked and the stigma is extremely strong. So yes, victims can access the services only through the NGOs because, otherwise, they need to go and scream it out and nobody wants this. Like, “I’m a victim of trafficking. May I have this status, please?” [...] as I said, if you are a victim of trafficking and say that you are a victim of trafficking, in the eyes of the public, “Oh, you are a prostitute.” It’s very difficult to make this distinction between a prostitute and somebody exploited, so people don’t say it. [...]

Going on speculation, knowing the general attitude of, “Okay, labour trafficking. Oh, I mean, it’s not that big a deal. Okay, you were fooled. That’s not a big shame.” Or “you’re a loser”, okay, but that’s not a big shame like if you are exploited for sexual exploitation. For men, even worse than women. [...] [If they were exploited for sexual purposes] they’d never say that. They’d never, ever, ever say that.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

9 Note that the monthly financial assistance available to victims of trafficking increased from 3000 Lek to 9000 Lek in 2022. See [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 193](#).



A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“But we have identified something that stigma for people that are men or boys that have been trafficked, even for sex trafficking or other that are identified as trafficked person is that they don’t go or they don’t come so to seek help and support to the organizations or to the institutions because they think that people will stigmatize them, to judge them being so weak to let the others exploit them. So the patriarchal mentality of Albanian men, it is that men should not be involved and shouldn’t be exploited because of the patriarchal mentality as empowerment. But for this reason, there are a few men or young men that go to our psychologists, for example, near the legal clinic because we offer the support for them, the male, in the legal clinic. And it is very difficult for them to be disclosed or to say what happened and to accept the fact because the community doesn’t accept these facts yet.[...] Now we have more men or young boys that come and seek support to our center.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“We are very much a society that likes to keep that macho bravado facade of men who are strong and are leaders of the household and the society in general. So it’s not usual that men would come forward and identify as victims of trafficking. [...] I think because there’re these prescribed roles, they are very vulnerable also to show any kind of emotion [...]. In terms of what types of trafficking would be attached to most stigma for men, sex trafficking definitely. [...] forced criminality, less. [...] Forced labor, again, I said it’s not in our culture to single out forced labor [...] so they wouldn’t even see themselves as a victim of forced labor.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth, with a recent research focus on young people at risk of criminal exploitation in Albania stated that:

“If they were known as having been trafficked. So their agency was curtailed, and they were forced into something. There would be a stigma. But people tell stories about themselves that are okay. So they can tell the story about having migrated. And then that’s not a stigma. That is just what everybody tries to do. So stigma applies only if you divulge that you have been stripped of your agency and forced against your will to do something.[...] So we have analyzed all these Albanian hip hop lyrics, which are about migration and migration stories, and they divulge a lot of vulnerability and yearning for mom and things like that, as I said earlier. And we haven’t found amongst those lyrics any story which said I was forced into having sex with men or anything like that. We have not found such a story. And I’m sure this is about you wouldn’t tell that story. Because you would, at that point, open yourself up to ridicule or stigma. Who would do that? These stories are silenced, effectively. But that renders these people vulnerable for other people to tell that story. So you’re again, you can potentially be blackmailed. Somebody saying, “I’m going to tell that this or that was really the case because I know.” You are easier blackmailed again and forced into things you don’t want to by saying we can tell this story exactly because social honor is such an important capital in this context.”

Source: Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] from my personal observation and also discussions with colleagues working with men and boys, usually, Albanian men and boys, they experience a different type of stigma than Albanian girls and women experience. With Albanian boys, we see the stigma of being a failure, of not succeeding in the country where you were initially sent to succeed, because what we’ve seen with Albanian men and boys is usually forced labor or debt bondage as among the most common forms [of trafficking]. And when this is not successful where they initially thought it would be successful for them and they’re returned back to their home countries, it’s usually the stigma of failure. Also, the stigma of being the breadwinner of the family: usually, in Albania, we do see men as the breadwinners and women as caretakers of the family. That’s not in Tirana. It has changed. But in most of the areas in Albania, this belief still exists. And we would see men being stigmatized as unable to provide for their families because they’re weak after their trafficking

experience, and it takes a little bit more time for them to get back into the labor market and provide for their family. And the third stigma we've seen is unfortunately this stigma of the bad boy, that you were not a bad boy enough to do bad things in order to survive or in order to succeed in the dark world, and now you are returned; you're a failure. But these are among the most common."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023



## 2. Protection

### 2.1 Legal framework

#### 2.1.1 Ratification of international treaties

• Refer also to [2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 121](#).

#### Desk review material

The January 2023 UNODC global report on trafficking stated that:

“Albania ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in 2002.”

Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, “[Global report on trafficking in person. country profiles: Central and South-western Europe](#)”, January 2023, p. 2

A 2022 evaluation authored by Robin Haarr of the “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania” programme, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë, gave the following legal context relating to trafficking in Albania:

“In 1992, Albania ratified the CRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child], and in 2008, became an accession country to the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In 2002, Albania ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, as well as the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. In 2006, Albania also ratified the CoE [Council of Europe] Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, [Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#), November 2022, p. 13

The Council of Europe confirms that Albania signed the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings in 2005 and ratified it in 2007.

Source: Council of Europe, “[Treaty list for a specific state: Albania](#)”, undated

#### 2.1.2 Trafficking of adults – domestic legislation

• Refer also to [2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 121](#), [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 134](#), [3.3.3 Adequacy of services & bureaucracy on page 217](#) and [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 224](#).

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report noted that:

“[Article] 110(a) [...] of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of eight to 15 years’ imprisonment for a trafficking offense involving an adult victim [...] [This penalty was] sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. [...]”



The law provided equal services for both potential and officially recognized victims.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

Regarding the law on forced labour, the USDOS 2023 Albania Human Rights Report stated that:

“[...] 7. Worker Rights

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor [...] .”

Source: US Department of State, “[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Albania](#)”, 20 March 2023

The January 2023 UNODC global report on trafficking stated that:

“Albania ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in 2002. The current legislation on trafficking in persons in Albania – articles 22, 110/a, 110/b, 128/b of the Criminal Code (1995) – covers all forms of trafficking indicated in the Protocol.”

Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, “[Global report on trafficking in person. country profiles: Central and South-western Europe](#)”, January 2023, p. 2

A report submitted in August 2022 by the Albanian Government to the UN Human Rights Committee (UN HRC), published in January 2023, listed the following laws present in Albania relevant to trafficking and victims of trafficking:

“Article 2, 20 and 26 – Non-discrimination: Effective legal remedies against rights violations [...]

62. Law no. 121/2016 “On social care services in RSH” where the principle of non- discrimination for a set of reasons is listed among the basic principles for the provision of services. The law provides for the provision of specialized services for abused or trafficked women and girls, for pregnant women and girls or single parents with children up to 1 year old, etc.

63. Law no. 65/2016 “On social enterprises in RSH” which, among other things, aims to employ disadvantaged people in the labor market, such as: people who are treated with economic assistance, people with disabilities, orphans/orphans, women victims of violence and trafficking etc. [...]

67. Law no. 111/2017 “On legal aid guaranteed by the state”, is guided by the principle of equality and non-discrimination of individuals regarding the right to legal aid, professionalism in the provision of legal aid services. Among other things, it guarantees free legal aid for special categories: victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking, minors in conflict with the law, children in social care institutions, persons who have been violated and rights through an action or omission that constitutes discrimination, etc. [...]

Articles 2, 7–8, 24 and 26 – Elimination of slavery, servitude and human trafficking

135. The criminal procedural law has undergone significant changes regarding the subject competence of the investigation and trial of these crimes, as well as guaranteeing a more active role and important rights of the victim in the criminal process.

136. For these criminal offences, the exercise of criminal prosecution is under the competence of the prosecutors’ offices of general jurisdiction and for the trial, the courts of general jurisdiction. In cases where these crimes are committed within a structured criminal group or criminal organization, according to the provisions of the Criminal Code, the competence for their investigation is the Special Prosecutor’s Office, while the trial is the competence of the Court against Corruption and Organized Crime.

137. The prosecution body has paid special attention to the rights of the trafficking victim, where, in addition to what has been mentioned above, the elements related to the creation of suitable conditions for questioning the trafficking victim have been taken into account. ensuring the presence of the social worker or psychologist, the accommodation of the victim of trafficking in reception centers where they benefit from accommodation, food and other free services, etc. [...]

Article 14 – Access to justice, judicial independence and fair trial

151. In 2017, Law no. 111/2017 “On legal aid guaranteed by the state”, which expanded the circle of beneficiary subjects, considering as beneficiaries of legal aid not only economically disabled persons, but also persons who benefit from this aid in the capacity of special categories. Already in the capacity of special categories, regardless of their income or assets, the following also benefit: victims of domestic violence, sexually abused victims, trafficking in human beings or minor victims, increasing access to justice for as many categories as possible.”

Source: United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Human Rights Committee, **“Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, due in 2022 [Date received: 2 August 2022],”** 10 January 2023, pp. 13-14, 25-26, and 28

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding special protection measures for child victims of human trafficking, that:

“In recent years, within the framework of the justice reform, there has been an improvement of the legal basis that regulates the right to legal aid for vulnerable categories, including victims of trafficking, influencing the increase of access to justice. In 2017, as part of the Legal Reform legal package, law no. 111/2017 “On legal aid guaranteed by the state”, which repealed the previous law offering a new approach to the access of vulnerable groups. With Order no. 59, dated 25.03.2019, the Ministry of Justice changed the structure/organization by now providing as a subsidiary institution the Directorate of Free Legal Aid. This directorate is the institution dedicated to the administration and operation of the free legal aid system in the Republic of Albania. With the aim of strengthening access to justice through the Law on Legal Aid, the Ministry of Justice has prepared by-laws for the purpose of implementing this law, giving special importance to the provision of free legal aid to women. With the new law, the circle of beneficiary subjects was expanded, considering as beneficiaries of legal aid not only persons with economic disabilities, but also persons who benefit directly in the capacity of special categories: In the capacity of special categories, regardless of their income or assets, also benefit: victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual abuse or human trafficking or minor victims. [...]

Secondary legal assistance consists of: drafting the necessary acts to set the court in motion and; providing advice, representation and defense before the court in administrative, civil and criminal cases, for which mandatory protection is not applied, according to the provisions of the criminal procedural legislation. To benefit from the second form of legal assistance (representation by a free lawyer in court/prosecutor’s office), they can apply in person or through the postal service to the Courts (civil/criminal/administrative) and Prosecutions near their place of residence, filling in:

- Application and self-declaration form for secondary legal assistance;
- Self-declaration form for special categories/Self-declaration form for income and assets

Citizens who have benefited from secondary legal aid can benefit from exemption from:

- Payment of court fees and expenses (expenses for witnesses, experts, translators);
- Advance payment of the decision execution fee at the state judicial enforcement service. [...]

As for the legal assistance provided by the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NACTS), the capacities have been increased with professional lawyers and lawyers, who offer a complete package of legal services for VoT/PVoT. During 2021, NCATS has assisted with legal aid a total of 272 cases of VoT/PVoT and 120 of their children, who are part of the reintegration program. All beneficiaries of the reintegration program are supported with legal aid according to their needs. Legal assessments are conducted for each new case entered into the program. The assistance offered includes providing information on the legal situation for each case and providing a package of assistance according to the victim’s own needs, including primary and secondary legal assistance.”

Source: Council of Europe, **“Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec(2020)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation”**, 19 December 2022

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes, and gave the following legal context relating to trafficking in Albania:

“There are provisions in the Constitution of the Republic of Albania that make TIP [Trafficking in Persons] illegal. Although the country does not have a specific law against human trafficking, it does have some important related laws addressing the phenomenon in general, and child trafficking in particular, including the 1995 Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code (no. 7905/1995), the State Police Law (no. 108/2014 and amended Law no. 133/2020), the Code of Criminal Justice for Children, the Child Rights and Protection Law (no. 18/2017) and the Social Care Services Law (no. 121/2016). These laws offer additional protection and support to VoTs [Victim of Trafficking], including children and adults. [...]



Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, [“Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022”](#), November 2022, p. 13

The government of Albania’s report to the UN Committee Against Torture, published in 2022, discussed recent changes in the country’s legislative framework aimed at improvement of the rights and position of victims of trafficking:

“84. The amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (amended by law no.35/2017, dated 30.3.2017) considerably improve the rights and position of victims of criminal acts, by also including specific provision for victims of human trafficking. More specifically, the obligation of participation as a party at trial for victims of a criminal act has been introduced, guaranteeing their access to the criminal process, with new articles having been added, specifically for victims of trafficking, among which the provision as special figures for underage victims, sexually abused victims, or subject of trafficking, specifically articles 58, 58/a, 58b, 59, 60, 61.

85. Article 58, CPC 1. The victim of a criminal act has the right: a) to request criminal prosecution for the culprit; b) to benefit health care, psychological assistance, counselling, and other services offered by authorities, organizations, or institutions responsible for assisting victims of criminal offenses; c) to communicate in his/her language and to be assisted by a translator, sin [sic.] language interpreter, or communication facilitator for persons with limited capacities in speech and hearing; d) to select defense and, when applicable, to benefit free judicial aid, according to the legislation in force; e) to request at any time information on the state of the proceeding, as well as be acquainted with acts and evidence, without violating the principle of investigative secrecy; f) to request obtainment of evidence, as well as present other request before the proceeding body; g) to request compensation and be accepted as a civil plaintiff in the criminal process.”

Source: United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Committee against Torture, [“Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 19 of the Convention, due in 2016”](#), April 2022, p.15

The same report also outlined details regarding the provision of specialised services for categories, including victims of trafficking:

“[...] 123. Law No.121/2016 “On Social Services”, provides specialized services for all categories such as minors in conflict with the law, persons with disabilities, women and girls abused, abused or trafficked and all categories in need of such services. It provides for equal services to both parties as potential (assumed) and officially recognized victims. Both the potential victims/victims of trafficking have access to social care services. [...]”

Source: United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Committee against Torture, [“Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 19 of the Convention, due in 2016”](#), April 2022, pp. 23-24

The same report provided an overview of trial procedures and penalisation of organised crime:

[...] 133. The criminal procedure law has undergone significant changes regarding the subject-matter competence of the investigation and the trial of these offenses as well as guaranteeing a more active and important role of the victim in the criminal process. Under the new legal changes, the first instance prosecutors’ offices of general jurisdiction are competent for the investigation of these offenses, whereas the district courts are competent to try these cases. In cases when these offences are committed by a structured criminal group or criminal organization, according to the provisions of the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedures Code (Article 75 / a), the Special Prosecution Office against Corruption and Organized Crime is competent to investigate them and the trial is within the competence of the Court against Corruption and Organized Crime. [...] 137. Law no. 70/2017 “On some additions and amendments to law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009” On the preventing and striking against organized crime and trafficking through preventive measures against assets “, applies to the assets which are owned fully or partially, directly or indirectly by persons who are suspects of having committed crimes defined by the articles of the Criminal Code on “Trafficking in adults” and “Trafficking in minors”. This law stipulates the establishment of a special fund to prevent organized crime. The special fund is earmarked for social purposes, including the rehabilitation and integration of victims of trafficking (article 37/2-c). Article 37/3-b provides that also NGOs benefit from this fund, including shelters”

Source: United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Committee against Torture, [“Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 19 of the Convention, due in 2016”](#), April 2022, pp. 25-26



The Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar's 2021 research report stated the following relating to organised crime and Albania's current legislative framework:

"OC [organised crime] has emerged as one of the most important challenges in Albania after the beginning of the country's political and economic transition in the early 1990's. Given the danger it poses, the effective fight against OC is a key delivery priority for Albania prior to its being able to open accession negotiations with the European Union (EU). [...] Albania has initiated practices to combat money laundering by people linked to crime and terrorism in 2009, when the government adopted the 'anti-mafia' law<sup>10</sup> which aimed to prevent and counter OC and trafficking by confiscating the property of persons who have unjustified wealth, as a result of suspected criminal activity. Although several amendments were made to this law, it has remained largely unsuccessful due to the lack of institutional coordination and insufficient capacities.<sup>11</sup> Due to the inefficiency of the above law, in early 2020 Albania adopted a special package introducing temporary preventive measures to enhance its capacity to counter OC and terrorism (popularly referred to as the anti-'grab-what-you-can' package, or "KÇK").<sup>12</sup> These measures focused primarily on asset seizure and confiscation, thus limiting the movement of suspected criminals and restricting their economic activities. The "KÇK" mechanism is currently implemented by a special structure (OFL) within the General Directorate of State Police tasked with prevention, detection, documenting and countering serious and organised crime.<sup>13</sup> [...]"

<sup>1</sup> Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014,

<sup>10</sup> Law no. 192/2009 on preventing and countering organized crime and trafficking through preventive measures against property. Available at [www.pp.gov.al/web/ligj\\_per\\_parandalimin\\_dhe\\_goditjen\\_e\\_krimet\\_te\\_organizuar\\_dhe\\_trafikimit\\_nepermjet\\_masave\\_parandaluese\\_kunder\\_411.pdf](http://www.pp.gov.al/web/ligj_per_parandalimin_dhe_goditjen_e_krimet_te_organizuar_dhe_trafikimit_nepermjet_masave_parandaluese_kunder_411.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> General Prosecutor's Office, 2020. General Prosecutor's Report on the State of Crime for 2019, Tirana: General Prosecutor's Office

<sup>12</sup> Council of Ministers, 2020. Normative Act "Preventive Measures in the Framework of Strengthening the Fight against Terrorism, Organised Crime, Serious Crime and Consolidation of Public Security. Tirana: Council of Ministers

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Source: Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar, "[Falling Short of Commitments: How Western Balkans Governments Fight Organised Crime](#)", February 2021, pp. 8-10

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

"Following the amendments made to the Criminal Code in 2013, trafficking in persons is criminalized in Article 110/a and Article 128/b. [...] In order to improve the effectiveness, there is a need for a special law against trafficking in human beings focused on the protection of victims of trafficking and to increase capacities in terms of professionals and financial resources. The reasons for a specific law against TIP are explained in detail in the Study Report of D&E1. The initiative for the new law against human trafficking is part of the National Action Plan<sup>2</sup> against Human Trafficking (2021-2023) as one of the main measures in the section of drafting and changing legislation. Currently we are waiting for the steps that will be taken by the Government institutionally to continue the process of drafting the new law."

<sup>1</sup> Different & Equal, Study Report on the Need of Drafting a Special Law for Protection of Victims in Albania, 24 October 2019

<sup>2</sup> Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 670, dated 10.11.2021 For an addition to the Decision No.1140, dated 24.12.2020, of the Council of the Ministers, "On the approval of the Strategy on the Fight against Organised Crime and Serious Crimes 2021-2024 and the Action Plan 2021-2022, <https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/VKM-nr-670-date-10.11.2021-Plani-Kombetar-Antitrafik-2021-2023.pdf>

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

"In Albania there is not a special law dedicated to the Trafficking in Human Beings. We are working on it. [...] [Article]110(a) [...] of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking and prescribed penalties of eight to 15 years' imprisonment for a trafficking offense involving an adult victim [...]"



Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article “The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”, published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“The definition of human trafficking both for adults and minors is enshrined in Articles 110/a and 128/b of the Albanian Criminal Code (2017) and reflects that of the Palermo Protocol. Since 2005, the Albanian government has undertaken several important steps for the prevention and fight against human trafficking, including the creation of the National Referral Mechanism and that of the Standard Acts of Procedure (Ministria e Brendshme, 2016). Major legal changes took place particularly in 2017, with the most important advancement being the addition of Article 58b in the Albanian Code of Criminal Procedure (Simoni, Anastasi, & Imeraj, 2017). For the first time, this article listed specific procedural rights particularly for victims of human trafficking (Ligji nr. 35/ 2017).”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] we don’t have a specific law for trafficking, so we are discussing these times to push for a law. I mean, it’s an initiative that is a civil society sector.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“[...] in general, not only for trafficking in Albania, [...] the country has been issuing laws and the entire legal framework is very recent. Furthermore, there have been many legal amendments the country has undergone, especially since 2014, when they were given the status of candidate country to enter the EU. [...]”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation stated:

“Albania doesn’t have a unique [...] framework law regarding human trafficking, anti-trafficking. But there is a framework of legislation that [...] is organized in different laws. And so we have the law in the penal code and criminal code as well. [...] So we have [...] some articles regarding identification trafficking in persons for adults and minors we recognize through legislation, internal and external transnational human trafficking, as well we have some legislation regarding [...] the rights of the victims. It is provided in the procedural penal code such as the victims have the rights of being supported with immediate psychological, medical, social support through programs in Albania provided by state and non-state actors. [...] We have social law for the social support of the victims as well. And we provide different articles and different laws for the rights of victims of human trafficking. We have some bylaws that are related to this law. For example, for identification and support for victims of human trafficking, there is a standard operating procedure for identification and protection of victims and potential victims of human trafficking [...]. So this is more or less the legal framework. And now in the framework of our advocacy, we are working as a coalition for drafting a framework law to have a law in anti-trafficking. And all these laws that are separate and are in different laws and bylaws to derive and to have this law as a reference. [...] So we have a good legislation and a good [...] institutional framework in Albania for supporting the teams of human trafficking [...].”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“So we don’t have a unified law. There isn’t a special law for victims of trafficking either that would lay out the support that is available. So everything related to trafficking is very much scattered in the criminal code of Albania, but most of these provisions are just taken from European law like the Convention [in further clarifications Dr Anta Brachou confirmed that the ‘Convention’ referred to the European Convention Against Trafficking]. All the main conventions have been ratified. So, by the book, everything looks good.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] we don’t have a dedicated law. That makes it very challenging to protect victims in general. But Articles 110 and 128, Section B, of the criminal code in Albania, they do criminalise human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking and labour trafficking. And they anticipate penalties to those involved in exploiting the victims from 8 years up to 15 years of imprisonment, based on the case.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 2.1.3 Trafficking of children - domestic legislation

Refer also to [2.4.1.2 Children – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 127](#) and [2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations on page 140](#).

#### Desk review material

A European Commission report of November 2023 stated:

“The legal and policy framework on the rights of the child increasingly reflects international standards and EU requirements.”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p.37

The USDOS Trafficking in Persons report published in 2023 stated that:

“[Article] [...] 128(b) of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of [...] ten to 20 years’ imprisonment for an offense involving a child victim. [This penalty was] sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania”](#), 15 June 2023

In relation to child protection in Albania, the USDOS 2022 human rights practices report noted the following legislation in Albania:

“The law criminalizes any form of abuse or neglect against children. The penalties include up to life imprisonment in cases of child rape and trafficking of children. [...]”

The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, or using children for commercial exploitation, including child sex trafficking. Penalties for the commercial sexual exploitation of a child range from eight to 15 years’ imprisonment. The country has a statutory rape law; the minimum age for consensual sex is 14. The penalty for statutory rape is a prison term of five to 15 years. In aggravated circumstances the penalty may increase to life imprisonment. The law prohibits making or distributing child pornography, which is punishable by imprisonment for three to 10 years. Possession of child pornography is illegal.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania”](#), 20 March 2023



The report submitted by the government of Albania in August 2022 to the UN Human Rights Committee, published in January 2023, noted the following laws relating to child rights, child protection and trafficking of minors:

“Article 2, 20 and 26 – Non-discrimination: Effective legal remedies against rights violations [...]

65. Law 18/2017 “On the rights and protection of the child”, where equality and non- discrimination are mentioned in its general principles. The law defines what child protection means, clarifying “protection measures” due to violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. For the first time, the protection of children in street situations or working/exploited for work is foreseen, addressing various forms of violence against children, such as bullying, violence in schools, in the family, sexual abuse, economic exploitation, children’s safety on the Internet, unaccompanied children or victims of trafficking, etc. [...]

142. Law No. 18/2017 “On the rights and protection of the child” Article 2, provides for “the effective mechanisms and operation of the institutions charged with taking concrete measures for the promotion, respect and protection of the rights of the child, as well as for establishing a system of integrated and functional child protection, for the prevention and efficient response to all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect”. The law is monitored by the State Agency for the Protection of Children’s Rights. At the same time, DCM no. 129, dated 13.3.2019, “On procedures for the identification, immediate assistance and referral of economically exploited children, including children in street situations”.”

Source: United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Human Rights Committee, “[Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, due in 2022 \[Date received: 2 August 2022\]](#)”, 10 January 2023, pp. 13; 25

As part of its fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the OSCE, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection, which covered issues including the law related to child trafficking.

“OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]

The OSCE does not work directly with victims of trafficking (VOT) or shelters but has a role in supporting the government. OSCE is less active in prevention / protection. Their role is more policy related, including capacity building and improving the protection framework. The current focus is on child trafficking, including the legal framework and training various stakeholders. In 2015, the government acknowledged the problem of street children. OSCE support the government to understand child VOT and to create a legal basis to address child trafficking. In line with the legal framework, the State Agency for Child Protection has an action plan on child VOT and forced labour. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.21

In an interview as part of the UK Home Office’s fact-finding mission, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection stated:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

[...] we have a law on child rights protection, it stipulates the prevention of violence and sexual use of minors, and there is also a mechanism in place for the referral of children being trafficked. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 74

In an interview as part of the UK Home Office’s fact-finding mission, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection stated:

“State Agency for Child Rights and Protection, 11 October 2022 [...]

I want to explain about the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection that has been established since 2010. There is a new law (18/2017) on the ‘rights and protection of the child’. For the first time the term ‘child’ is in all legal documents, before it was only minors / juveniles. Under the new law a “child” is defined as aged 0 to 18. Our role as state agency is to establish a system for children to protect them from every form of violence, neglect, and trafficking. Our law and constitution has guaranteed protection for all children in Albania. [...]

**Q.** Why was a stronger child protection framework introduced?

**A.** The first law on child rights that established the first child protection system in Albania was adopted in 2010. The new law 18/2017 “On the rights and protection of the child” improved some of the procedures of child protection system and gave the State Agency on the Rights and Protection of the Child the mandate to monitor and coordinate



the organization of the integrated child protection system, including the implementation of interventions and taking of measures for prevention and protection of the child from abuse, neglect, maltreatment and violence.

**Q.** How is the system working?

**A.** At the moment it is a strong system, we have trained for many years but absolutely we have challenges like all countries. But now children are being identified and we have the system to protect the children at any time, at any place. In our law child protection is prevention of and response to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of the child, including kidnapping, sexual abuse, trafficking and child labour.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.84

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes, and gave the following legal context relating to trafficking in Albania:

“[...] Although the country does not have a specific law against human trafficking, it does have some important related laws addressing the phenomenon in general, and child trafficking in particular, including the 1995 Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code (no. 7905/1995), the State Police Law (no. 108/2014 and amended Law no. 133/2020), the Code of Criminal Justice for Children, the Child Rights and Protection Law (no. 18/2017) and the Social Care Services Law (no. 121/2016). These laws offer additional protection and support to VoTs, including children and adults.

[...] In recent years, there have been some positive developments in improving legislation that addresses the rights of crime victims, including VoTs. In the framework of justice reform, some laws have been adopted that regulate access to justice, such as the Code of Criminal Justice for Children, the Child Rights and Protection Law (no. 18/2017). There have also been amendments made to the Law on Measures against Domestic Violence and the Law on Social Services. These legal reforms reflect the efforts of GoA to regulate the protection of crime victims, including children and gender-based violence victims. [...]

Laws have been adopted to regulate case management for child and adult VoTs. In particular, Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 578, ‘On Case Management Procedures’, includes referral and case management procedures for children in need of protection. [...]

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, “[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)”, November 2022, pp. 13-14

IOM’s 2022-2025 strategy for Albania, published in October 2022, detailed the following regarding laws relating to child protection and their implementation:

“In addition to the legal basis focused on asylum and migration, two legal acts, namely the Law on the Rights and Protection of Children No. 18/2017 and Law No. 121/2016 on Social Services provide for specific protective measures for children and persons in need of protection and/or who are part of vulnerable categories, including migrants in the territory of Albania.”

Source: IOM, “[IOM Strategy for Albania \(2022-2025\)](#)”, October 2022, pp. 6-7

In July 2022, an Alternative Report was prepared by the Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA/ECPAT Albania), together with the Tirana Youth Parliament, in response to the fifth and sixth official report of Albania, to be considered during 2022 by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. With regards to the law relating to social care services, it stated:

“[...] The law on Children Rights and Protection approved in 2017 and followed by its bylaws in early 2019 have set new measures for ensuring that children from the most marginalized families can be raised with their biological parent [...]

Source: Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA/ECPAT Albania), “[Alternative report to the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)”, July 2022, p.11



The government of Albania listed in its April 2022 report to the UN Committee against Torture the following laws relevant to child protection:

"[...] 128. Law no. 18/2017 "On the rights and protection of the child", article 6 envisages that child protection structures shall take immediate measures for the case assessment of the child, under the age of criminal responsibility, by engaging the needs assessment and referral unit and the multi-disciplinary group in preparing the Individual Protection Plan, which contains one of the protection measures set out in this law, as well as other services and interventions that are necessary for the child's reintegration. DCM no. 635, dated 26.10.2018 "On the activities of the child protection structures of the children under the age of criminal responsibility, who is under suspect of having committed a criminal offence", provides child protection structures on the treatment of the child, who is under the age of criminal responsibility and is suspected to have committed a criminal offence.

129. Law no. 18/2017 provides for institutions, structures and mechanisms dealing with the rights of children by individuals, families and the state and the system of protection of children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, including local level. This law explains the protection measures that child protection staff shall apply in cases when they find children who are in a precarious situation due to violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. The law provides as a protection measure the specialized supervision of the child in the family environment. Specialized supervision in the family environment is established as a protection measure for the child, who can be treated and protected within the family, being monitored based on a set plan by the child protection structures.

130. Additionally, the law provides for special protection for certain categories of children, more specifically, those abused, raped, neglected, economically exploited children and children who are accused of having committed criminal offenses but are under the age of criminal responsibility. [...]"

Source: United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Committee against Torture, "[Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 19 of the Convention, due in 2016 \[Date received: 19 July 2021\]](#)", 5 April 2022, pp. 24-25

In its report "Albania Child Notice", published in 2022, UNICEF noted that:

"In 2017, two major pieces of legislation were passed: the law on the Rights and Protection of the Child (updated from 2010), and the Code of Criminal Justice for Children (CCJC). The CCJC and another 2017 law guaranteeing free legal aid incorporated international child-friendly justice standards. They have had some effect [...] although independent analysis showed that significant gaps in achieving child-friendly justice remain [...] Alongside ratification of the UNCRC protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography Children and the Palermo Protocol, Albania has a body of legislation to combat child trafficking, further supported by the 2017 Child Rights and Protection law."

Sources: UNICEF, "[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#)," 2022, pp. 15, 21, 93

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Judge Albana Boksi and Dr Arta Mandro, regarding the compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the *Acquis Communautaire* of the European Union relating to trafficking in human beings, it was noted that:

#### "ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR CHILD VICTIMS

In accordance with the minimum standards provided by the EU Directives, the Albanian legislation has adopted the legal framework and has taken measures for the identification of child VT/PVT.

Law 18/2017 and CCJC, as well as the other legal acts adopted based on them and for purposes of their implementation, are of primary importance for the protection of children and form a complete legal framework. It is important to emphasize the continuous need for training and specialization of persons or staff dealing with the treatment of children, especially of child VT/PVT. Law 18/2017 emphasizes the obligation of every public institution or body that treats children, to be guided by the principle of BIC.

This legal provision is in line with the minimum standards set by Article 16 of Directive 2011/36/EU, which stipulates precisely the obligation of Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure the assistance, support and protection for unaccompanied child victims of trafficking in human beings."

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Authors: Judge Albana Boksi, Dr Arta Mandro, "[Compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union in the area of the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)", 2021



The same report further noted with respect to the protection of child victims of trafficking in criminal proceedings that:

**“PROTECTION OF CHILD VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS AND PROCEEDINGS**  
Article 58/a of the CPC provides specific rights for the child victim as well the right of the child to be accompanied by a trusted person. The Albanian legislation is in line with the standard stipulated in Directive 2012/29/EU. On the other hand, in full compliance with EU standards, the CCJC provides in a separate chapter (Chapter IV) the rights and rules that apply during criminal proceedings for a child victim and child witness of a criminal offence.

This provision is in full compliance with the above-mentioned Article 15 of Directive 2011/36/EU, as well as with Article 24 of Directive 2012/29/EU. However, regardless of this provision, which is mostly related to the case when a child is questioned as a witness, specifically and in accordance with EU standards, the CCJC provides in detail the specific rules for the questioning of child victims and witnesses. The main purpose of this legal provision is to ensure the life and health of the child victim during the questioning in the criminal proceedings.”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Authors: Judge Albana Boksi, Dr Arta Mandro, **“Compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union in the area of the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings”**, 2021

The People’s Advocate published the text of the 2017 law, LAW No. 18/2017 ON THE RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF THE CHILD. The following part of the text set out the responsibilities of the police in cooperation with various ministries:

“The State Police, in cooperation with the ministry responsible for education, ministry responsible for health and ministry responsible for social affairs, within their respective competencies, shall take measures in order to: a) prevent involvement of children in production, distribution and trafficking of narcotic substances; b) raise public awareness, including children, on this matter, as well as drafting the necessary curricula for this purpose; c) support children and their families through counselling; ç) draft policies, strategies and services that guarantee the physical, mental, and social rehabilitation of the child using alcohol, tobacco or narcotic and psychotropic substances; The child protection structures at the local government unit support the child and the family through referring the cases to relevant specialized service.”

Source: Publisher: The People’s Advocate, Author: Republic of Albania, **“LAW No. 18/2017 ON THE RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF THE CHILD”**, 2017, pp. 30-31

The same text stated:

“The child shall be protected from trafficking, sale and any form of sexual exploitation and abuse, including illegal sexual activity, child prostitution or other illegal sexual practices, exposure, display or involvement in pornographic materials or sexual abuse of children according to the provisions of the Criminal Code and other acts in force.”

Source: Publisher: The People’s Advocate, Author: Republic of Albania, **“LAW No. 18/2017 ON THE RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF THE CHILD”**, 2017, p. 31

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, outlined Albanian laws that relate to the protection of children:

“National Legal framework for referral and protection of children in Albania:

- Family Code (Law 9062 date 8.5.2003-updated)
- Criminal Code of Justice for Juvenile (law 37/2017)
- Law 111/2017 “On legal aid granted from the State”;
- Law 18/2017 “On the Rights and Child Protection”
- Law 9669, date 18.12.2006 “For measures against domestic violence”, updated;
- Law 121/2016 “On the Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania”;
- Law 9355, datë 10. 03. 2005 “For Help and Social Services”, changed;



- Law 22/2018 “For social sheltering”;
- Law 9887 date 10.03.2008 “For protection of personal data”, changed;
- Law 10221 date. 4.02.10 “For the protection against discrimination”, changed;
- Law 44/2012 “On mental health”;
- Law 119/2014 “On the right of information”;
- CMD [Council of Ministers Decision] No. 129, dated 13.03.2019 “Procedures for Identification, Immediate Assistance and Referral of Economically Exploited Children, Including Children in Street Situation”
- CMD No. 111, dated 06.03.2019 “On the Procedures and Rules for the Return and Repatriation of the Unaccompanied Child”.
- CMD No. 186, dated 04.04.2019 “On the criteria for employment of employees of child protection structures and employees working with children”
- CMD No. 465, dated 03.07.2019 “On measures for the protection of children from access to illegal and / or harmful content on the Internet”
- CMD 148 date 13.03.2018 “On the determination of the rules of collaboration between institutional consultative and coordinative mechanisms , child protection structures and not for profit organizations for the implementation of the national and local policies and the necessary services for child protection”;
- CMD 636, date 26.10.2018 “For determination of all kind and manners of processing and exchanging of information and statistical data, request form State Agency for Rights and Child Protection, close to responsible state structures, in central and local level”;
- CMD 499, date 29.8.2018 “For approval of Standard Operating Procedures for protection of victims and possible victims of trafficking”;
- CMD 353 date 12.06.2018 “For rules and functioning of multidisciplinary technical group for child protection in Municipalities and local administrative units”;
- CMD 91 date 14.02.2018 “For procedures of controlling and determination of sanctions from State Agency for Rights and Child Protection”;
- CMD 578, date 3.10.2018 “ On the procedures of the referral and management of the case , development and content of the Individual Protection Plan financing of the expenses for its implementation as well as implementation of the measures for the protection of children”;
- CMD 54, date 31.1.2018 “For approval of the regulation for the functioning of National Council for the rights and child protection”;
- CMD 108, date 15.2.2017 “For approval of regulation for child protection in working”;
- CMD 573, date 24.6.2015 “For approval of standards services for Child protection Units”;
- CMD 372, date 26.04.2017 “For approval of National Agenda for Children Rights 2017-2020”;
- CMD 195 date 11.04.2007 “For approval of Standards for Residential centers for victims of trafficking”;
- Instruction 14, date 10.5.2016 “For offering of emergency services in the Care Social Institutions, financed by the public state budget that offer residential care services for vulnerable children”;
- Instruction 10, date 25.2.2015 “For manners, forms of collaboration and procedures of interventions for the protection of children in dangers for Institutions and the main responsible structures for child protection”;
- National Referral Mechanism for the identification, referral, protection, and improved assistance to victims/ potential victims of trafficking – signed on 15.02.2012.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Different and Equal also referred Asylos to Article 128/b of the Albanian Criminal Code in relation to the crime of child trafficking.

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“[Article] [...]128(b) of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking and prescribed penalties of [...] 10 to 20 years’ imprisonment for an offense involving a child victim.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023



Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“For children specifically, we have the Law on Child Rights and Protection No. 18/2017. So this is a dedicated law in children who trafficking is part of. Every child who is identified as victims of trafficking, he is in care of the state authorities or the Child Protection Unit with all the legal procedures to be-- it’s very well-regulated, I can think. Also, the SOP I mentioned before, 499, it was re-signed after a revision in June 2023. It’s a document which is in line with the national strategy of anti-trafficking in Albania and which defines specifically for the cases of children who are victims of trafficking all the procedures which are in line with the Law on Child Rights and Protection, and orientates the local authorities and national authorities on how to proceed and protect, provide services, so for prevention, protection, and prosecution then of cases of children. So it’s very well, I think, regulated.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article “The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”, published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“The definition of human trafficking both for adults and minors is enshrined in Articles 110/a and 128/b of the Albanian Criminal Code (2017) and reflects that of the Palermo Protocol.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[...] there is a law for protection of the rights of the children. And in this law, there are some articles that provide support for children victims of human trafficking. And this protection system is well organized. It is based on the local level. Each local level municipality has protection workers and offices near the municipalities. And they have a technical group to support all the cases that are referred that are in danger or suspicions or there are risks for being [...] trafficked as well. And there is a technical group refer to the cases and does case management to all the cases.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] first, there is a law on child rights and protection of the child, and we have insisted that protection of the child is given in the name of the law because it is important, and there are all of the steps there described also for the case management for children at risk of abuse and how it is identified, referred, assisted, how the meetings are organized, what are the specific roles of each of the members with the technical working group. So that’s a system that we have supported, actually, and it works. It is run, let’s say, as a mechanism, the whole of it from the Ministry of Health and social protection. And the state agency, that’s the ministry which is responsible for the implementation of the specific law. There is the National Strategy child Agenda 2030, actually is a 7-year strategy for which they collect information and report on around six-monthly basis.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] in relation to the child protection, it’s usually the Article 128 (B) of the criminal code for labor trafficking. But there is also specific legislation to protect children victims of human trafficking, especially in the situation of children living in streets and being exploited by their family members.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.2 Trafficking prevention measures

### 2.2.1 State efforts to prevent trafficking

• Refer also to [2.2.3 Limitations in prevention efforts on page 89](#).

#### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

"Albania has some level of preparation in the fight against organised crime, with a continued good level of cooperation with EU Members States and EU agencies [...] combatting trafficking in human beings remain[s] [an area] in which additional results are needed [...]"

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, pp. 5, 46

The same report stated:

"As part of the organisational and structural reform of the Albanian State Police, an investigative sector has been created in the border and migration police with the aim of preventing, detecting and countering cross-border illegal activity, including people-smuggling and trafficking in human beings. This is a very positive development."

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, p. 55

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report summarised anti-trafficking efforts by the government:

"The government maintained institutionalized training programs at the School of Magistrates for judges, prosecutors, and judicial police. The government, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, trained police officers, judges, prosecutors, and victim coordinators on various anti-trafficking issues. [...] The government decreased efforts to prevent trafficking. The national coordinator led the Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (ONAC) and overall anti-trafficking efforts. The State Committee against Trafficking in Persons, composed of relevant ministry representatives, was responsible for monitoring and implementing various anti-trafficking efforts; the State Committee did not meet in 2022 or 2021. The government also maintained the National Anti-Trafficking Task Force, composed of ministry officials, civil society representatives, and other participants that monitored the NRM [national referral mechanism]; the NRM met once in both 2022 and 2021. The government implemented the 2021-2023 NAP [National Action Plan] and allocated 412.6 million leks (\$3,874,000) for its implementation. [...] The Advisory Board of Victims of Trafficking consisted of three survivors that provided recommendations on anti-trafficking efforts and participated in awareness campaigns. Observers reported the Advisory Board was more active in 2022 due to funding from a foreign donor. The government, sometimes in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, conducted awareness campaigns for students, government officials, the public, and teachers. The government maintained a legal framework for regulating and licensing private sector employers and recruitment agencies, including prohibiting worker-paid recruitment fees."

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

In a March 2023 report, GRETA noted cooperation between the Greek and Albanian police regarding the issue of border crossing at Kakavia:

"GRETA also welcomes the steps taken in the area of international co-operation, including the conclusion of an agreement with Albania on the establishment of a Joint Contact Centre for Police and Customs Co-operation at the Kakavia border crossing, and co-operation through Interpol, Europol and SELEC."

Source: GRETA, "[Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Greece](#)", March 2023, p 58

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, a representative of the General Directorate of State Police stated:

“The national anti-trafficking committee is subordinate to the Prime Minister’s office, the anti-trafficking coordinator is under the Mol and chaired by the Deputy Mol. This national anti-trafficking coordinator is under the anti-trafficking directorate in the Mol. The Mol is the responsible authority against HT. This is the graphic representation about how the fight against HT works in Albania, so state police is only one part of it. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.35

Kukes Municipality noted the importance of awareness raising activities with the public to assist people to recognise trafficking risks:

“Kukes Municipality, 7 October 2022 [...]

Awareness raising is important to us and we carry out meetings, activities and campaigns to make citizens aware of trafficking risks and indicators, especially now in October as it is anti-trafficking month. We talk to a lot of citizens so they are aware that they may become trafficked. Some people might not always realise the indicators/signs of trafficking without help. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.60

During an interview with the UK Home Office the Ministry of Health and Social Protection pointed to the involvement of local health units in trafficking prevention:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

October is the awareness raising month against HT and November is the month against DV. A lot of activities are carried out, the Ministry of Interior (Mol) has a cross-cutting strategy against HT and also carries out awareness activities. [...]

We are part of the National Action Plan against HT 2021-2023, as implementing institution, with specific action in the social and health sector. This action plan includes several cross-cutting pillars and is managed by the Mol by the national coordinator of HT. [...] In terms of prevention, the local health care units have their own focal points against trafficking and sessions against HT are implemented as an inter-sectorial approach and these are more frequent during anti-trafficking month. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.76-77

The State Agency for Child Rights and Protection provided the following information to the UK Home Office regarding trafficking prevention measures:

#### “Preventative initiatives

- In addition to the implementation of laws and the adoption of protective measures for victims of trafficking, an important aspect that must be focused on to reduce cases of trafficking remains education for the prevention of this phenomenon and appropriate institutional interventions.
- Through the organization of awareness campaigns in schools, day care centers, with parents and children. Educating children to avoid trafficking, raising their awareness not to drop out of school without completing compulsory education, and neither to leave home nor to emigrate prematurely abroad. Children need to be made aware of the dangers associated with leaving home and emigrating to earn a living as elsewhere within the country or even abroad.
- To assess the current measures for border control in relation to accompanied or unaccompanied children, and to increase professional capacities through training of border police staff to detect and stop child trafficking and traffickers to provide initial protection for children trafficked. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.89



During an interview with the UK Home Office, a representative of Tirana Municipality reported a range of prevention efforts in cooperation with civil society, aimed at raising awareness in schools and preventing re-trafficking:

“Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Are you part of national referral mechanism (NRM)?

**A.** Yes, and of the community and the war against trafficking, the Prime Minister (PM) has a committee. The Municipality of Tirana is a member of the Regional Committee for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons established by Order No. 6, dated 26.01.2017 of the Prime Minister. The creation of this Committee aims to supervise and coordinate state and non-state actions, for the prevention of this phenomenon, for the protection of victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking. [...]

Since our scope of activity includes educational policies, and there is a directorate on education, we carry out awareness raising in high schools, to prevent trafficking but to also avoid re-trafficking. Not only in schools, but also in community centres. Our focus in community centres is on the prevention of re-trafficking. Tirana municipality is a member of the anti-human trafficking regional committee that was established by the PM in 2017. The aim of the regional committees against HT is to supervise and coordinate actions by members, as well as local and central government. The committee includes the regional council, municipality, local police directorate, regional directorate of border and migration, regional social service directorate, regional labour offices, educational directorate and public health directorate and also civil society organisations and state labour inspectorate. [...]

In order to stop the phenomenon of human trafficking, Tirana Municipality, in cooperation with civil society organizations, periodically conducts information and awareness-raising activities in all the schools of the city. There are at least 12 to 13 schools per month where students of different classes benefit from these activities.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 107, 108, 109

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes. The report provided the following summary of anti-trafficking measures by the Albanian government:

“Albania established an Anti-Trafficking Task Force, comprising directors and deputy ministers of relevant government agencies and the National Shelters Coalition and civil society partners. The Task Force is headed by the National Coordinator for Human Trafficking, who is also a deputy minister of the Interior.<sup>64</sup> In the Ministry of Interior (Mol), the Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (ONAC) is the focal point for such activity. The Responsible Authority, comprised of specialists from relevant government agencies and other experts and service providers, reports to the Task Force.

In 2017, based on the Prime Minister’s Order no. 7/2017, twelve Regional Anti-Trafficking Committees (RATC) were established. RATCs comprise local officials and civil society organizations (CSOs) and are responsible for coordinating protection and prevention activities. Child Protection Units in the municipalities and administrative units are responsible for case management of children in need of protection, including child VoTs [victims of trafficking] and PVoTs [potential victims of trafficking]. Both the National Referral Mechanism and the RATCs are relatively new mechanisms and are weak as they still lack financial and human resources. [...]

<sup>64</sup> The members of the task force include police, border patrol, Ministry of Interior Affairs, State Social Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Health, Ministry of Education, and Coalition of Shelters.”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, “[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)”, November 2022, p. 14

In its October 2022 strategy for Albania, IOM also provided a summary of the National Action Plan relating to trafficking in persons, of which prevention is one of the main pillars:

“Albania has taken concrete actions in enhancing coordination at national and local levels and strengthening the prevention and protection mechanisms in place. The National Action Plan against trafficking in Person 2021-2023 is based on four main pillars, prevention, protection, coordination, and penal prosecution. It includes responsible



stakeholders and partners involved in the implementation of the activities. The preparation of the plan was a participatory process involving stakeholders, CSOs and grassroots organizations working directly with VoTs. The Organized Crime and Serious Crimes Strategy 2021-2025 provides the overall framework and following it the National Action Plans are prepared with measurable indicators for quality performance monitoring.”

Source: IOM, “[IOM Strategy for Albania \(2022-2025\)](#)”, October 2022, pp. 7 and 10

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

“[...] There is the Anti-Trafficking National Coordinator Office in Albania, where the National Coordinator is represented by the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs. The special anti-trafficking department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs is the secretariat of the special anti-trafficking body. The special anti-trafficking body includes 9 government bodies. All these government bodies have access to the trafficking case database, but the main data entry is done by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”

The same interlocutor also stated:

“The phenomenon of trafficking always remains complex and actions for prevention must be continuous. In the following, awareness campaigns were developed and in this direction it is worth highlighting the areas of the anti-trafficking month of October that takes place every year in the framework of the European day against trafficking. It has now become a tradition that all Institutions in cooperation with civil society work together by drawing up a plan of activities at the national level, coordinated by the Minister of the Interior - the Office of the National Coordinator against human trafficking. The most common activities are information sessions in schools or with other vulnerable groups to inform them about the causes and consequences of trafficking.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor also stated:

“The initiative for the new law against human trafficking is part of the National Action Plan against Human Trafficking (2021-2023) as one of the main measures in the section of drafting and changing legislation.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“The focus of the state authorities, for example, of the Minister of Interiors is we have a dedicated month like month of anti-trafficking that is October, which more of the focus has been placed by the national authorities. So they plan activities and a lot of campaigns toward that. But we lack this-- for me, this campaign and awareness process and prevention should be part of our curricula, should be part of our everyday work, should be part of local-level initiatives, not only on national level. What I have to say that this child protection unit is also responsible for the prevention. And the social services directors are also responsible for prevention. [...]

[Child Protection Units] are [responsible for] prevention, identification, protection, and follow up: case management, rehabilitation. So all the steps. You can imagine one person, how can they do everything? It's quite impossible. You need resources for the prevention, for example, working with schools, working with citizens, with community members to-- most of the prevention-- I can share this. Most of the prevention work is made by organizations, programs.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] So we do have a National Action Plan now, which has all of the measures that we have identified as necessary [...] rearranged and adapted to the national strategy against organized crimes, so. [...] the organizations and the institutions who which need to implement this action plan are working in the inter-trafficking sector for a long time now. Okay. In our day-to-day work, we can instill this victim-centered approach. But the National Action Plan itself has lasted [...] during the month of October, the 30 days of activism, the ministry tries to organize awareness raising activities.”

Source: Terre des hommes- Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist outlined that:

“[Albania has] a National Action Plan to fight human trafficking, the development of which was supported by UNICEF [...]. And it covers 2021 to 2023. [...] UNICEF is currently also supporting the Ministry of Interior, the National Authority to review the progress of that plan and supports the development of a new National Action Plan from 2024 to 2026.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[I]n Albania, for example, the month of October, it is called the trafficking month. And all the organizations and state institutions are organized under the national coordinator of anti-trafficking in Albania to organize a month of awareness raising to the population to prevent human trafficking, to prevent irregular migration, etc. So we do this, and it is mostly done by NGOs, but the state is organized and into this. But prevention so must have as well empowerment components, and I see that we have a lack of empowerment components in Albania because there is a lack of employment, there is a high rate of poverty in Albania. So these are not preventing people to leave Albania to go abroad or to be involved in dangerous situation and exploitation. So this is not so much effective so the prevention.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, reported the following with regards to state measures to prevent trafficking:

“[...T]here is the [...] national strategy to prevent trafficking. And again, some of these documents would appear perfect in paper because they are taken from the EU. One thing that was very clear is that Albania has been dreaming to enter the EU for a while now, so anything that brings them closer to the EU it's great. Even with regards to trafficking, of course, they want to take as much as they can in terms of good practice.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] In terms of state measures, on paper, we do have measures placed for protecting victims for-- for preventing human trafficking. It's the National Action Plan to Prevent Human Trafficking in Albania. And we also have a budget, quite of a budget allocated to this action plan. [...] And according to this national action plan to prevent human trafficking or against human trafficking in Albania, there are specific provisions. But when we see the responsible authorities or organizations to implement most of these actions in the action plan, it usually lies within the non-governmental organizations. And when we review who funds the non-governmental organizations in Albania, it's usually, in the majority of cases, private donors or international agencies or the EU, but not the government. So in terms of the state measures, I would say they fall more into policy-level efforts rather than the provision of direct services. And it's usually through, firstly, the action plan, a policy level, but also through more sporadic awareness campaigns that usually will happen during October, which is the anti-trafficking month in Albania, or during July,

which is the world day against human trafficking, the 30th of July, where they would make an awareness-raising spot in the television or an awareness-raising campaign in the community.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.2.2 Other measures to prevent trafficking

\*The original research terms of reference sought information about state prevention efforts, however, a section on “other measures” was included due to themes that emerged from the information gathered indicating that trafficking prevention measures are also carried out by non-state actors.

• Refer also to [2.2.3 Limitations in prevention efforts on page 89](#).

### Desk review material

In April 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross reported providing funds to Albania to support counter-trafficking efforts.

“The Empress Shôken Fund (ESF) is named after Her Majesty Empress Shôken of Japan who – at the 9th International Conference of the Red Cross – proposed the creation of an international fund to promote relief work in peacetime. [...] The Fund has a total value of more than 14 million Swiss francs and supports projects run by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that benefit the communities they serve in many different ways.

[...] *Youth*

• According to figures on human trafficking, Albania is a primary source country and the non-EU European country with the second highest number of victims. To address this threat, the Albanian Red Cross will use the grant to train staff and volunteers, with a view to activating peer-to-peer prevention in high schools. The National Society will reach out to other sister National Societies to build a strong network of certified trainers who will raise awareness through peer-to-peer activities.”

Source: International Committee of the Red Cross, “[Empress Shôken Fund announces grants for 2023](#)”, 11 April 2023

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Caritas noted the educational work it has carried out related to trafficking prevention:

“Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

A.[...] We are now trying to activate prevention through inter-religious groups.[...]

Q. Do you work nationally with prevention? What activities?

A. Yes, national work on prevention, and informal education such as after school, social activities, summer school, visible materials, sports. We did the story ‘Pinocchio’ to educate about VOT. With women, we organise counselling meetings, and we have a big network within schools.[...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.51, 53

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, officials from Mobile Unit Kukes (managed by Tjeter Vizion), described their work with ‘village administrators’ to help raise awareness of trafficking in remote areas.

“Mobile unit, Kukes, 7 October 2022 [...]

Q. Could you tell us about the work of the mobile units?

A. We work on site all the time and we are in constant contact with groups at risk of trafficking as well as vulnerable groups. In addition to that we have a lot of meetings in the remotest administrative units of Kukes. It was perhaps the first time an organisation has reached out to remote areas.

When we went to these remote administrative units, we found a lack of information and awareness regarding human trafficking (HT). However we have had cases where we went to certain administrative units and 2 days later a case of HT was reported to the police because of the awareness we brought there. [...]

In villages the administrators or the elderly are in charge of communicating and have local power. We spoke with



them too and had meetings in schools to bring awareness to teachers and parents, on who might be most vulnerable to HT. So raising awareness is key.

**Q.** Does the project have other aims other than raising awareness of risks of trafficking?

**A.** The main aim is identifying victims of trafficking (VOT) and potential VOT (PVOT) and referring them to services.

**Q.** You mention identifying groups at risk, how do you identify those at risk of being trafficked?

**A.** These focal points – the police and village administrators – they are well informed on the problems in their areas. They know the families with problems of domestic violence (DV) and also financial hardships. The mobile units are told about those at highest risk of HT and we can support them. [...]

Those in remote and poor areas are at the highest risk. There may be parents with disabilities or unemployed who cannot provide and support. There are no businesses and no industry and nothing to live on in these areas, there are huge issues and that's why we reach out to these areas. [...]

**Q.** Once you have identified a VOT what happens next, what's the referral process?

**A.** As soon as we identify a VOT it is up to authorities to organise and take on the case. As we work for Tjeter Vizion [shelter in Elbasan], which has direct links with the responsible authority, we are on site identifying persons and help filling out forms and checking indicators that the person is a VOT or PVOT, and then make referrals."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.53-54

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Mary Ward Loreto noted the importance of prevention work:

"Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]

We found working on prevention is important. So we implemented last year a programme called Empowerful and invited 10 VOT to attend a course on economic empowerment and at the end of the session we noticed a great improvement. When given basic programmes there is always a risk of revictimization. Also working with vulnerable communities to empower and train them to resolve their own issues. Training for transformation, we are seeing we can work more effectively with certain age groups. So it's about learning from our approaches and failures. We usually involve the community as we don't want them to feel excluded but what we see is effective change with certain young people."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.93

The anti-trafficking NGO Arise published a summary of an event to mark anti-trafficking month in 2022:

"On the 20th of October, as part of Anti-Trafficking Month, Arise Albania organised a flash mob to raise awareness of human trafficking.

[...] Arise Albania Coordinator, Anxhela Bruci, summarised the event:

*'Youth across different communities joined forces to raise awareness in the framework of the anti-trafficking month. They wanted to highlight the trafficking risks that exist from the use of social media, aiming to increase the understanding of local communities about human trafficking.*

[...] *'This activity was organised in collaboration with the network of anti-trafficking organisations in Albania, and with the support of Arise, aiming to bring more light into human trafficking in the framework of October, which is the Anti-Trafficking Month in Albania.'*"

Source: Arise, "[Albania Network: Flash Mob For Trafficking Awareness](#)", 8 November 2022

In its 2022 Country Office Annual Report, UNICEF Albania mentioned trafficking prevention work that it had undertaken, including efforts to shift knowledge and attitudes, and to provide children and young people with training on online protection from abuse, exploitation and trafficking:

"Thanks to UNICEF securing a three-year grant from the Government of the United Kingdom, activities to prevent and respond to trafficking can continue. This is a reflection of UNICEF's anti-trafficking programme delivering positive results during 2022, not only by directly capacitating around 300 frontline professionals and assisting over 300 (potential) victims of trafficking and those identified as high risk, but also generating evidence through different pieces of research and evaluation[1].



The cross-sectorial and innovative nature of the human trafficking programme led to the public engagement of about 430,000 individuals via social media; face-to-face activities reached more than 11,000 individuals (6,034 females), demonstrating already positive shifts in the knowledge and attitudes among youth (Davy, D, 2022). The expansion of the UNICEF-supported “BiblioTech” programme in Shkodra and Korca means there are now six locations accessible, where in 2022, 564 children and young people improved their skills related to digital literacy and online protection from abuse, exploitation and trafficking.’

Source: UNICEF, “[UNICEF Albania Country Office Annual Report](#)”, 2022, p. 4

### Interview material

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“So most of the prevention actions are, majority of them, provided by NGO organizations. They have established this mobile units we call psycho-social teams in the streets, in the community level with schools who make awareness-raising sessions and inform citizens and children mostly about risk of trafficking and how they can report is very important and where can they find support if they have a case they want to report. So the majority of prevention initiatives are from NGO organizations, but there are initiatives that are running cooperation with the ministries and the organizations because the funds-- for example, this UK fund that is run by UNICEF, it’s in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. So each of the programs are implemented in cooperation with the ministries or the local authorities.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] [prevention] work at the local level is mainly conducted by the NGOs who are present there and do whatever they can.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[...] in Albania, for example, the month of October, it is called the trafficking month. And all the organizations and state institutions are organized under the national coordinator of anti-trafficking in Albania to organize a month of awareness raising to the population to prevent human trafficking, to prevent irregular migration, etc[...] it is mostly done by NGOs, but the state is organized and into this.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] according to this national action plan to prevent human trafficking or against human trafficking in Albania, there are specific provisions. But when we see the responsible authorities or organizations to implement most of these actions in the action plan, it usually lies within the non-governmental organizations. And when we review who funds the non-governmental organizations in Albania, it’s usually, in the majority of cases, private donors or international agencies or the EU, but not the government.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023



### 2.2.3 Limitations in prevention efforts

#### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

"Implementation of the 2021-2023 national action plan on the fight against human trafficking should be supported by adequate funding and better coordination. [...]"

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, p. 46

The same report noted that:

"Prevention efforts, especially on strategic communication, should be stepped up. Dedicated awareness-raising campaigns should be developed to target communities at risk of trafficking in human beings and high-risk sectors and environments. The 116 006 hotline for victims of crime, including trafficking, should be made functional."

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, p.46

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report provided the following analysis and information regarding the limitations of prevention measures:

"The government decreased efforts to prevent trafficking. The national coordinator led the Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (ONAC) and overall anti-trafficking efforts. The State Committee against Trafficking in Persons, composed of relevant ministry representatives, was responsible for monitoring and implementing various anti-trafficking efforts; the State Committee did not meet in 2022 or 2021. The government also maintained the National Anti-Trafficking Task Force, composed of ministry officials, civil society representatives, and other participants that monitored the NRM; the NRM met once in both 2022 and 2021. The government implemented the 2021-2023 NAP and allocated 412.6 million leks (\$3,874,000) for its implementation. ONAC produced a report assessing the implementation of the NAP but did not publish or share its findings. Civil society observers reported limited government coordination efforts to prevent trafficking [...] labor inspectors did not have authority to inspect informal work activities, including unregistered businesses."

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme "Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania", implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes. The report noted challenges in the coordination of protection and prevention services, as well as limited resources:

"In 2017, based on the Prime Minister's Order no. 7/2017, twelve Regional Anti-Trafficking Committees (RATC) were established. RATCs comprise local officials and civil society organizations (CSOs) and are responsible for coordinating protection and prevention activities. Child Protection Units in the municipalities and administrative units are responsible for case management of children in need of protection, including child VoTs and PVoTs. Both the National Referral Mechanism and the RATCs are relatively new mechanisms and are weak as they still lack financial and human resources. [...]"

In Albania, social services and child protection sectors are interlinked, particularly with regard to the prevention of human trafficking and protection of trafficking victims. In 2015, social services were decentralized to the local governments and recent legislation has helped to improve social service provision. Nevertheless, this legislation has yet to be harmonised or fully implemented, and financial funding remains a challenge."

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, "[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)", November 2022, p. 14

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“Despite these [anti-trafficking] efforts, not enough is being done to have more results and stability in the prevention of trafficking. At the local level, there are more difficulties due to the lack of capacities.”

Source: Different & Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, pointed to a number of limitations in existing trafficking prevention efforts:

“More efforts-- I mean, for me, efforts mean there is financial resources and professionals engage in the identification process. And in terms of reports, more effort should be placed on that. Because if we don't-- it's my opinion. If we don't share the data about trafficking, it's a limitation. It's a way of not talking about trafficking. And if you don't talk about trafficking, you are not aware of what are the mechanisms, what are the reporting mechanisms, what are the supporting services, and all this data, or some information about how we protect the individuals who report being trafficked so that the victim can feel safe and know that if they report, they will be protected.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“[...] there is a lot of awareness raising and dissemination of information in the last five years. However, we believe that there has been a challenge to reach out to some vulnerable communities, especially in rural areas. Social media, for example, or the use of internet is less accessible in these specific communities. So these are some of the limitations.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated with regards to limitations in prevention measures:

“I would say two main aspects. One is awareness raising. For people either in the system, or the wider population, or the specific target groups that are [...] more prone to or at risk of being trafficked. Everybody needs to know because trafficking is [always seen as] something that happens to other people. I mean, never to themselves. It is something outside of their existence until it happens. So awareness raising is one of the things that needs to be conducted in a really structured way, not just sending some messages and some leaflets and collecting five people and explaining what is trafficking and what are the signs of trafficking. I think it really needs to be targeted by sector. For example, the health sector has a very, very big potential in helping in the prevention of trafficking and identification, and zero cases are coming from the health system in Albania. The school system is the same. They're the ones who are popular in the community. [...] The other thing is being able to provide services for family strengthening, [...] before the trafficking has happened. And when you have the mapping of the social factors that might lead to trafficking and you can identify and spot vulnerable groups, then you need to really work with them in order not only to raise their awareness [...] build their resilience to the risk factors that could lead them to trafficking. And that's what we do, actually, through the multi-functional community centers that we have established throughout the country.”

Source: Terre des hommes- Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“[...] there is this lack of financial resources that means the system is not always effective. So in general, the system is set up and works, but mostly our NGO civil society organizations [...] support with services [for] the children and the victims in general because they [...] have projects [...] based on donor project, donors’ money, international, that have projects to support the children [...].”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same interlocutor observed that:

“[P]revention [...] must have as well empowerment components, and I see that we have a lack of empowerment components in Albania because there is a lack of employment, there is a high rate of poverty in Albania. So these are not preventing people to leave Albania to go abroad or to be involved in dangerous situation and exploitation. So this is not so much effective so the prevention.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] [T]he type of prevention that is needed is not one that civil society interventions or awareness campaigns or anything that would solve it because we’re talking about desperate people who want to leave. So the only way to prevent that is to have some systemic change in terms of having jobs that would pay decent wages, having after-school clubs or places where young people can go and nurture their sense of belonging. So I don’t know what, if anything, can be done to prevent with the current political will.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“For me, firstly, it’s the lack of interaction with the communities that we are targeting. For example, when the government launches an awareness-raising campaign, usually, the government will be the initiator, but then that will be delegated to the Ministry of Education. And the minister of education will delegate it to specific schools. And all of it will lie on the responsibility of the teachers in the schools. And given the workload that they have-- usually, in Albania, the classrooms have approximately 40 students each classroom, which is a high number for a teacher to deal with on a daily basis. And then when an awareness campaign is also tied in the massive list of responsibilities that teachers have, that makes the campaign ineffective. It’s just a ticking box in the letters that we’ve done an awareness campaign. So firstly, it would be to allocate resources, not just financial resources but also expertise in doing awareness-raising campaigns.

Second would be to target the root causes of human trafficking. And we’ve seen that the most common one is poverty. Going to the most affected areas or in the areas where we see the highest rates of poverty - and providing more employment opportunities or schemes that can help to firstly train the vulnerable communities and provide income or increase investments to those smaller areas.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

The same interlocutor noted that:

“But apart from [policy level interventions and sporadic awareness raising campaigns], I haven’t experienced or seen any effective state measures to protect men and women. When it comes to children, I have seen more vigilance towards especially online forms of human trafficking. But here, still, these have been cases mostly taken by international organizations or, for example, by the US embassy in Tirana or UK embassy in Tirana, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with different schools, to go to the schools and talk about human trafficking, raising awareness. But they still don’t touch the root causes of the human trafficking. They don’t do in-depth work with families, who might



be extremely vulnerable or have low literacy rates, to educate them on different forms of trafficking for their children or how exposed they might be online when they're unsupervised on their mobile devices."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.3 State protection

### 2.3.1 Victim identification

#### 2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism & victim identification

\*The original research terms of reference did not include research questions seeking general information about the National Referral Mechanism, however, a section on the "National Referral Mechanism" has been included as it corresponds to a theme that emerged from the findings.

• Refer to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 130](#) and [3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations on page 212](#).

### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

"Albania has some level of preparation in the fight against organised crime, with a continued good level of cooperation with EU Members States and EU agencies [...] The national referral mechanism for (potential) victims of trafficking remained functional. Assistance was provided in all cases. In 2022, 112 victims or potential victims were identified and assisted, compared with 159 in 2021. [...]"

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, pp. 5, 45, 46

In June 2023, an article by the OSCE stated:

"On 26 June, Albanian public institutions and civil society organizations signed a new Co-operation Agreement for the National Referral Mechanism for Potential and Victims of Trafficking (NRM), developed thanks to the OSCE Presence's technical assistance in the 2022–2023 years.

The new agreement targets existing and emerging types of trafficking in human beings and involves all pertinent institutions in order to guarantee adequate protection to potential and current victims of trafficking in Albania. It follows a thorough needs assessment analysis and consultations with state and civil society stakeholders, conducted by the Presence and the Ministry of Interior, in order to update the NRM framework in line with the Albanian human trafficking challenges, the legal framework, and ultimately with the OSCE commitments. [...] Fifteen representatives of Albania's state institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) signed the new NRM Agreement."

Source: OSCE, "[Albania endorses a new National Referral Mechanism for Potential and Victims of Trafficking, drafted with OSCE Presence's support](#)", 29 June 2023

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report stated:

"[...] The government maintained a multidisciplinary NRM with SOPs for identifying and referring victims to services [...]. Law enforcement and state social services conducted joint interviews for potential victims who voluntarily requested official victim status."

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023



The same report stated:

“The government also maintained the National Anti-Trafficking Task Force, composed of ministry officials, civil society representatives, and other participants that monitored the NRM [national referral mechanism]; the NRM met once in both 2022 and 2021.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The same report further stated:

“The government continued to inconsistently implement screening efforts for vulnerable populations – particularly migrants, asylum-seekers, Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, and children [...] The government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims, a decrease compared with 154 potential victims and five official victims in 2021. [...] MIUs in nine regions, consisting of social workers from NGOs and police officers, identified most of the victims every year [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

For a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with several interlocutors during which the state authorities’ capacity to identify, protect and support victims of trafficking was discussed. The General Directorate of State Police confirmed that all anti-trafficking and border and immigration police were trained on identifying victims of trafficking:

“General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** Are police trained to identify VOT?

**A.** There are 10,000 officers, they are not all trained, but anti-trafficking officers and border and immigration police, then yes they are trained by state police, EU and UK.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.35

During an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the Ministry of the Interior gave an overview of the composition of the NRM, and how institutions and NGOs work together to identify and respond to trafficking:

“Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** How are VOT identified and referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process?

**A.** The Albanian government and Mol decided to establish a legal and institutional framework that was complete and provided full support to the protection of victims of trafficking (VOT), that is the identification, referral and reintegration of victims. [...]

Regarding identification of VOT, the SOP are just an annex to the NRM. As such the members of the NRM at the central level, including the responsible authority, are in charge of identifying, referring, assisting and reintegrating the VOT as well as assisting with their voluntary return.

In addition to state institutions, the NRM consists of national and international organisations, which means the Mol and the government are prioritising VOT and the fight against HT. I believe that this is the key to the success of the NRM.

The NRM is chaired by a national coordinator and includes the Mol, state police, representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Education and Youth and Ministry of EU Affairs. There are representatives from the General Prosecutors Office (GPO). It also consists of the 4 shelters, one is state-run and the other 3 are NGO-run. There is also the International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Vision, ARSIS Tirana, Mary Ward Loreto, Tjeter Vizion and others. So there are only a few government institutions and others are national and international organisations. [...]

However, we have made efforts to mitigate risk and worked with social administrators across Albania who work and live in their own communities and they know everyone and whether there is a problem. [...]

**Q.** Do you think the initiatives are working and society is seeing people more as victims?

**A.** Yes, they are working. By cooperating with state actors and stakeholders we raise awareness with teachers, doctors, security officers in schools, so front line professionals.

A security officer may see a young girl accompanied by stranger so this might be an indicator, or a doctor may see scars and bruises. So bringing awareness to professionals we bring awareness to citizens. But more work is needed. We also have meetings with regional committees and these are another brick in the wall of prevention of HT and illegal migration. So it is ideal to have these initiatives in all regions.[...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 56, 58, 59

The same interviewee discussed the training provided to police, lawyers and prosecutors to identify victims of trafficking and indicated that increasing capacity in this regard was one of their main objectives:

“Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** For people who return, but not through the AVR process, would border police be able to identify them as a VOT or PVOT?

**A.** We have organised training and meetings with border police to identify VOT, and also to inform them of the indicators that could show that certain individuals could be at risk, and we have trained them on how to conduct interviews. There is also an action plan and framework in the UNICEF project (financed by the UK government) so we are thankful for that. It’s been one of our main objectives to increase the capacity of the border police, and also the community police, lawyers and prosecutors to identify VOT and co-ordinate with other professionals. If the border police identify a VOT it doesn’t end there. If the VOT is a minor they have to contact the CPU, or if they have mental health issues they would contact the health care services. The anti-trafficking officers should be there, too, so it’s a series of professionals involved.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.57

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in an interview with the UK Home Office, described the Albanian NRM:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

The NRM is actually one of the most robust and well established mechanisms in the country, working with the standard operating procedures (SOPs), which were renewed in 2018. SOPs give ways to identify, refer and support PVOT/VOT as well as responsibilities to the social sector. Based on the SOPs, the MoHSP has drafted sector manuals on social services and health. All the services mentioned have specialised or specific service standards.

In the framework of SOPs we have carried out training sessions in 2019/20 and 2021 in health and social sectors to train front line staff in identifying, supporting and referring VOT and PVOT.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 76-77

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

“[...] Efforts to coordinate work between state institutions and civil society organizations have materialized with the Cooperation Agreement on the functioning of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims and potential victims of trafficking signed by 15 organizations, including government bodies, international organizations, and NGOs. The NRM includes assistance to both Albanian citizens who have been trafficked domestically or abroad, as well as to foreign victims who have been exploited in Albania. The agreement clearly stipulates the duties of each party according to the field of responsibility for intervening to identify and protect victims of trafficking. Article 7 of the agreement defines the role of the Responsible Authority as the structure that guides the implementation of the agreement and Article 8 “Monitoring and coordination of the agreement” refers the National Coordinator as the institution reporting periodically on its progress and the role of the Anti-Trafficking Unit as the technical secretariat of the Task Force monitoring this agreement. [...]



- Albania has agreements and supplementary agreements with 6 countries (including Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and the UK) that clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, as well as anti-trafficking procedures.
- Ongoing anti-trafficking training and education for the prosecutor's office and the labor inspection are underway."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

"According to the Albanian legislation, victims of trafficking and potential victims of traffickers benefit from all the services as victims of trafficking until the determination of their final status or until their full reintegration even in the absence of determination of status as victims of trafficking. Victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking receive a full package of services consisting of: Housing, food, clothing; Psycho-social counselling; Continuous medical assistance; Assistance for re-entering the school system; Professional training; Advice and assistance for employment; Income-generating work programs; Development of life skills; Mentoring; Advice and legal protection; Mediation with the family; Information on services, rights, opportunities, etc."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

"Identification and referral was made based on the Standard Operating Procedures for protection of Victims/potential victims of trafficking (SOPs). The law enforcement institution are the main and first one who are providing the protection of the VTs in Albania. After categorisation of the cases through the formal interview conducted jointly by police and the state social service they decide where to refer and which are the responsible authorities for the follow up of the cases together with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, part of the national referral mechanism. [...] Every adult case identified as VoT/PVoT has full access to choose services in the shelter or in the community."

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

"[...] we have a national referral mechanism. So there are very good, well-established structures on how to identify and proper support on the cases. Also, we have an anti-trafficking office in the Ministry of Interior who's dedicated. We call responsible authority, that is, the office who is gathering all the cases in Albania and trying to provide somehow coordination, monitoring, and support."

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist stated:

"[...] the competent authority, which is the Ministry of Interior or the National Referral Mechanism, has been very active as well and very committed to preventing or responding to human trafficking. But as well, Albania is going through this decentralization of various services. And at the municipal level, there have been a lot of roles and responsibilities that have been attributed to the social services department and they also have been very much engaged in responding to and protecting victims of trafficking. So I think that it will be important also to note the role of the municipalities and social services at the sub-national level in order to prevent or respond to trafficking."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated:

“[...] the National Referral Mechanism [...] by law should collect on a quarterly basis. Sometimes it does gather on quarterly basis, sometimes it doesn’t, but it is actually the party that it is composed again from not technical people, but let’s say middle level management, administrative level, territories of specific ministries. We’re part of this mechanism as well as the representatives from the prosecution office, from the police, and from NGO sector as well. The main actors in the field of anti-trafficking are part of the National Referral Mechanism. And it has both roles. It’s a bit more policymaking body, which defines, as I said, the National Action Plan or highlights topic that need emergency follow-up and what needs to be done in the coordination in between the line ministries.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

“The victim might be assigned a status of victim of trafficking or potential victim of trafficking [...] Most of the cases are identified as potential victim of trafficking, which is another status, let’s say, given. There is no difference between the one and the other because in both cases, you display the indicators because in both cases, you receive the same support-- you are entitled to the same benefits and support. The only difference is if you are a victim of trafficking, you will receive an allowance of £20 a month, which is practically nothing and no one, but in order to receive this, you need to go to the state offices. If you go to the state offices and say, “I have the status.” then everybody knows that you have been trafficked and the stigma is extremely strong. So yes, victims can access the services only through the NGOs because, otherwise, they need to go and scream it out and nobody wants this. Like, “I’m a victim of trafficking. May I have this status, please?”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“The institutional framework, it is composed by National mechanism-- or Referral Mechanism in Albania and the draft together with the centers that I’ve mentioned before are members of this National Referral Mechanism. And we have regional mechanism as well that are so supported by the national one. And we have responsible authority in the ministry of interior in the office of national coordinator and trafficking coordinator that are recording and are so have all the data and our supporting all the institutions. We have to deal with some serious problems regarding referral and support of victims of human trafficking.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same source stated:

“[...] during [2022], 118 new cases of victims and potential victims of human trafficking. All these victims have been identified based on standard operating procedures in Albania. [...] for identification and support for victims of human trafficking, there is a standard operating procedure for identification and protection of victims and potential victims of human trafficking [...] we have standard operating procedures. And there are nine institutions that are involved in this [...] so procedures such as police, social agencies in Albania, and other education health institutions, etc, [...] For identification of victims, all of our centers have set up some mobile units that are supported by our organizations. And this mobile unit act to identify potential victims of human trafficking among vulnerable groups in Albania. And they collaborate with police and social structures in order to identify and refer these cases for services [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

### 2.3.1.2 Recognition of returnee victims of trafficking by Albanian NRM

#### Desk review material

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented that:

“A number of measures have been taken to further intensify [...] cooperation, by signing and implementing additional Agreements and Protocols with Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Greece and the United Kingdom for the identification, referral, protection and reintegration of victims/potential victims of trafficking.”

Source: Council of Europe, “[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)”, 19 December 2022

During interviews conducted by the UK Home Office with representatives from the OSCE, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the topic of referrals of Albanian victims of trafficking returning from the UK to Albania, and identification of victims of trafficking returning to Albania from abroad in general was discussed:

“OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q:** Do the Albania government receive referrals for suspected VOTs from the UK?

**A:** UK referrals – they are followed up through community policing. For example, the UK police will ask the local Albanian police to check if a person they have arrested in the UK has been trafficked. However, the follow up is not thorough. They only rely on police reports that might not indicate the person has been trafficked, rather than looking at the bigger picture, such as the economic situation, family and social structures.

[...]

Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** We are interested in hearing about Albanians that are returned to Albania and how they are identified on return and whether they self-identify.

**A.** The exact term is assisted voluntary return (AVR). National and international organisations from other countries co-operate with Albanian authorities and organisations that operate here. IOM is important in AVR, these organisations have their own network, links and ties and when they identify a VOT they inform them of the procedures to return to Albania and how they can be assisted. If they want to come back they proceed with necessary steps. When it comes to neighbouring / bordering countries, we have additional protocols. Agreements with Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Greece. We also signed an agreement with the UK in 2014 regarding illegal migration and VOT. However there is room for discussion.

**Q.** Are AVRs directly referred into the NRM process when they return?

**A.** Yes, they are immediately referred into the NRM and the responsible authority, which is a technical structure and it sets in motion and follows all the necessary steps for a voluntary return to Albania. This is all in the SOPs, I don't have them right now but they are in English. [...]

**Q.** In relation to returns from the UK to Albania. You have contact with organisation including IOM, do you have contact with other trafficking support organisations in the UK?

**A.** To the best of my knowledge, no. [...]

Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** If someone is accepted to be a VOT and returned to Albania, are they accepted as a VOT on arrival or will you make your own decisions when they return?

**A.** If they have received status of a VOT in the UK they automatically are considered a VOT in Albania. The MoHSP [Ministry of Health and Social Protection] is not the one communicating with the other countries authorities, that authority is the national anti-trafficking coordinator. As soon as a victim arrives in Albania the system and necessary services are in place for them. There is a whole prepared process taking place in Albania while the individual is being assessed in another country, so they may have a safe place to return, and we will decide if it is ok to come back to Albania. **A.** We will look at the social economic situation of the families and see where they will be placed, so with their families or in a shelter. If it is not safe for a foreign VOT to return to their country of origin we have a law on asylum seekers and refugees so that they will be as safe as possible.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 24; 58, 59, 78.



In an interview with the UK Home Office, the National Agency for Employment and Skills stated the following with regards to whether they are made aware of migrants returning to Albania:

**Q.** Are you told about migrants returning to Albania, for example, by immigration services?

**A.** No. This agency is at the central level and that kind of communication operates at the local one. Our agency doesn't receive any official information or list by the border police station but they can inform or guide this category to go to local employment offices in order to receive services."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 112

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

"According to our experience yes."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, referred Asylos to the Joint Communiqué between the Government of Albania and the UK government of 13 December 2022.

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

"I don't know if there is an agreement between two countries for that because there should be somehow a legal framework which can define that cooperation. [...] in Albania, we have a child protection unit which is responsible at the municipality level for interviewing the child and defining status together with police. And if, during their first assessment template they have to fulfill, for sure fits with the indicators of that, they get the status immediately and all the dedicated services. But to have immediately the status, I think that should be an agreement, and I'm not aware of that agreement."

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article "The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges", published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

"Yes. Based on my 2019 study, the interviewees [including individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims] noted that the process of making the connections between the relevant foreign offices and the rehabilitations centres in Albania was long and involved many mechanisms and different parties both abroad and in Albania. However, once the victims arrived in Albania, they were welcomed in the airport by the relevant Albanian anti-trafficking governmental and organisational representatives."

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023



The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist outlined that:

“[...] the only way to be recognized as a victim of trafficking in Albania is to go through the National Referral Mechanism in Albania and this is the only authority or actual instance where they get this status and recognition. I’m not 100% sure, but we believe it’s not possible that when they get identified as a victim in the UK, they will automatically be recognized as such in Albania. But what we know is that in December 2022, there was a joint communique between the two countries and they have a new agreement, but as for UNICEF, we haven’t come across any specific case that can provide any exceptions or that says something different from what is available in the national framework.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Yes [...] I’m not quite sure about if it is automatic or reevaluated, because as I said, I don’t do case management by myself. I know that it is automated for the ones who are identified in the three countries that I mentioned with whom we have bilateral agreements that once the status is given in also North Macedonia or Montenegro, it is immediately recognized. [...] what is sure is that whatever victim of trafficking is identified, especially if it is given the status of victim of trafficking in the UK or EU countries or wherever the victim is found, she’s repatriated by state authorities, which link to Albanian state authorities in specifically with the Directorate for Migration and the trafficking at the ministry of interior because the [Albanian] National Referral Mechanism is appointed at the ministry of Interior in Albania, and it has a special unit like the anti-trafficking coordination unit, which itself includes also the responsible authority, which is the authority registering the case and conducting the, it’s called, I forgot it, the multidisciplinary team of experts, which do the evaluation of the case and then draft the plan of the intervention”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explains that:

“Yes, definitely.[...] we have had a few cases but very few in the past. So if they have been identified in the United Kingdom, for example, and referred to Albania so it is definite that there is such international protocols that we rely on and we have ratified as well so we use the same definitions and the same identification tools probably for a victim. And these victims are accompanied by information. And from our part, some of these cases are provided with information regarding our services. So before coming to our shelters or to other centers and we provide them with information and they choose where to go, which program to follow.”

The same interlocutor stated:

“[...] we just know from the reports that there are a lot of people that are identified as victims of human trafficking in these countries, but we don’t have any referrals from these countries for supporting victims that have been identified and to refer in Albania or to come to Albania and to be supported by us. These are very few referrals that not justify. So what can we say so the trafficking of Albanian people outside the country. So we don’t have cases of this.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the following clarifying question in relation to the above passage:

*Does this mean that although the numbers of VoTs and PVoTs formally identified in other countries are high, you do not see many of these being referred to Vatra / the NCATS? Or did you mean something else?*

The interlocutor responded as follows:

“We can add as well that not only from international reports, but as well from victims that we assist, there are other Albanian victims in European Countries, but the problem is that they apply for Asylum in these countries and the process takes too long. From other agencies or organizations that support victims of trafficking in Europe countries

including UK, we do not have many referrals of cases that return in Albania, in order for us to support them in Albania in reintegration process. It has been very few in recent years, from Sweden, UK, or Netherlands, number that not justify the number of Albanian cases reported in international reports as victims of human trafficking. Probably they stay in these countries, or when they return, do not approach [...] the services in Albania.”

Source: Vatra, [written clarifications](#), 19 December 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, whose P.h.D thesis looked at, among other issues, the interstate cooperation and partnerships between Albania and the UK, and who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, explained:

“This should be the case in a sense that if they are returned through recognized channels, which means that one of the support organizations in Albania would be contacted and they would be waiting for them so that support would be offered. That said, when I worked as a practitioner and also while I was conducting the study, there had only been two cases of returnees. I mean, very, very few Albanians who have gone through the UK NRM system go back to Albania. [...] So the return of victims, I would say it’s another area that has a lot of question marks because we haven’t had many victims return. So this is not kind of a foolproof route that we know much about it, just because it has not been used. But from my understanding and the conversations with civil societies, so the four shelters that are run by NGOs, they are very willing to. Of course, in order for the status to be given in Albania, they have to go through the police [...]”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] at the moment, we don’t have a dedicated law in Albania to define all of these structures and how you can obtain a victim status by court. But if a victim is referred to the National Referral Mechanism or the Mobile Identification Units in Albania, then the respective authority within the NRM of Albania, they will issue a statement which proves that the person is either a victim of human trafficking or a potential victim of human trafficking. [...] In the case where an Albanian victim from the UK is in the NRM, and there are facts that they are a victim or a potential victim of human trafficking, then they will also be recognized in Albania as such a victim of human trafficking because the link will be through the UK NRM or UK organizations with the Albanian organizations.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.3.2 Criminal Justice system

### 2.3.2.1 Justice system and police

- Refer also to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 130](#), [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 134](#), [2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations on page 140](#) and [2.5 Corruption on page 161](#).

### Desk review material

In its 2023 report on Trafficking in Persons, USDOS stated:

“[...] The government continued judicial reforms that changed prosecutorial jurisdiction for trafficking cases; SPAK [Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime] and the Special Court of Appeals on Corruption and Organized Crime have jurisdiction over trafficking cases related to organized crime, while GPO and district courts prosecuted trafficking cases without an organized crime nexus. [...] The government maintained institutionalized training programs at the School of Magistrates for judges, prosecutors, and judicial police. The government, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations, trained police officers, judges, prosecutors, and victim coordinators on various anti-trafficking issues.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023



Addressing assistance for victims of trafficking within the judicial system, the same report noted that:

“[...] District courts lacked equipment to allow remote testimony, but SPAK possessed equipment that allowed testimony via video conferences, though it did not record how often it was used. [...] The government reported interviews and testimonies took place in the presence of a psychologist and prosecutors separated victims and defendants during trials to prevent re-traumatization.

[...] Twenty-two victim assistance coordinators provided legal assistance and guided victims in accessing services; the government appointed victim assistance coordinators to all victims assisting in prosecutions. The government signed cooperation agreements with higher education institutions to add to a list of professionals that provided pro bono legal assistance to victims [...].”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the General Prosecutor’s Office, who gave an overview of how trafficking cases are prosecuted following justice reform, and discussed involvement of victims of trafficking in the prosecution of their traffickers:

“General Prosecutors Office, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** We are looking for information on the support available to VOT and will ask about the support your office gives to victims of trafficking (VOT).

**A.** Here at the General Prosecutors Office (GPO) we have victim coordinators and there is also a prosecutor that deals with training with regard human trafficking (HT). I will need to retrieve statistics but cannot give them right now. I will share a general overview. In 2017 Albania started a justice reform which included legislation and justice institutions. Currently we have 2 prosecutor offices, the GPO and the Special Prosecutors Office (SPO), which works against organised crime and corruption. Both prosecutors are independent of one another and the law stipulates the function of each. The GPO has under its jurisdiction the General Jurisdiction Prosecutors Offices (GJPO) and the SPO is headed by a chairperson who works against organised crime and corruption.

**Q.** How many offices are there?

**A.** As regards the GJPO there are 22 of them, operating across Albania. There is only one SPO and it’s based here in Tirana. The responsibility and function are stipulated by the criminal procedure code and HT is tackled by the GPO. HT is dealt with by the GPO as long as it takes place in a simple form. However, when an organised criminal group (OCG) or other armed force is involved then the SPO deals with the crime.

The victim coordinators in district prosecution offices work directly with victims of different criminal offenses. The target group they work with don’t only include victims of trafficking but also victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual violence, and minors in contact and in conflict with the law. Victim coordinators at the GPO receive information about the problems that the coordinators face during their work and they work for a quick solution for the highest interest of the victims.

Regarding the need for training of the victim coordinators in district prosecution offices, victim coordinators at the GPO plan and organise periodically training and information sessions. They regularly cooperate with state structures and non-profit organizations that work in the fields of victimology and criminal justice.

The GJPO have a specialised section for HT in larger regions of the country.

**Q.** How many specialised sections are there?

**A.** We don’t have the numbers but they’re in the larger regions of the country. The prosecutors that work in these sections have been trained on HT or have a lot of experience in this matter. In any case of HT, the prosecutor’s office is in charge of working with the state police who have their own structures in place for HT and protection of victims. [...] Regarding the GPO and the GJPO, the GPO is not in charge and does not have competence of investigating. Only the GJPO can investigate and carry out procedures with victims. The only competence the GPO has is to represent cases in the supreme or high court. There are special sections and sectors for VOT and the coordinators office and here at the GPO we assist counterparts at GJPO, we compile information and this goes into statistics. [...]

**Q.** What happens when VOT are referred [by the police]?

**A.** A prosecutor becomes in charge of the case, they speak with judicial police officers and they collect evidence and we go ahead with case. [...]

**Q.** Can you tell us about the role of the special coordinator regarding long term support for VOT?

**A.** As soon as the prosecuting officer has received a case of HT then the victim coordinator comes into play and they are the linking bridge between the victim, police and GPO. We first provide psychological support to the victim and after we inform them of their rights. Of course, the victims have a lot of needs and what we do is find the shelter that

is closest to them and refer them there. The victim coordinator is in charge and coordinates with all centres across Albania. The victim coordinator follows up with the victim until the case goes to court. If the victim has any questions about the legal procedure they can ask the victim coordinator. If there is confidential information we don't reveal it so we don't violate the investigation.

**Q.** If the victim didn't want to cooperate to identify the trafficker what would happen?

**A.** The form that the victim signs describes their rights and also has a clause box which says, 'I refuse to receive any assistance from the victim coordinator'. If they tick that we can't help them. But we encourage them to assist the prosecutor and the criminal proceedings. We want them to agree, they need our help. If the victim refuses to work with the justice system and help identify who or where the trafficker is, then we try to convince them that is right thing to do and that the trafficker should be held to account. If the victim still refuses we use our own methods to collect evidence and do our own investigation.

**Q.** Do some victims opt not to receive support?

**A.** Here at the GPO we do not work with victims directly, but we receive reports from other (GJPO) offices that some victims refuse help.

**Q.** Do they provide an explanation about why they refuse?

**A.** Stigma, as well as fear of being harmed by the trafficker, being afraid of families, or not supported by the family. A series of reasons why.

**Q.** What sort of protective mechanisms are put in place if they are in fear?

**A.** It is the state-owned shelter and they are placed there whilst the investigation is ongoing. So they have state protection.

**Q.** Is there security at shelter?

**A.** Yes. Security is provided. The procedures that take place in shelters are confidential.[...]

**Q.** If an offence of trafficking took place outside of Albania would you still prosecute the trafficker if they are here, if located?

**A.** If the victim is Albanian then, yes, we can proceed."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.45 – 48

## Interview material

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist stated:

"The police [...] is very active. This is the main institution for providing protection to victims. There is a lot of work that has been done by training and collaborating with the police. [...] we as UNICEF [...] are [...] involved in working with police as one of the main institutions when it comes to protecting, [...] victims of [...] trafficking."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou commented on interviews she conducted with Albanian police officers as part of her P.h.D exploring the efficacy of processes and practices in place in Albania that seek to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators:

"[...] [W]hen I spoke to the police officers [in interviews conducted as part of my PhD research], at least the ones that I spoke to [...], they did look very proactive, especially in cases that related to gender-based violence, trafficking, child exploitation [...]"

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"In terms of protecting victims of human trafficking, the police has been effective when [...] called by the NGOs, for example, on cases where they've identified potential victims of human trafficking or when they needed to provide a specific order to protect the victim. For example, based on the severity of danger that a victim of human trafficking might be in, they can be given a specific order of protection by the police and then be placed in a high-security safe shelter to be protected by possible threats of the traffickers or even family members in cases where there is a high stigma and also safety concerns by the family members. [...] I would assess from my experience here that the police



has not been very proactive and effective but also not passive at all, so at the medium level.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 2.3.2.2 Judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked

• Refer also to [2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 121](#).

#### Desk review material

The Albanian government commented, in reply to the Recommendations of the Committee of Parties as part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), that:

“Albanian legislation provides for the exemption of trafficking victims from punishment, not from criminal prosecution. Specifically, in article 52/a paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code it is provided that: “The person injured by the criminal offenses related to human trafficking can benefit from the exemption from punishment, for the commission of criminal offenses during the period of trafficking and to the extent that was forced to perform those illegal actions or omissions”. In practice, there is no criminal prosecution against trafficking victims for criminal offenses that they were forced to commit for the purposes of trafficking. The prosecuting body argues that the victims should not be criminally prosecuted for the offenses committed due to trafficking, as the victim’s will has been violated and the subjective side of committing the criminal offense is missing.”

Source: Council of Europe, “[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)”, 19 December 2022

In an interview with the General Prosecutors Office conducted by the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, it was noted that:

“General Prosecutors Office, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** What if a VOT is found to have committed a criminal offence (if picked up in a situation of exploitation, for example)? The criminal code stipulates that if they commit an offence they have to be punished for that, for example prostitution is punished, even if they are a VOT they may have received criminal proceeds and so they can be prosecuted. However this is decided by the prosecutor in regard to what is and what is not the fault of the victim. This is done on a case by case basis. There is no golden rule, it is up to the prosecutor to see if the victim has committed a crime.

**Q.** Are special measures taken for those aged under 18?

**A.** Yes, there are special measures in place. The justice reform brought in a juvenile justice code. This should be available in English, translated by UNICEF.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 47

The report of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons on the non-punishment principle mentioned Albania among the countries that have this principle embedded in domestic legislation:

“24. The non-punishment principle is found in domestic legislation in several jurisdictions, including Albania [...]”

Source: UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights, “[Implementation of the non-punishment principle. Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally](#)”, June-July 2021 p. 6



## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, pointed to a 2013 amendment to the Albanian Criminal Code, which provides an exemption of victims of human trafficking who are forced to commit illegal acts:

“In light of GRETA’s recommendation to include a specific non-punishment provision, in 2013, a new amendment was made to the Albanian Criminal Code. Article 52/a of the Criminal Code provides that victims of Trafficking in Human Beings may be exempted from punishment if they were forced to commit an illegal act or to refrain from action during the period in which they were trafficked.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

### 2.3.2.3 Witness protection

• Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 134](#).

## Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS report on trafficking in persons stated:

“Victims who testified against traffickers had access to the witness protection program; no victims participated in the program in 2022 or 2021.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania”](#), 15 June 2023

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding taking additional steps to protect victims of human trafficking and their families from retaliation and intimidation, that:

“As far as the protection of victims is concerned, the victims of trafficking in almost all investigated cases, immediately after the identification of the case, are sheltered in reception centers for victims of trafficking, where they benefit from accommodation, food and other free services. They also have the right to enter the witness protection program if they feel threatened. As for the centers that deal with victims of trafficking, in any case when a minor or an adult is in the process, they have taken measures to ensure safety throughout the process by protecting them from any danger, especially children. Accompanying, confidentiality are guaranteed in every case presented. Organizations also ensure a secure environment with guards, cameras and staff at all times. In the case of children, the necessary information is obtained and it is estimated that the intervention will be done with the best interest of the child in mind. During the period 2020-2022, there were no cases included in the witness protection program or proposed by the Prosecution to be included in this program.”

Source: Council of Europe, [“Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation”](#), 19 December 2022

UNICEF’s report, “Albania Child Notice”, did not include any recent information on witness protection cases involving children:

“No [...] recent information on witness protection in trafficking cases involving children has been found.”

Sources: UNICEF, [“Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf”](#), 2022



In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Judge Albana Boksi and Dr Arta Mandro, regarding the compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the *Acquis Communautaire* of the European Union relating to trafficking in human beings, it was observed that:

#### “THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAMS

In order to guarantee the right of the victim of trafficking for protection and safety, it may be necessary that the trial *is held behind closed doors*. In addition, through the amendments made by Law no. 35/2017, the definition of “witness with hidden identity” was included in the Criminal Procedure Code. It is important to emphasize that this special witness questioning technique is applied only to a limited number of criminal offences, and excludes criminal offences related to trafficking in human beings (Article 110/a or Article 128/b of the Criminal Code).

The Albanian authorities, in compliance with the grETA recommendations, should take additional steps to ensure that victims and witnesses of trafficking in human beings, as well as their family members, are provided with effective and appropriate protection against potential retaliation or intimidation.

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Authors: Judge Albana Boksi, Dr Arta Mandro, “[Compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union in the area of the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)”, 2021

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“The witness protection programme is regulated by the Law No. 10/173 of October, 22, 2009, “On the Protection of Witnesses and Persons Collaborating with Justice”. The Witness Protection Directorate is tasked with protecting witnesses and persons collaborating with justice. The protection envisaged includes measures such as providing a new identity and change of residence. The decision to place a person in the protection programme is taken by a committee made up of the Deputy Minister of the Interior, an officer from the Serious Crimes Directorate of the police, a prosecutor from the Serious Crime Prosecutor’s Office and a judge from the First Instance Court for Serious Crimes.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, confirmed that:

“Yes there is a witness protection programme.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] There is the witness protection program as well.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“Yes, there is a witness protection program and law. Before 2004, there was a protection program [was] that supported by international agencies in Albania such as OSC or some agencies such as USAID or international embassies. And all the victims that have been identified as at risk for life so has been involved through this program. After 2004, there is a law in Albania, the law for protection for witness protection and collaborator of justice, but few victims have been so benefited from this law. For example, we have only one case that has been supported by Vatra that has benefited by this Albanian law and program. And the 10 former victims that have been supported before has been supported



by this international body, so organizations that have been supported this program and the victims because during all this time, Vatra has been supported 11 victims of human trafficking that has been involved in this witness programs. 10 has been before the law and then 1 has been from the programs set up by Albanian governments.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“Yeah, I found out that there is a witness protection program [...] the short answer is yes, and there is a legal provision for that.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“There is a witness protection program, which is not only related to victims of human trafficking but to any victim who testifies against their abusers. And in terms of how effective it is, for the ones who have applied and went through the process, they have received the protection. Now I have a statistic, but it’s not public. It’s usually from what I’ve heard from my colleagues who work directly supporting victims of human trafficking. Over the last five years, only two cases of Albanian victims of human trafficking in Albania. They have been part of the witness protection program by receiving special support on either changing their identities or changing the countries where they live, for example, from Albania to another country, to be protected from what they’ve testified against their traffickers.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

#### 2.3.2.4 Compensation for victims of trafficking

• Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 134](#).

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report provided information regarding compensation for trafficking victims:

“Victims could obtain restitution through criminal proceedings or compensation through civil suits. However, judges generally rejected restitution in criminal proceedings and civil suits required victims to submit new testimonies, causing re-traumatization. Additionally, civil courts dismissed or closed civil suits if criminal courts dropped the case or acquitted the defendant. Courts granted compensation to only two victims in cases from 2010 and 2018 but did not disburse compensation to the victims – the case from 2018 remained under appeal.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding facilitating and guaranteeing access to compensation for victims of human trafficking, that:

“Compensation through the state scheme is regulated in law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009 “On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against wealth”, as amended. Based on article 37 point 2 letter ç) of this law, the use of the confiscated assets fund for the compensation of victims of organized crime and trafficking is foreseen in the amount determined by court decision, so it is left to the discretion of the court for the amount of compensation. Also in article 37 point 2 letter c) a special fund for social purposes, including the rehabilitation and integration of victims of trafficking, is designated, while article 37 point 3 letter b) provides that NGOs also benefit from this fund, including shelters.[...] the number of cases applying for compensation is limited. There are only two cases with a Court decision in favor of the victim assisted by the



“Different & Equal” Center in cooperation with the Center for Legal Initiatives that have managed to win court proceedings for compensation as victims of trafficking, one case in 2010 (worth 40,000 euros) and another case in 2018 (worth 44,000 euros – concluded at first instance and currently on appeal). Even for these two cases, it was not possible to execute the compensation decisions, which means that in Albania we still do not have a single case that was compensated as a victim of trafficking.”

Source: Council of Europe, “[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)”, 19 December 2022

During an interview with the UK Home Office, the General Prosecutor’s Office discussed compensation for victims of trafficking:

“General Prosecutors Office, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** What is the amount of compensation that is offered to VOT?

**A.** For any criminal offence that provide criminal proceeds we are responsible to seize assets and use them accordingly, the same applies to HT which is a criminal offence, we seize the assets and use accordingly. A percentage of criminal proceeds seized are passed to the victim.

**Q.** What percentage?

**A.** There is actually a board that decides how much will go to victim, how much to the police and how much to the GPO, this board sits periodically.

**Q.** How do they make a decision on how much is awarded?

**A.** I have never been part of that board so I cannot give you that information. It must be noted that in Albania we have an agency – the Agency of Seized and Confiscated Assets Administration, under the Ministry of Interior (Moi) – that administers and manages seized assets and they follow legal procedures up until selling assets at auction.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 46

In a February 2022 submission to the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, the Albanian NGO Different and Equal, described the difficulties in obtaining compensation for victims/survivors of human trafficking:

“[...] Compensation to victims of trafficking through litigation is complex due to the procedures required by civil litigation in criminal proceedings. As a rule, the Court decides on the separation of the civil lawsuit from the criminal process. Civil proceedings take longer than criminal proceedings and may impede the progress of criminal proceedings. It results from the practice that in the civil lawsuit for compensation is required the involvement of the victim to prove the damage caused by putting her/him again in front of the perpetrator. In Albania there are only two cases assisted by D&E in cooperation with the CLCI (Center for Legal Initiatives) that have managed to win lawsuits for compensation as victims of trafficking, one case in 2010 and another case in 2018 and none of them has not been executed.”

Source: Different and Equal, “[Input for the Special Rapporteur’s report on ‘contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities’](#)”, February 2022, p. 7

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, both Different and Equal and Tjeter Vizion highlighted the following information, based on NCATS information:

“Albanian legislation provides for two forms of compensation for victims of trafficking, through the judicial process against the perpetrators and the state scheme.

- Compensation through the judicial process is regulated in the Criminal Procedure Code – Article 61 of the CPC regulates the filing of a civil lawsuit in the criminal process, while Articles 625 and 644 of the Civil Code regulate the procedure for filing a civil lawsuit after the end of the criminal process.
- Compensation through the state scheme is regulated in the law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009 “On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against property”, changed. The law, also provides for the establishment of a Special Fund<sup>1</sup> as a source for the



compensation of victims of trafficking, but which has not yet been implemented in practice. Unfortunately, both of these forms have not yet become effective.”

- 1 Article 37 of the law 9284, dated 30.09.2004 “On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against property”, changed.

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023, Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, further stated:

“In order to improve the situation, D&E has recommended that the Agency of the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets (AASCA) to be part of the NRM. AASCA<sup>1</sup> is a very important institution that has actually started to support with funding programs and projects for the protection of victims of trafficking. By including AASCA as an NRM member, its role and contribution could be increased in order to use the special fund and other assets for financing the needs of victims of trafficking, including compensation for victims of trafficking.”

- 1 Agency of the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets is functioning based on the was established with Law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009 “On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against property”, changed.

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

### 2.3.2.5 Treatment of minors and young people within the criminal justice system

\*The original research terms of reference did not include research questions seeking specific information about treatment of minors and young people within the criminal justice system, however, this section has been included as it corresponds to a theme that emerged from the research findings.

- Refer also to [2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations on page 140](#).

### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report stated:

“The government maintained the Development Center for Criminal Justice for Minors with four part-time prosecutors, a judicial police officer responsible for child protection in criminal proceedings, and five child friendly interview rooms.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding special protection measures for child victims of human trafficking, that:

“In relation to access to justice for minors and the training of professionals, good work has been done both by the state structures and by the NCAT. The children are assisted by lawyers and are always accompanied by the psychologists of the institutions and NCAT. The establishment of coordinators for victims of crime at the Prosecutor’s Office has been the key point, which has enabled and created a successful cooperation between the NCAT and the Prosecutor’s Office for sharing information and referring cases. In the premises of the district police, there are special rooms for interviewing children, where, in all cases, during the interview or assistance of children in the police, the presence of a psychologist is evidenced.”

Source: Council of Europe, “[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)”, 19 December 2022



In its response to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in February 2023 Albania noted measures taken to support children in the prosecution system.

“In the prosecution system, children are interviewed by prosecutor or the judicial police officer in the presence of the Coordinator for Subjects with Special Status, who are trained on domestic violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking and children in conflict with the law. The Coordinator provides psychological support to the victim, helps facilitate the discussion and drafts a needs assessment report.”

Source: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, “[Replies of Albania to the list of issues in relation to its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports\\*](#)”, CRC/C/ALB/RQ/5-6, 23 February 2023

### Interview material

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS explained that in the case where children lack parental care, the decision about pursuing the prosecution of the trafficker is that of the state authorities:

“When a child is in the police station, we are present during the interview of the child. So we’re the first contact with the victim. [...]”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

### 2.3.2.6 Investigations, prosecutions and convictions for trafficking

• Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 134](#).

### Desk review material

In a European Commission report of November 2023, it was observed that:

“The Prosecution Office registered 11 new criminal proceedings for trafficking in human beings in 2022, compared with 10 in 2021. The number of final convictions remained very low with seven final convictions from two cases.”

Source: European Commission, “[Albania 2023 Report](#)”, 8 November 2023, p. 46

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report, covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, discussed trafficking convictions during the period under review:

“The government did not convict any traffickers [...]”

The government decreased law enforcement efforts. [...] The Albanian State Police (ASP) investigated 85 new cases with 112 suspects, an increase compared with 61 cases with 27 suspects in 2021; 71 suspects for sex trafficking and 41 suspects for unspecified forms of trafficking. The ASP investigated no suspects for “knowingly soliciting or patronizing a sex trafficking victim to perform a commercial sex act,” the same as in 2021. The General Prosecution Office (GPO) prosecuted 54 cases with eight defendants, compared with 60 cases with 19 defendants in 2021. Separately, the Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) initiated two new investigations and continued to investigate two cases initiated and registered in 2021. Of the four investigations, SPAK referred one to court for dismissal and merged two investigations, resulting in two active investigations. Courts did not convict any traffickers, a significant decrease compared with 11 traffickers in 2021, but the same as no convictions in 2020.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023



In its 2022 annual report, published in March 2023, the Albanian Office of the General Prosecutor stated that:

“[...] 1.5.4 Regarding the criminal policy on child trafficking offenses, the data shows that, for the year 2022, there are no requests from the prosecutor regarding personal security measures or requests for sentencing because there are no individuals under investigation, accused, or convicted for this criminal act. However, for the criminal offense of ‘Trafficking in adult persons,’ as provided by Article 110/a of the Criminal Code, there is only one request for imprisonment sentencing against one accused person.” [In-house translation. The author is an Albanian native speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: 1.5.4 Sa i përket politikës penale në veprat penale të trafikimit të fëmijëve, të dhënat tregojnë se, për vitin 2022 nuk ka kërkesa të prokurorit lidhur me masat e sigurimit personal apo kërkesa për caktim dënimi sepse nuk ka persona nën hetim apo të pandehur dhe as të dënuar për këtë vepër penale. Ndërsa, për veprën penale ‘Trafikimi i të rriturve’, parashikuar nga neni 110/a i Kodit Penal ka vetëm një 1 kërkesë për caktim dënimi me burgim ndaj një të pandehuri.”

Source: Office of the General Prosecutor, “[Annual Report on the State of Crime 2022](#)”, March 2023, p.18

The same source stated:

“[...] 1.9.9. Within the framework of strengthening cooperation with regional and international law enforcement agencies, aiming to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of investigations and criminal prosecutions related to drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, financing of terrorism, etc., based on statistical data generated by the IMPRO system, the following indicators are recorded for the year 2022, according to specific offenses:

[...] 1.9.9.2 For the criminal offense of “Human Trafficking”:

Extraditions from abroad to Albania - 2 cases;

Extraditions from Albania to other countries - 1 case;

Incoming letters rogatory - 35 cases;

Outgoing letters rogatory - 4 cases.” [In-house translation. The author is an Albanian native speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: “[...] 1.9.9. Në kuadrin e fuqizimit të bashkëpunimit me agjencitë ligjzbatuese rajonale dhe ndërkombëtare, në funksion të rritjes së efikasitetit dhe efektivitetit të hetimeve dhe ndjekjes penale për veprat penale që lidhen me trafikimin e narkotikëve, trafikimin e qenieve njerëzore, pastrimin e parave, dhe financimin e terrorizmit etj., nga të dhënat statistikore të gjeneruara nga sistemi IMPRO, për vitin 2022, sipas grupveprave rezultojnë treguesit, si më poshtë:

[...] 1.9.9.2 Për veprën penale “Trafikimi i qenieve njerëzore”:

Ekstradime nga jashtë drejt Shqipërisë – 2 praktika;

Ekstradime për jashtë vendit – 1 praktik;

Letërporosi nga Jashtë – 35 praktika;

Letërporosi për Jashtë- 4 praktika.”

Source: Office of the General Prosecutor, “[Annual Report on the State of Crime 2022](#)”, March 2023, p.271

The same source reported:

“[...] 1.12.6.2 Unlawful trafficking of persons

i) Regarding the criminal offenses of unlawful trafficking of persons as provided by Articles 110/a and 128/b of the Penal Code, in compliance with the recommendation of the Supreme State Audit (SSA), Albania is encouraged to increase efforts to combat human trafficking in 2022. According to statistical data [...], the following is highlighted:

For the offense of trafficking in adult persons as provided by Article 110/a of the Penal Code, there have been 7 criminal proceedings registered, and 2 accused individuals have been sent for trial. Compared to 2021, this represents a decrease from 8 to 7 in the number of registered proceedings and a decrease from 4 to 2 in the number of accused individuals sent for trial for this criminal act.

For the criminal offense of “Child Trafficking” as provided by Article 128/b of the Penal Code, there have been 4 registered proceedings, while there are no proceedings or accused individuals sent for trial in comparison to 2021. This represents an increase from 2 to 4 in the number of registered proceedings and a decrease from 2 to 0 in the number of proceedings and accused individuals sent for trial for this offense.” [In-house translation. The author is an Albanian native speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: “1.12.6.2 Trafikimi i paligjshëm i personave

i) Lidhur me veprat penale trafikimi i paligjshëm i qenieve njerësore të parashikuara nga nenet 110/a e 128/b të Kodit Penal, në përbushje të rekomandimit të KSA Shqipëria inkurajohet të shtojë përpjekjet për të luftuar trafikimin e qenieve njerëzore në vitin 2022, sipas të dhënave statistikore (aneksi 1, tabela 36) evidentohet:

- Për veprën me trafikimin e personave të rritur, të parashikuar nga neni 110/a i Kodit Penal, janë regjistruar 7 procedime penale dhe janë dërguar për gjykim 2 të pandehur, ose krahasuar me vitin 2021 me ulje nga 8 në 7 të numrit të procedimeve të regjistruara dhe ulje nga 4 në 2 të numrit të pandehurve të dërguar për gjykim për këtë vepër penale.

- Për veprën penale “Trafikimi i të miturve” të parashikuar nga neni 128/b i Kodit Penal, janë regjistruar 4 procedime, ndërkohë nuk ka procedime apo të pandehur të dërguar për gjykim ose krahasuar me vitin 2021, me rritje nga 2 në 4 të numrit procedime të regjistruar dhe ulje të numrit nga 2 në 0 të procedimit dhe pandehurit të dërguar për gjykim për këtë vepër.”

Source: Office of the General Prosecutor, “[Annual Report on the State of Crime 2022](#)”, March 2023, p.35

The same source observed:

“Trafficking in adult persons

The specific proportion of this criminal offense in the group of criminal offenses “Against illegal trafficking” in 2022 is 4.22%. From the statistical data, there is a decreasing trend in the number of registered proceedings for the criminal offense provided by Article 110/a of the Penal Code, “Trafficking in adult persons,” compared to 2021, from 8 proceedings to 7 proceedings registered in 2022, representing a decrease of 12.50%.

Child trafficking: The specific proportion of this criminal offense in the group of criminal offenses “Against illegal trafficking” in 2022 is 2.41%, while in 2021 it was 0.8%.

The number of registered proceedings for the criminal offense provided by Article 128/b of the Penal Code, “Child trafficking,” in 2022 is 4, compared to 2 proceedings in 2021.” [In-house translation. The author is an Albanian native speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: “Trafikimi i personave të rritur

Pesha specifike që zë kjo vepër penale në grupin e veprave penale “Kundër trafikeve të paligjshme” në vitin 2022 është 4,22 %.

Nga të dhënat statistikore vërehet një tendencë në ulje e procedimeve të regjistruara për veprën penale të parashikuar nga neni 110/a i Kodit Penal “Trafikimi i personave të rritur” në krahasim me vitin 2021, nga 8 procedime në 7 procedime të regjistruara në vitin 2022 ose 12,50 %.

Trafikimi i të miturve: Pesha specifike që zë kjo vepër penale në grupin e veprave penale “Kundër trafikeve të paligjshme” në vitin 2022 është 2,41 % ndërsa në vitin 2021 ka qenë 0,8 %.

Numri i procedimeve të regjistruara për veprën penale të parashikuar nga neni 128/b i Kodit Penal “Trafikimi i të miturve”, në vitin 2022 është 4, ndërsa në vitin 2021 ka qenë 2 procedime.”

Source: Office of the General Prosecutor, “[Annual Report on the State of Crime 2022](#)”, March 2023, pp.178-179



The same source produced a table of statistics regarding the number of proceedings and convictions in relation to the crimes of adult and child human trafficking:

Criminal Offence	2021					2022				
	No of registered proceedings	No of court proceedings	No of registered defendants	No of defendants in the trial	No of defendants convicted	No of registered proceedings	No of registered proceedings	No of registered defendants	No of defendants in the trial	No of defendants convicted
<b>Neni Trafikimi i të rriturve (Article 110/a Albanian Criminal Code) – Trafficking in adult persons</b>	8	2	2	4	0	7	0	0	2	1
<b>Neni Trafikimi i të miturve (Article 128/b Albanian Criminal Code) – Child Trafficking</b>	2	2	2	2	12 <sup>10</sup>	4	0	0	0	0

Source: Office of the General Prosecutor, “[Annual Report on the State of Crime 2022](#)”, March 2023, Table 36, p.264

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with a representative from the General Prosecutor’s Office, who provided statistical data from the Prosecution Offices of General Jurisdiction.

“General Prosecutors Office, 6 October 2022 [...]  
 Statistical data from the Prosecution Offices of General Jurisdiction  
 Year 2021  
 Article 110/a Trafficking of adults  
 Number of registered proceedings: 8  
 Number of proceedings in court: 2  
 Number of defendants registered: 2  
 Number of defendants in court: 4  
 Number of Victims: Total 3  
 1 (female) until 18 years old and 2 (females) over 18 years old  
 Article 128/b Trafficking of minors  
 Number of registered proceedings: 2  
 Number of proceedings in court: 2  
 Number of defendants registered: 2  
 Number of defendants in court: 2  
 Number of defendants convicted: 12  
  
 Year 2022 (January to June)  
 Article 110/a Trafficking of adults  
 Number of registered proceedings: 1  
 Number of defendants in court: 2”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 48-49

<sup>10</sup> Note: It is unclear how 12 defendants were convicted under Article 128/b of the Criminal Code in 2021, while only 2 defendants are recorded as being on trial.



UNICEF's 2022 report "Albania Child Notice" reported that no child online sexual exploitation had been prosecuted as child trafficking.

"The Cybercrime Unit of the Criminal Police Department deals with child online sexual exploitation. No such cases have been prosecuted as child trafficking."

Source: UNICEF, "[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#)", 2022

### Interview material

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"[...] in terms of the rate, we do see that we have more victims, and we keep having more victims and extremely low conviction rates for human trafficking. This reflects that there is a crucial need for the institutions responsible to do the convictions to be either restructured or to have better and more proactive policies placed."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.3.3 Child protection

### 2.3.3.1 Child protection system and anti-trafficking efforts

• Refer also to [2.4.5 Child protection system and anti-trafficking efforts – limitations on page 143](#).

### Desk review material

As part of the UK Home Office fact-finding mission, SHKEJ discussed child protection responses:

"SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Once a child is identified as a VOT or PVOT do you refer them to the police?

**A.** We immediately refer to social services, to the child protection officer. If we see a child is high risk we may contact the police, but first step is the child protection officer.

**Q.** What happens then?

**A.** The child protection officer in the municipality, they will interview the child or they establish if the child is really at risk. Then there is a meeting with the police and social services and altogether we make a decision whether the child needs to be protected, removed or surveillance put in place. If risk is high then immediately we refer to the police. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 80, 82

During an interview with the Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection gave a detailed overview of the National Agenda on the Rights of the Child and how child victims and potential victims of trafficking are identified:

"State Agency for Child Rights and Protection, 11 October 2022 [...]"

[...] Now we have a new National Agenda on the Rights of the Child 2021 - 2026, a strategic document that is in line with the Council of Europe Strategy on children's rights. This is an important statutory policy document.

The new Agenda is very important to implement this programme under the MoHSP, also we now have a Minister of Youth and Children. Decision of Council of Ministers no 578 and 129 give special attention on protecting children from trafficking, at the same time they provide a mechanism for the protection of children from forced labour and trafficking in Albania. Before this new law, child protection workers were not included, but we now have child protection workers. We have 61 municipalities in Albania, and we have 61 child protection units (CPUs), one in each municipality.

Now we have built this system of child protection workers to identify, report and manage cases, under this DCM 578 (available online and in English). Our website is [www.femijet.gov.al](http://www.femijet.gov.al)

Legal and sub-legal acts define the obligation of the Albanian state at the central and local level.

**Q.** So is the purpose to enforce these laws at a local level?

**A.** The system provides services at a local level for the protection of children in the community. In each municipality there are Child Protection Units, 61 CPU in all Albania. Child Protection Workers are employed in each municipality and administrative units of the municipality. At the moment there are 241 child protection workers in the country. Most of them are social workers and psychologists. The law provides that there should be one child protection worker for every 3,000 children in an administrative unit. The child protection worker performs the function of the case manager for children in need of protection from the moment of identification or referral, and the Individual Protection Plan until their termination.

**Q.** So it depends on the population of an administrative unit as to how many child protection workers there are?

**A.** Yes, so Tirana is a big city. Any administrative unit of the municipality having more than 3,000 children shall have at least one child protection worker. They may not be engaged in other duties. When the administrative unit has less than 3,000 children, this task may be performed by one of the employees for local social services, whose job description includes the function as a child protection worker [...]

**Q.** How many children are in the system?

**A.** Case manager is one per child. CPW manage approximately 2,300 cases of children in need for protection.

**Q.** Are children in forced labour defined as potential victims of trafficking (PVOT)?

**A.** Not all, but some. It depends on who is their legal guardian.

From January to August 2022, 25 child VOT or PVOT have been taken into protection.

**Q.** When you have identified a VOT or PVOT, what is process?

**A.** We have standard operating procedures (SOPs adopted by Decision of Council of Ministers) for the evaluation of child VOT. Police perform a formal interview with the child to identify whether he is a PVOT or VOT. Child protection workers make the risk assessment of the child. [...]

Child protection workers collaborate with the inter-sectorial technical group at local level. The inter-sectorial technical group is composed of local representatives of police structures, social services structures, and representatives from the field of education, health, justice, representatives of non-profit organisations, as well as any other specialist who is familiar with the situation of the child or who may contribute in taking or implementing child protection measures, who are obliged to attend the meetings of the inter-sectorial technical group. As soon as a child is considered a VOT or PVOT the child protection worker assesses the case and then calls a meeting with inter-sectorial technical group to draft the child protection plan.

The meeting of technical group provides services the child and its family as: housing, psychological assessment, food, clothing, family visits etc on a case by case basis."

UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 84, 85, 86

The same interlocutor provided the UK Home Office with the following information regarding the response of the State Agency for Child Rights to child trafficking:

"From the reports of Child Protection Unites [sic] throughout the country, it appears that so far for 2022, 25 cases of trafficked children or potential victims of trafficking have been taken into protection.

Child Protection Workers manage and monitor cases of children in need of protection including VT/VPT children. Pursuant to the Procedures Standards Evaluation, the Child Protection Worker is part of the formal interview of the children, and in cases where the child is found to be a VT/VPT take the case for protection according to the legislation in force, implementing the steps for case management. The Child Protection Worker, in cooperation with the Intersectional Technical group at the local level, draw up the Individual Child Protection Plan.

Every service is offered with complete professionalism, focusing on the child from the Child Protection Units. The package of services offered to victims of trafficking includes the following:

- Meeting the basic economic and social needs of children and families at risk or victims of economic exploitation, including Children in Street Situation.
- Family visits and psychological, social, and economic assessments
- Housing
- Psychological counselling
- Support with food packages



- Clothing
- Hygienic-sanitary package
- Medicines
- Mediation for employment
- Psycho-social service
- Mediation and assistance in conducting medical visits
- Registration in nurseries, kindergartens, schools
- Assistance for re-entering the school system
- Registration in civil status
- Free legal service
- Professional training
- Development of life skills during reintegration

SARPCH provides advice and technical support to CPU in case management of child victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and economically exploited children.

SARPCH has close cooperation with the Responsible Authority with the aim of supporting the cases of child victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and addressing the problems identified by the CPW during the process of managing these cases.

The State Agency for Children's Rights and Protection in cooperation with the Responsible authority, in the first half of 2022, held meetings in the municipalities of Kukes, Diber, Berat, Kamez, Korce, Bulqize, Elbasan, Vlore, Shkoder and Tirana with the employees OF THE Units of child protection as well as with local actors representing the Intersectional Technical Group. The purpose of the meeting was to closely discuss and promote cooperation at the local level with CPW, traffic specialists and other actors, who are part of the Intersectional Technical Group on the progress of the management of cases of the VT/VPT children and addressing the problems encountered in this direction.

From the meetings, it was recommended that there be a continuous need for joint meetings/trainings between the CPW, the police and traffic specialists regarding the strengthening of knowledge and the increase in capacities for issues related to child trafficking.

SARPCH in cooperation with OSCE has worked on the establishment of a data system for trafficking in order to provide disaggregated data for each case of identified trafficking victim/potential victim managed by the CPUs. The new indicators have been integrated into the new DCM of statistical data. The source of the data is the Ministry of the Interior and CPU to have disaggregated and unified data.

Recently, as part of the Anti-trafficking Month, SARPCH has requested the cooperation of the Child Protection Units to support activities planned by the Regional Anti-Trafficking Committee."

UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 87-89

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Terre des Hommes described the support they had provided to the Albanian government regarding child protection:

"Terre des Hommes, 11 October 2022 [...]"

In Albania we were the first to start a project in 2010, which was developed over 8 years, for the creation of child protection units at municipality level. We helped develop the State Agency for Child Protection and laws for child rights adopted in 2018.

We introduced the idea of a child protection unit, and piloted at a local level to demonstrate that it was worthy as there were no child protection workers, particularly at the local level. [...]"

**Q.** What type of intervention do you provide?

**A.** All interventions are based on a case management approach, meaning each centre has a social worker and psychologist, together with the child protection worker from municipality. Teams identify vulnerable persons and start an intervention plan. The case manager is assigned from our centre. The intervention plan is devised for the individual and whole family. In the centre we have educational catch up classes or reintegration for those who have dropped out of school, and we have after school classes for life skills for children. Also, movement, games and sports. The children lack behind socially as well as educationally. [...]"

**Q.** Do you have official assessments to see if strategies are working?

**A.** Yes we do, I mentioned we work with children and we also work with youth. We explore community issues that they want to solve and empower them to get involved, through youth engagement activities. Everything springs from the 5 pillars of wellbeing, networking, help, connection and feeling secure. All youth report an increased resilience to adverse factors. Whatever intervention is planned, it is to increase resilience of children, youth and adults. [...]"



Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 91, 92

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Homme. The report gave the following information regarding the link between social services and child protection services:

“In Albania, social services and child protection sectors are interlinked, particularly with regard to the prevention of human trafficking and protection of trafficking victims. In 2015, social services were decentralized to the local governments and recent legislation has helped to improve social service provision. Nevertheless, this legislation has yet to be harmonised or fully implemented, and financial funding remains a challenge [...]”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, “[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)”, November 2022, p. 14

The 2022 USDOL report on child labour in Albania summarised the agencies responsible for child labour law enforcement, as well as the mechanisms to coordinate government efforts:

“Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement [...]”

Ministry of Interior

Enforces laws related to the worst forms of child labor through protection officers. <sup>(9, 41)</sup> Coordinates operations of the Border Police and each of the Illicit Human Trafficking sections in the country’s 12 Regional Police Directorates through the General Directorate of State Police. <sup>(2, 6)</sup> Establishes the government’s policy on addressing human trafficking through the State Committee Against Trafficking in Persons, chaired by the Interior Minister. <sup>(42)</sup>

Office of the Prosecutor General

Investigates and prosecutes child trafficking cases through the Serious Crimes Prosecution Office. <sup>(2)</sup> [...]

If a child is subjected to trafficking for labor exploitation, the agency identifying the child refers the child to the police and state social services and then to an anti-trafficking shelter. <sup>(7, 45)</sup> The case may also be referred to local Child Protection Units, which can then connect the child to social services. <sup>(7, 40, 45, 46)</sup> [...] Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Office of the National Coordinator for the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ONAC)

Collaborates with regional counterparts to adopt standard protocols to guide anti-trafficking efforts. Oversees 12 regional anti-human trafficking committees that carry out local action plans in cooperation with civil society partners. <sup>(19)</sup> Chairs the National Referral Mechanism, which coordinates the identification, protection, referral, and rehabilitation of human trafficking victims between government and civil society organizations. Leads data collection and report writing for the National Database for Human Trafficking Victims/Potential Victims. <sup>(4, 19)</sup> Runs the Closed Case Task Force with the Serious Crimes Prosecution Office and Albanian State Police. <sup>(22)</sup> During the reporting period, ONAC identified 100 minors as victims or potential victims of child trafficking. In addition, ONAC worked with the anti- trafficking shelter “Vatra” to develop 33 trainings tailored for government officials responsible for carrying out mandates pertaining to the protection of at-risk children. <sup>(7)</sup> [...]

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. February 18, 2020. [...]

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. February 26, 2021. [...]

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. February 6, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. February 10, 2022. [...]

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. January 17, 2017. [...]

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. February 16, 2018. [...]

<sup>40</sup> Government of Albania. Instruction No. 10 on Cooperation and Intervention Procedures for Assisting Vulnerable Children for Institutions and Structures in Charge of Child Protection. February 25, 2015. [http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore\\_zyrtare/2015/PDF-2015/33-2015.Pdf](http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2015/PDF-2015/33-2015.Pdf)

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana. Reporting. January 22, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Embassy- Tirana official. E-mail communication to USDOL official. March 10, 2017. [...]

<sup>45</sup> CoE Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Reply from Albania to the Questionnaire for the evaluation of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the Parties. June 20, 2019. <https://rm.coe.int/090000168097fa81>



- 46 Government of Albania. Presentation of the “Matrix of Penalties” as a Transparency Platform of Decision – Making. State Labor Inspectorate and Social Services. January 14, 2019. <http://inspektoriatipunes.gov.al/presentation-of-the-matrix-of-penalties-as-a-transparency-platform-of-decision-making/>”

Source: US Department of Labor, “[2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Albania](#)”, 28 September 2022, pp. 3 and 5-7

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

“The State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child is the authority responsible for guaranteeing the functioning of the integrated protection system for unaccompanied children, inside and outside the territory of Albania. In cases where Albanian families leave their children abroad with the hope that the children will be able to obtain the nationality of the country and/or access education and work, the State Agency works with the families to find a solution but often has to place the children in shelters or foster families. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 111 of 6 March 2019 “On procedures and rules for the return and repatriation of children” aims to guarantee the rights of unaccompanied children and provide them with the highest possible protection, through the creation of an integrated system of protection and efficient coordination of all state institutions and non-profit organisations.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“We have a new child protection system in my opinion. So only 13 years of an existing real system with dedicated resources, with people, professionals, with laws and by-laws developed through years. So for me, it’s still fragile and still needs a lot of enforcement and strengthening in three directions. It’s professionals. We need more professionals, especially at the local level for the identification, prevention, and support. We need money, so we need financial support in order that these professionals to be engaged and to be on the field and to be reacting professionally. They need social care services with them [...]

“We have a national agenda that we call - it’s a strategic document. A very important one - National Agenda on Child Rights and Protection 2021-2026, which specifies measures dedicated to trafficking in line with the national strategy on anti-trafficking. So we have very good nice policies, and we have a lot of activities there to change social norms, to provide support and to identify victims of trafficking, to integrate them in the community. [...] We have a lot of new good improvements, but we need to improve.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Officer posited that:

“There is a child protection system in place that is very much involved. [...] the priority of UNICEF has been how to support the existing national child protection system to include this phenomenon of trafficking. Since 2019, we have been supporting a lot of capacity building of the child protection actors to better identify and respond to cases of child trafficking [...]

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes - Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] for the unaccompanied minors being repatriated, the system works, because it is stipulated on paper that if it doesn’t work or if something happens, whoever has responsibility [...] and has not done it is in big trouble. So people do it either because they fear the consequences of not doing it or because they are devoted social workers [...] So because there is this very clear – decision of the council of ministers, we call it – like in the hierarchy of law, you



have a constitution, you have the laws, and then you have the decision and the council's ministers. It [...] very clearly describes the process of when an unaccompanied Albanian minor is identified in the territory of a foreign country. It very much defines who is responsible for identifying who to contact, how long the time of the response will take, what are the steps to prepare to conduct the family evaluation before the child is repatriated, what are the steps to take to work with the family to prepare for the repatriation of the child, and how to organize the assisted return of the child up to the moment he reaches the family, and what is the plan for the family reintegration work once the child is back. So in terms of protocols, everything is very, very clear."

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation observed the following, regarding the efficacy of the child protection system:

"Yes. This is the child protection system, there is a law. I mentioned before, there is a law for protection of the rights of the children. And in this law, there are some articles that provide support for children victims of human trafficking. And this protection system, it is well organized. It is based on local level. Each local level municipality have protection workers and office near the municipalities. And they have a technical group to support all the cases that are referred that are in danger or suspicions or there are so in the risk for being trafficking or trafficked as well. And these technical group to refer the cases and do case management to all the cases [...] mostly our NGO civil society organization that support with services of the children and the victims in general because they so have projects so based on donor project, donors' money, international, that have projects to support the children.[...] But in general, so the coordination and the referral system and the support system works well."

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"There is a child protection system and established structures within each municipality in Albania. And there is also a shelter for child victims of human trafficking in Albania, which provides emergency support to the children."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 2.3.3.2 Alternative care for children without parental care

• Refer also to [2.4.6 Alternative care for children without parental care – limitations on page 148](#).

#### Desk review material

During an interview with the Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection stated the following regarding alternative care:

"Child protection is realized through protection measures, interventions, aiming at the development and well-being of the child in the family environment or when, because of the best interest of the child, the latter may not be entrusted to parental care.

Then the child protection workers, together with police, provide protection for the child. Child protection workers apply protection measures if the child is at risk, regardless of whether they are a VOT or PVOT. Child protection workers decide whether the child will stay with the family or will be placed in alternative care."

UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 85- 86

In July 2022, an Alternative Report was prepared by the Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA/ECPAT Albania), together with the Tirana Youth Parliament, in response to the fifth and sixth official report of Albania, to be considered during 2022 by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. With regards to the child protection system in Albania, the report stated the following:



“The Government provides care and protection to most of the children deprived of a family environment. In 2021 the Government approved a national plan for the placement in foster care of all the children who currently are living under public residential care. [...]

In early 2010 and onwards Albania started to initiate few measures that could establish foster care as an alternative to institutionalisation. A decision of the Government paved the way for the system to be established, yet until late 2019, little had been done by the local government units to make fully functional foster care. The current system is based on the decentralization of services, deinstitutionalization of children and establishing of more community services, where a child is being supported and assisted in a family environment. Under the foster care can be placed not only children without parental care but also those children who come from neglected families, or are victims of violence, exploitation within family premises.

Currently in Albania, there are about 250 children in public residential centres, from 0 up to 18 years old, while another 400 children are placed in private residential centres, mostly run from NGOs. An analysis of data on the number of children placed in institutions as well as the dynamics of entering and leaving these institutions, shows that approximately 70% of the children come from poor families or families with social issues, 25% of them are abandoned since birth and 5% of them are accommodated in institutions for other reasons, including the repatriation of trafficked children and child workers. [...] In 2018, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection undertook the one-year initiative “Children First,” which aimed at drafting a need assessment report of the biological families in order to mediate for employment, social housing etc, so that children without parental care turn back in their families. To date, there is not a public report on the achievements of this initiative. Based on other counties’ experiences, Albania in addition to care services provided in public and private residential institutions, in 2018 approved a new bylaw that regulates foster care services for children in the families of other so-called family caregivers.”

Source: Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA/ECPAT Albania), “[Alternative report to the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)”, July 2022, pp. 10-11

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Yes, there are adequate local provisions, particularly accommodation and social care, for children who do not have parental care. Refer to UNICEF Albania for further details regarding the child protection system.

1 UNICEF, “[Child Protection System](#)”, undated

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Tjeter Vizion also indicated that:

“[...] In cases where the victim of trafficking is a minor there are only 2 choices, whether turning back and being assisted into the family of origin or assisted in the shelter after psycho-social assessment”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“[...] what happens now [...] is if a child is a victim of sexual abuse or trafficking or domestic violence and this happens in the family circle, so from the father or someone else in the family, what we do now is that if the family is the abuser, we immediately place the child in a residential care institution. And what should happen normally is the placing of foster care family who is trained, has the willingness, has the professional capacity to take care of the child. [...] We are still facing problems on identifying potential foster care families in local levels. So the local authorities are not able to provide a list of families who are potentially willing to provide care for children. And if you don’t have potential foster care list of families-- the first solution of a child without parental care is placing them in residential care institutions.”



Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same interviewee outlined current efforts by the Albanian government to establish alternative care for children without parental care:

“I can share now the Government of Albania is trying to transform this institution, at least to provide the models from residential care institutions into other alternative care like community centres to transform the daily services in order to empower the family and to reunite them with their children [...] they call, child and family support hubs; a professional foster care, so to pay parents to take care of children and to take a salary for that, not only just to volunteer but to be paid for that; and kinship care. [...] It means care by family members, so when their family members can provide support to children. The government is also establishing a small group homes or other alternative care. So we’re in the process. We started in 2019. So you can imagine how new we are in this process. [...] I think, will help also the mentality and the work on identifying professional foster care, for example, who are able, trained before, to take care of the victims. But this is the process, how has been starting. Now we are working on developing the models, piloting the models. So it’s a long way forward in the future.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Officer stated that:

“[Organisation providing accommodation and social care for children without parental care include] institutions that depend on the municipal state social services. You have some that also depend from the National Authority at the central level, especially in Tirana and the capital. And then you have also some civil society organizations that they provide some emergency services or services that are provided for specific categories of vulnerable children. In some cases, migrants or children, and accompany of separated children.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“For what we know so far, there have been no cases where the family has denied or has rejected welcoming the child. [...] Family ties are still strong in Albania. So strong that they force children into arranged marriages. So strong that they might send their children to serve in criminal gangs because they approached them. So you rarely see a child without parental care, unless the parents are dead - and then, either one of the grandparents will take them. Even if the parents are living, even within the Roma community, you’ll see it a lot, you have many, many, many cases when a grandmother is taking care of the children because parents have immigrated and have left them behind. So I’m not saying that these children are living in the very best conditions, but they are not left in the street.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation stated:

“[...] so we call it shelters or orphanages so for people that don’t have-- for children who don’t have parental care. There is only one shelter in this coalition that we have. It is in Elbasan. And it is provide support for children that are identified as potential victims of human trafficking and as well, two other shelters but rush shelter that we have and different and equal in Tirana support. So minors that are girls that are up to 14 years old in the shelters. So these are the possibilities for sheltering victims of human trafficking you know as well as the state center.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023



Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] there is also a shelter for child victims of human trafficking in Albania, which provides emergency support to the children. The shelter aims to provide alternative ways of care, such as, for example, for the children being placed back to their families in case their families were not the ones who trafficked them, or finding alternative methods of support. [...] In the case where children don't have any parental care, they will be under the authority and responsibility of the government of the state, where they will be placed in the house for children with no parental support and stay there until the age of 18 years old. After that, there are sporadic programs that they can help adults to move into rented apartments. And the rent might be supported by the municipality grant in Albania, but that will last up to a year. And what happens after this year ends? Usually, they need more support.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.4 Barriers to protection

### 2.4.1 Legislation and implementation – limitations

#### 2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation

• Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 134](#).

### Desk review material

A European Commission report of November 2023 stated:

“The improved legislative framework for victims [of trafficking], including amendments to the Criminal Procedural Code, is yet to be implemented.”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p. 46

A July 2023 study produced by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Centre for the Study of Democracy noted that:

“... [T]he Albanian government declared it would not give up on another thorny economic programme – ‘fiscal amnesty’, under which any Albanian or foreign citizen can deposit up to €2 million in non-declared money into the national banking system, enjoying legal immunity and a tax of only 5–10%. The EU and the International Monetary Fund both denounced an earlier version of this law [...] International stakeholders’ main concern is that the scheme provides criminals with a platform to launder the proceeds of crime, such as [...] human trafficking.”

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Centre for the Study of Democracy, [“Cash Is King: Impact of the Ukraine War on Illicit Financial Flows in South Eastern Europe”](#), July 2023

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons in Albania report outlined various factors that affected the application and implementation of trafficking related legislation.

“[...] GRETA, prosecutors, and other observers reported district prosecutors did not have the specialized experience and capacity to prosecute trafficking cases successfully. GRETA and observers reported authorities confused overlapping elements of “exploitation of prostitution” and trafficking and at times applied the lesser charge because it required less specialization and time or due to the false belief that trafficking crimes required a transnational element. [...] Limited resources, capacity, and reports of constant turnover within law enforcement created additional obstacles to maintaining capacity to investigate trafficking, including a lack of resources to investigate trafficking through virtual means.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania”](#), 15 June 2023



The 2023 Nations in Transit report by Freedom House noted that targeting by human traffickers had occurred after the identities and addresses of victims of sexual abuse were published in the media.

“While Albania generally complies with international human rights instruments, the country still fails to uphold fundamental rights as crucial values underpinning a liberal democratic society. For example, a BIRN study discovered that approximately 320 cases of sexual abuse occurred in 2020–22, and the victims’ identities, families, personal information, and home addresses were widely published in the media, [...] leading to [...] targeting by human traffickers.”

Source: Freedom House, “[Nations in Transit 2023 - Albania](#)”, 24 May 2023

During an interview conducted by the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, SHKEJ noted the following:

“[...] SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** We have spoken to government departments about the legal framework to support VOT. We were told that there is a comprehensive framework in place, do you think it is implemented?

**A.** They may have told you about the framework, but did they tell you that the budget is zero. We have laws and frameworks and we have strategic plans, we have everything but they are not monitored, they have zero budget and change every 2 or 3 years. We have not, as a civil society, seen any evaluation report to show what they have done within this framework [...].”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 68, 83

In October 2022, the IOM highlighted the following regarding the need for support with implementation of legislation:

“New relevant legislation was approved in 2021 such as the law 79/2021 “On Aliens” (developed in 2020-2021 with IOM support) and Law No. 10/2021 “On asylum in the Republic of Albania”, further approximated with the EU acquis and EU directives, that regulate the procedure for pre-screening and processing of foreigners. Its aim being to differentiate among persons on the move, such as asylum seekers, unaccompanied and separated minors, victims or potential victims of trafficking and undocumented migrants, in order to provide the appropriate assistance to them. [...] However, continuous support for the approximation of legislation with the EU acquis and EU directives, as well as with other international standards, is needed, especially with regard to their implementation and the development of secondary legislation.”

Source: IOM, “[IOM Strategy for Albania \(2022-2025\)](#)”, October 2022, pp. 6-7

The Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar’s research suggested in 2021 that Albania’s law to counter organised crime, including trafficking, by confiscating property had had little success:

“[...] Regardless of its efforts to seize and confiscate OC [organised crime] property, Albania remains unsuccessful in this area due to the following: i) the available number and value of seized and confiscated assets does not correspond to the level of criminality in the country, ii) the deployed mechanisms have practically failed in their mission to confiscate assets, managing only to temporarily seize them, and iii) the decreasing number of criminal proceedings carried out for money laundering reflect the poor performance of state institutions in this regard.”

Source: Western Balkans Organized Crime Radar, “[Falling Short of Commitments: How Western Balkans Governments Fight Organised Crime](#)”, February 2021, pp. 20

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Valbona Lenja, the following challenges were identified by study participants, including representatives of the NCATS:

“*Challenges related to legal aid:* This challenges was mentioned by 14% of the NCATS participants. The challenge was categorized as related to state institutions staff’s lack of professionalism, total lack of funding. According to one of the participants, this challenge is not related to the existence of legal provisions but mostly to their implementation, to the failure of the Prosecution Office to inform the victim, including on the assigned prosecutor and on whether the court has made a decision.”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Author: Valbona Lenja, “[Services - To the Survivors or to the System? Access to and quality of services for victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania](#)”, 2021, p.27

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“[...] [I]n Albania there have been some positive developments in recent years in improving legislation addressing trafficking, the rights of victims of criminal offences in general, including the position of victims of trafficking. In the framework of the Justice Reform are adopted some laws that regulate special aspects of access to justice, including some specific laws on specific fields and categories, such as the organic laws of justice institutions (law reform package), Law on the Protection of Children Rights, Juvenile Justice Code, amendments to the law on measures against domestic violence, some other laws on the social service reform, etc. This indicates that Albania already has a consolidated practice of legal initiatives that regulate the protection of specific categories.

Despite the progress made, the implementation of this legislation in an effective manner remains a challenge. In addition to other factors, the lack of effectiveness in the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation has also been influenced by the fact that Albania still does not have a dedicated law for the fight against human trafficking and the legislation remains fragmented.

In order to improve the effectiveness, there is a need for a special law against trafficking in human beings focused on the protection of victims of trafficking and to increase capacities in terms of professionals and financial resources. The reasons for a specific law against TIP are explained in detail in the Study Report of D&E<sup>1</sup>. The initiative for the new law against human trafficking is part of the National Action Plan<sup>2</sup> against Human Trafficking (2021-2023) as one of the main measures in the section of drafting and changing legislation. Currently we are waiting for the steps that will be taken by the Government institutionally to continue the process of drafting the new law.”

<sup>1</sup> Different & Equal, Study Report on the Need of Drafting a Special Law for Protection of Victims in Albania, 24 October 2019

<sup>2</sup> Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 670, dated 10.11.2021 For an addition to the Decision No.1140, dated 24.12.2020, of the Council of the Ministers, “On the approval of the Strategy on the Fight against Organised Crime and Serious Crimes 2021-2024 and the Action Plan 2021-2022, <https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/VKM-nr-670-date-10.11.2021-Plani-Kombetar-Antitrafik-2021-2023.pdf>”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

With regards to the gap between the law and its implementation, the same interlocutor stated in written communication with Asylos:

“It seems that there is a marked difference between what is written and foreseen in the laws and the implementation in practice. More specifically, regarding the legislation that regulates the fight against trafficking and the protection of victims, it has been confirmed by various international reports that Albania has problems related to the implementation of the law in practice. Some of the influencing factors in this direction are:

- Lack of adequate human resources to deal with trafficking and to guarantee effective protection for victims of trafficking (There are no permanent specialists in key positions and the high turnover of professional cause the lack of knowledge about the phenomenon of trafficking);
- High level of poverty and lack of economic growth in society;
- During the last years, the recent events in Albania related to the earthquake of 2019, COVID 19, as well as the political situation, have caused a decrease of vigilance toward trafficking in human being, as well as the fight against human trafficking not being considered a priority.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal and Tjeter Vizion both highlighted, based on NCATS information, that:

“Related to access to justice, despite the legal improvements, the practical implementation of new law no. 111/2017 “On legal aid guaranteed by the state”, toward the victims of trafficking remain a challenge. The law requires the completion of a procedure with certain requests for documents, which cannot be provided by victims of trafficking, both for primary legal aid and secondary legal aid. NGOs authorized to provide free legal aid will benefit from the state scheme only for providing primary legal aid and not for the secondary legal aid that a trafficking victim needs most. The list of lawyers engaged in providing secondary legal aid does not represent a group of lawyers specialized in representing and protecting the interests of the victims of trafficking. The recent changes (law no 35/2017) to the Criminal Procedure Code related to the competence of dealing with cases of trafficking, which has passed to the Prosecutor’s Offices and District Courts, has made the work of providing free legal assistance difficult because there is a lack of specialized capacities and structures at the district level to guarantee such service.”

Sources: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023, Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

In addition, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, explained in written communication with Asylos that:

“Primary legal aid assistance is only related to counselling, document drafting, legal guidance to claim rights in the administration, as well as preparation of files for deposition in court. [...] Secondary legal aid is very necessary, especially for minors to be represented in the court or in the prosecution office from the beginning according to the law. But it is also very important for adults as well to benefit from the secondary legal aid as by themselves they are not able financially and morally to afford the process [...] Justice institutions, including the Courts, the Prosecutor’s Office and the Police, continue to have a mentality and behaviour oriented towards the perpetrator and less towards the victim. According to the rights provided in the Code of Criminal Procedure, the victim can give his testimony through video/audio, but there is lack of the means in the district level courts to realize this. According to their rights provided in the Code of Criminal Procedure, the victim can give his testimony through video/audio, but there is lack of the means in the district level courts to realize this.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, stated that:

“There have [been] a lot of efforts to improve the legislation [...] A lot of efforts from international organizations. Again from the state has been this kind of willingness to have a process of improvement. I think now we have a very good one. What should be revised, it’s the package of services dedicated to the victims and then prosecution. [...] I think that mostly what is lacking and what needs to be strengthened and more present is the package of the social services dedicated to victims are not enough. And these need to be regulated in law and then to be further supported by the local authorities which are responsible. Just to explain for you to make an example. For example, the economic aid for the victims of trafficking is only €30 per month<sup>11</sup>, and this is legally written. So you can imagine [...] what victims with €30 per month can do. Nothing. It’s nothing. Even to have a normal life, a regular life, it’s quite impossible to live with €30 per month. Adding the vulnerability of trafficking and the risks and all the necessities of today, it’s totally not possible to recover from that situation.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

11 Note that the monthly financial assistance available to victims of trafficking increased from 3000 Lek to 9000 Lek in 2022. See [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 193](#).



The same source stated:

“[...] So free legal support and the legal orientation should be provided by the state. But up to now, in my knowledge, most of the cases are supported by programs of international NGOs or local NGOs who are working with the victims of trafficking [...]”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Even though the European Commission (2004) suggests that trafficking victims have the right to protection despite their willingness to testify and that their penalisation should be avoided at any cost, evidence from my study conducted in 2019 [based on interviews including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims] showed that Albanian victims were prosecuted for their reluctance to cooperate with authorities [...]”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“[...] In general terms, most of the existing legislation in Albania, faces more or less the same challenge, which is the implementation of the law. I mean, they have a good legal framework, with many provisions in place, but the challenge remain with the implementation of these provisions. And for human trafficking, it is the same challenge. [...] when it comes to quality and expansion of services and covering not only the main urban areas but also ensuring services in rural and remote areas. [...] gaps are also related to availability of sustainable financial resources and institutionalized capacities of the different service providers. In the social services area, including response for trafficking, so far, the government relies heavily on external funding, especially from international organizations. [...] So for example, if there are some services that are established, after a few years if the donor changes priority or believes that now it’s time for the state to continue to take the financial burden of specific services, there is some disruption or the quality of the service is compromised.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated:

“Lately, I don’t know [about cases of judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked] [...] but in the past, yes [...] The trafficker is condemned for the crime of trafficking exploitation for sexual purposes. The victim is convicted then for exercising prostitution. But I think it has been something like five to seven years ago. Nowadays, we don’t have much of this because also we have had judiciary system [...] reform going on. It’s six years now it’s been started implementation, but it’s not yet concluded, meaning that before the crime of trafficking was under severe crimes court [...] - the main problem here is to distinguish a victim of trafficking exploited for sexual exploitation. And to tell it from a victim of trafficking-- from somebody who is exercising prostitution [...] You do have both realities, and in the eyes of the police, of the prosecutors, 99%, they’re all prostitutes rather than potential victims of trafficking for exploitation. So they need a training, the prosecutors themselves. They are not aware of [...] how the organized crime and trafficking works [...]”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[...] this is a question even for us, and so we have this good legislation and we do a lot of training, for example, as a centre and coalition to other employees that work in order to improve their knowledge regarding legislation because there is a problem in the implementation of legislation. It is a problem in Albania as it is related to the law capacities that the human and financial resources are in Albania because the law, it is not based on a strong infrastructure and structure being implemented as being efficient [...] So this is a problem. There are a lot of problems related, for example, to access justice for the victim.[...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] what appears to be the main challenge is sometimes the implementation of some of those provisions that are related to trafficking, both in terms of protection and prosecution of trafficking charges [...] From what I understood, the law enforcement side, they are also very much under-resourced. [...] let's take the UK case. These cases need to be very well-resourced because you're talking about arguably operations across various jurisdictions. And the conversations that I had with law enforcement representatives, the law is there, but then there are challenges in implementation and one of the challenges is also related to resources above everything else.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

“[...] [judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked] can happen also because if [victims of trafficking] are charged under the prostitution clause, that means that they would be seen as offenders rather than as victims. So yes, there is that gap in the law that would unfortunately allow for victims to be seen as purely offenders.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“I will answer it both from my personal experience working with victims and then also from what the data tells us. From my personal experience, we have seen that, usually, law enforcement-- or how effective the legislation in place is in terms of protecting victims of human trafficking. It hasn't been effective because we have seen an increase in numbers of human trafficking in Albania. And we cannot say that that was as a result of better identification procedures because the government, at the moment, does not fund any identification operations or mobile units in Albania.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

The same interlocutor commented that:

“[...] In terms of enforcing the law by the police, usually, what we've seen is that the police we've seen the implementation gap between the legislation mostly when it comes to protecting victims after they've been identified as victims of human trafficking, such as victims receiving compensations when they also testify against their traffickers and they win the trial. Also victims being protected and provided basic social support and assistance, which I think this is where we see an implementation gap. But maybe that's also a gap within the legislation itself, where the legislation is not very well developed. So I don't know if I can frame it as an implementation or legislation gap.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

With regards to legislation relating to victim compensation, the same interlocutor stated:

“[...] according to law, victims of human trafficking, they are entitled to compensation. But because of limitations in the law, and not having a dedicated structured law generally to protect victims and refer to victims of human trafficking, even in the cases where victims of human trafficking, they have won the rights to win compensation, they weren’t compensated, because there is no part in the Albanian legislation to define who should be responsible to compensate the victim and from where the compensation will come. And even when the trafficker is responsible to compensate the victim, there are no legislation measures in place to get this money from the trafficker or to take the property of the trafficker and to give it to the victim of human trafficking entitled to compensation.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

#### 2.4.1.2 Children – limitations in legislation and implementation

- Refer also to [2.4.5 Child protection system and anti-trafficking efforts – limitations on page 143](#).

#### Desk review material

A European Commission report of November 2023 stated:

“Coordination mechanisms [in relation to the legal and policy framework on the rights of the child] need to be significantly improved to ensure full implementation of the legal framework in the areas of child trafficking.”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p. 37

The same report noted:

“All forms of child sexual abuse online should be criminalised and prosecuted.”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p. 5

The same report further observed that:

“A comprehensive legal framework on the status and responsibilities of social workers needs to be adopted. Further efforts are needed to ensure an adequate and systematic response to all types of violence against children. Albania lacks legislation criminalising travel companies that facilitate opportunities to engage in the sexual exploitation of children.”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p. 38

The USDOS 2023 Trafficking in Persons report noted in relation to offences against minors that:

“[...] some authorities prosecuted defendants with ‘disgraceful acts against minors,’ ‘sexual harassment,’ or ‘sexual intercourse with violence’ instead of trafficking.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania”](#), 15 June 2023

During an interview conducted by the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, representatives of the OSCE noted that current legislation does not address internal trafficking of children:

“[...] OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** How are VOT protected in law?

**A.** There is a gap in legislation as internal trafficking of children is not addressed. In the School of Magistrates manual child trafficking is addressed under other family-based offences, for example, abuse and so forth.



Disabled adults, children and women can access the legal protection framework. There are provisions for VOT in law.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 23

In an interview with the UK Home Office, the Kukes Mobile Unit (managed by Tjeter Vizion) suggested a lack of alignment in legislation between Albania and Kosovo, in relation to identifying victims and potential victims of trafficking among minors who cross the border from Albania to Kosovo:

“Mobile unit, Kukes, 7 October 2022 [...]

An issue we encountered in the summer at the border was related to minors crossing from Albania to Kosovo. Kosovo legislation handles cases differently. If a minor crosses the border into Kosovo they are deemed to have committed an offence. But when we have interviewed that minor, we find that, under Albanian legislation, they are actually a VOT or PVOT as they are exploited. There will be trafficking in other EU countries. So there should be some unification of legislation in that regard.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 55

A June 2022 UNODC report on trafficking in South-Eastern Europe stated that:

“[...] in Albania, “child sexual abuse material” is not defined in the law and as a consequence, cases of online sexual abuse may not be prosecuted adequately [...]”

Source: UNODC, “[Exploitation and Abuse: The Scale and Scope of Human Trafficking in South Eastern Europe](#)”, 13 June 2022

IOM’s 2022-2025 strategy for Albania, published in October 2022, detailed the following regarding laws relating to child protection and their implementation:

“[...] [C]ontinuous support for the approximation of legislation with the EU acquis and EU directives, as well as with other international standards, is needed, especially with regard to their implementation and the development of secondary legislation.”

Source: IOM, “[IOM Strategy for Albania \(2022-2025\)](#)”, October 2022, pp. 6-7

In its report “Albania Child Notice”, published in 2022, UNICEF noted that:

“[...] Albania lacks legislation criminalizing travel companies that explicitly or implicitly facilitate opportunities for engaging in sexual exploitation with children. While this does not mean that a company cannot be held accountable if such offences occur (e.g., through a fine or loss of legal personality) there have been no indications that this has happened.[...] Like other Western Balkans countries, Albania has no child protection plan to address child sexual exploitation in tourism. Sexual exploitation is a separate objective in the new draft child rights’ agenda, but not specifically for the tourism sector.”

Sources: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#),” 2022, pp. 21, 93

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Judge Albana Boksi and Dr Arta Mandro, regarding the compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the *Acquis Communautaire* of the European Union relating to trafficking in human beings, it was noted that:

“Pursuant to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 5), it is noted that Article 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania explicitly provides only the prohibition of forced labour and does not specifically provide the prohibition of slavery, servitude or the prohibition of trafficking in human beings, by considering the latter as equivalent with one of the forms of slavery.

[...] Although the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings is widely provided in Article 110/a (trafficking in adults) and Article 128/b (child trafficking) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, this comprehensive analysis, pursuant to this document, has identified several shortcomings, which we recommend to be taken into consideration by the legislator and thus be in full compliance with Directive 2011/36:



*Firstly*, in contrast to the provision that stipulates trafficking in adult persons, the article sentencing child trafficking (Article 128/b of the CC) does not mention the words “both within and beyond the territory of the Republic of Albania”. As analysed in this study, the inclusion of internal trafficking in the content of Article 128/b of the Criminal Code is considered a necessity and is recommended to be taken into consideration by the Albanian legislator.

*Secondly*, there is a provision in the CC that specifically provides punishment in cases when a child is exploited for prostitution purposes (Article 114, second paragraph of the CC). Based on the content of this provision, it can be concluded that encouragement to exercise prostitution, mediation or receipt of compensation as a result of exploiting a child for prostitution purposes, is not considered as trafficking, but as “exploitation for prostitution purposes”.

This part of the provision is in violation of international standards and the GRETA recommendations.

[...] *Thirdly*, “coercion, exploitation, encouragement or use of a child to work, to obtain income, to beg or to perform actions that damage his/her mental and/or physical development or education”, is not considered as trafficking but as child abuse.

*Fourthly*, there is a provision in the Criminal Code of the republic of Albania that provides the punishment in cases of “Intentional request to an adult or child to leave the territory of the republic of Albania for purposes of obliging him/her to enter into marriage”, which does not qualify as trafficking, although this coercion is exercised against a child.”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Authors: Judge Albana Boksi, Dr Arta Mandro, “[Compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union in the area of the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)”, 2021

A 2021 ECPAT International / CRCA/ECPAT Albania briefing noted a number of gaps in Albanian legislation with regard to sexual exploitation and online abuse of children:

“Despite widespread Internet usage throughout the country and data indicating that children in Albania may be vulnerable to online sexual exploitation, gaps persist in the Albanian legislative response. Under Albanian law, there is no definition of ‘child sexual abuse materials’ and offences such as grooming and sexual extortion are not criminalised. In addition, Albania does not impose any legal requirement on Internet Service Providers to block, filter or report child sexual abuse materials, unless they are commercial in nature.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Republic of Albania (2009). Law on Electronic Commerce. Article 20.

Source: ECPAT International and CRCA/ECPAT Albania, “[Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Online: Survivors’ Perspectives in Albania](#)”, 2021

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“[...] [I]n Albania there have been some positive developments in recent years in improving legislation addressing trafficking, the rights of victims of criminal offences in general, including the position of victims of trafficking. In the framework of the Justice Reform are adopted some laws that regulate special aspects of access to justice, including some specific laws on specific fields and categories, such as the [...] Law on the Protection of Children Rights, Juvenile Justice Code, [...] This indicates that Albania already has a consolidated practice of legal initiatives that regulate the protection of specific categories.

Despite the progress made, the implementation of this legislation in an effective manner remains a challenge.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes - Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“The problem is the state cannot provide much of the services that this child needs. That’s the gap. Not the fact that is the law known or are the roles known or do people know their job and how to do their job and whom to call, and how to report and how to collect information and how to refer to the other institutions. Everybody knows, because they’re in a lot of, as I said, not only technical support from ourselves, but also a lot of organizations have provided



trainings, and explain the things and contributed to set up very clear structures about it. The thing is, the fact that the services are not there. Meaning the social department at the municipality level, yeah, all they can do is provide food to the family, and that's it."

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

## 2.4.2 Identification – limitations

\*The original research terms of reference did not include research questions seeking general information about identification of victims of trafficking as a potential barrier to protection, however, this section has been included as it corresponds to a theme that emerged from the research findings.

### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

"[...] [C]ombatting trafficking in human beings remain[s] [an area] in which additional results are needed [...] The identification of potential victims remains inadequate within Albanian territory and among vulnerable migrants entering the country and those accommodated in reception centres."

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, pp. 5, 46

The same report stated:

"Border and Migration Police officers should increase their ability to identify vulnerable refugees and migrants with specific needs. [...] On asylum procedures, the capacities of the Border and Migration Police to identify and refer people with specific needs are still insufficient. [...]"

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, pp. 51, 52

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report stated:

"[...] The government maintained a multidisciplinary NRM with SOPs for identifying and referring victims to services, though observers reported it only met once in 2022 resulting in limited coordination."

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

The same report observed:

"The government continued to inconsistently implement screening efforts for vulnerable populations – particularly migrants, asylum-seekers, Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, and children – and mobile victim identification units (MIU) remained underfunded and understaffed despite identifying most of the victims every year. [...] MIUs in nine regions, consisting of social workers from NGOs and police officers, identified most of the victims every year, but the units' sustainability was uncertain due to the lack of permanent staff and resources [...]"

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

The same report also stated:

"Experts reported police did not participate consistently in the MIUs [mobile victim identification units] despite signing an MOU that formalized their participation and law enforcement rarely initiated investigations when civil society identified a potential victim. Observers continued to report border police lacked resources, interpreters, and knowledge to screen consistently or implement SOPs for migrants and asylum-seekers. [...] As in previous years, ASP [Albanian State Police] did not screen individuals in commercial sex for indicators of trafficking during raids and investigations of commercial sex establishments [...] Due to inconsistent screening procedures and as it had



reported in previous years, the government may have detained or deported some potential victims, including women in commercial sex, migrants, and asylum-seekers. [...]"

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

During interviews as part of a UK Home Office fact-finding mission, UNICEF and Different and Equal both discussed identification of victims of trafficking:

"UNICEF, 5 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Do you know if police are trained to identify male VOT?

**A.** We are not aware of specific training. Maybe one of the other implementing partners complete specific training. Not a lot of cases are identified or referred by the police. They are mostly identified by other means. [...]"

Different and Equal, 5 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** What about male victims, are police trained to identify male VOT?

**A.** Yes, although there are less cases identified by the police. Most are identified and referred by child protection workers and our mobile units. We have one established Mobile Unit in Tirana and one in Shkodra and a considerable number of males were identified by these mobile units."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.13, 19

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, OSCE highlighted several concerns including around the quality of training to identify victims of trafficking that the police receive, and issues relating to identification of male and female VoTs.

"OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]"

[...] **Q.** Are the police trained to identify VOT?

**A.** There is a lot of training for the police to identify VOT, but the quality of the training is an issue. We are working with police to institutionalise the training and conduct early, needs-based training planning. There are no longer dedicated officers for VOT.

There is no proper calendar of training. The police have received training but there is a lack of awareness of the NRM. [...]"

**Q.** If a VOT went to the police would they receive protection?

**A.** There is a big gap. For example, recently 7 non-Albanian sex workers were arrested in Albania. Full information on the girls were reported in the media, including their identities. The media identified them as prostitutes.

**Q.** Are police trained to identify male VOT?

**A.** Despite any training the police receive referrals to the NRM must be improved, so effectiveness of their training is a big issue. Women are only proactively identified by the police after they been arrested for prostitution. Most cases that the police have were referred by mobile units.

**Q.** What reintegration support do male VOT receive?

**A.** [...] However, few adult males seek protection from the police. Most men are trafficked for labour exploitation. OSCE is working with the state labour department around the identification of victims. There are a handful of cases of men exploited in labour being referred to the police by shelters, rather than self-referring."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.23

NISMA ARSIS pointed to a lack of recognition among the police of the importance of having the status of a victim or potential victim of trafficking:

"NISMA ARSIS, 5 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Do you know why the police don't see the children as VOT or potential VOT (PVOT)?

**A.** There is no official data publicly shared about the number of victims of trafficking or the potential of victims of trafficking in Albania. The reporting mechanism is functional for the authorities but more efforts should be considered in the feedback process about the measures taken for the cases of VOT/PVOT. Also, there is a tendency to accept the indicators of trafficking from police officers neglecting the importance of having that status (related to the services dedicated to that status).

**Q.** Do the police receive training to identify VOT?

**A.** They have been provided with lots of training. Over the past 5 years, UNICEF, OSCE and other organisations have provided a wide range, as well as in-house training. It's a matter of engagement."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.30

During an interview as part of the UK Home Office fact-finding mission, Caritas indicated that they had trained police on victim identification, however they suggested that identification of victims and potential victims of trafficking is not a priority for the government.

Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Do police have sufficient training to identify VOT or PVOT?

**A.** We worked a lot from 2014 to 2016 to increase the capacity of the police. We have 12 regions in Albania and 12 anti-trafficking regional committees. Most training is in Tirana, but we went for the first time to rural areas to work with social services, police, and so on, training on how to identify and locate VOT. Always you need to invest. We produced a manual for academia of police. But it's not enough, the project finishes and it's not enough. Identification of VOT/PVOT is very low. Change within the national co-ordinator is needed but it is not a big priority for the government."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.52

During an interview as part of the UK Home Office fact-finding mission, SHKEJ discussed police challenges in identifying victims of trafficking and recognising the signs of children being at risk of trafficking.

"SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Do you think police find it difficult to identify VOT?

**A.** I do not think the police are trained to identify VOT in the community. There are now a lot of younger police so it's my hope this will change. The police inspector of the area, I don't see they are well trained. When talking with schools they (the school) can be the first to identify a child is at risk. There is not a connection between all the actors. We have these meetings, but the police and teachers, they never come. If we see that a child is not ok and has different behaviours we go to the school and see why the child is like that, but not the police.

**Q.** Because they don't recognise those people are at risk?

**A.** They don't recognise the signs.

**Q.** Some children might be trafficked and might be forced to engage in criminal activities, if the police encounter a child in a criminal situation would police consider them as trafficked?

**A.** I don't know, we have police on the border. The police say whether the child is at risk of being a criminal or not, and then they return the child to their family. But there is no follow up. Police won't go to the home to see if the child is ok.

**Q.** Have you ever encountered a case that you might have referred to the police and they have ended up in another trafficking situation?

**A.** As an example, I don't know if he's still here but he worked for the US Embassy as a trainer for the Albanian police. His wife was giving lessons in Tirana and she saw a girl whom she suspected was trafficked. The girl was working on the streets, not being looked after by her mother. The wife called me and we chatted with the girl and we saw that the situation was very difficult, she wouldn't speak in front of her mother, and then she said that sometimes men come to see her. We told the police and they said we will look into it, but we need 2 weeks, we said that's too long, the girl was only 15. After 3 days the police made some investigation and then they arrested the mother for pimping the girl. But they made a big mistake when they called us as the mother saw us, and she knew we were the ones who reported her to the police. The mother went to prison for 3 months and the girl was in a safe house, not a children's home. After 3 months the mother was released and took the girl and she ended up on streets again."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 81- 82

IOM reported in 2022 that:

"Identification remains a challenge, especially within the refugee and migrant population."

Source: IOM, "[IOM Strategy for Albania \(2022-2025\)](#)", October 2022, p. 10

UNICEF's 2022 report "Albania Child Notice", referred to analysis by OSCE of the authorities' response to 45 cases of potential child trafficking between 2016 and 2019 that revealed only one of the children was conclusively identified as a victim of trafficking, meanwhile exploitation continued in a number of cases where children had been identified as potential victims of trafficking:

"Data gathered from child protection workers, analysed by the OSCE in 2016–2019 reviewed 45 cases of potential victims of child trafficking: 31 girls and 14 boys. Most (41 children) had no international trafficking connection but were found through Albanian night clubs and bars. The research found evidence of coordination in the authorities' response but that in 39 of the 45 cases identified as potential victims, only one was conclusively identified as a victim. In 11 of these cases (eight were sexually exploited girls) the exploitation continued after identification."

Source: UNICEF, "[Albania-Child-Notice-2021](#)," 2022, p.96

### Interview material

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

"[...] We need more professionals, especially at the local level for the identification, prevention, and support. We need money, so we need financial support in order that these professionals to be engaged and to be on the field and to be reacting professionally. They need social care services with them. If they identify a case, they need an emergency shelter. They need support for the parents, support for the child, trauma rehabilitation, and all the other services. And they need a better responding mechanism. What it means is that coordination needs to be between not only the child protection unit, but with schools, with health centres, with police, with informal education agencies. So this is a responsibility not only of the child protection unit in itself, but all the other sectors who are very important on the identification. If a child goes to the health centre injured with trauma, with visible violence elements, for example, and there are elements of exploitation, for example, they should be reported by the health sector. If the child is missing at school for one month, two months, but he's around the school and the school identifies and knows that, they should report that. So I don't think it's a responsibility only of the child protection system. They are the main authority who are coordinating and providing all the necessary steps. They know everything, for example. But they cannot do it alone. They need all these sectors to be part and to be coordinated with each other. Otherwise, it's impossible from only one agency and one authority to react [...]"

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

"Out of the 100, let's say, average cases each year that are identified in Albania as victim or potential victim of trafficking, only 20% might be [...] identified by the police. Police is there usually [...] through your mobile units, fieldwork, or referrals it might have had from peer organizations abroad. Police is there only when you call them. [...]"

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

"One thing that is not very effective it is a lack of identification of victims of human trafficking by the state institution even [though] we have standard operating procedures. And there are nine institutions that are involved in this state so procedures such as police, social agencies in Albania, and other education health institutions, etc, but there is not so much effective identification. For identification of victims, all of our centers have set up some mobile units that are supported by our organizations. And this mobile unit act to identify potential victims of human trafficking among vulnerable groups in Albania. And they collaborate with police and social structures in order to identify and refer these cases for services [...] There is very low identification. For example, during 2022, Vatra has identified, so we have supported, 53 new victims. So about 50% of the victims that have been supported [by NCATS] has been supported by Vatra. And from this cases, more than 80% of the cases have been identified through mobile units



that collaborate with state institutions. And 20% of them have been identified by other local institutions that are responsible for identification.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“In terms of enforcing the law by the police, usually, what we’ve seen is that the police has not been proactive in identifying [...] the victims or potential victims of human trafficking.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 2.4.3 Justice system – limitations

#### Desk review material

A European Commission report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

“Investigations and prosecutions are not conducted consistently with a focus on the victim. A gender-responsive approach to access to justice for victims should be promoted. Anti-trafficking efforts should increase, in particular by strengthening the capacity of border police to identify and refer to the prosecution service cases of trafficking [...]”

Source: European Commission, [“Albania 2023 Report”](#), 8 November 2023, p. 46

In its 2023 report on Trafficking in Persons, USDOS noted the leniency of sentencing for trafficking crimes in past years:

“[...] In past years, judges sentenced some traffickers to lenient sentences, such as probation which undercut efforts to hold traffickers accountable, weakened deterrence, created potential security and safety concerns for victims, and was not equal to the seriousness of the crime.

[...] GRETA, prosecutors, and other observers reported district prosecutors did not have the specialized experience and capacity to prosecute trafficking cases successfully. GRETA and observers reported authorities confused overlapping elements of “exploitation of prostitution” and trafficking and at times applied the lesser charge because it required less specialization and time or due to the false belief that trafficking crimes required a transnational element. Similarly, some authorities prosecuted defendants with “disgraceful acts against minors,” “sexual harassment,” or “sexual intercourse with violence” instead of trafficking. Limited resources, capacity, and reports of constant turnover within law enforcement created additional obstacles to maintaining capacity to investigate trafficking, including a lack of resources to investigate trafficking through virtual means. [...] observers reported lawyers did not always have knowledge on victims’ rights, courts did not consistently use victim-centered techniques, and the government often did not provide victims with necessary legal documents.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania”](#), 15 June 2023

The same report noted that:

“Victims could obtain restitution through criminal proceedings or compensation through civil suits. However, judges generally rejected restitution in criminal proceedings and civil suits required victims to submit new testimonies, causing re-traumatization. Additionally, civil courts dismissed or closed civil suits if criminal courts dropped the case or acquitted the defendant. Courts granted compensation to only two victims in cases from 2010 and 2018 but did not disburse compensation to the victims – the case from 2018 remained under appeal.”

Source: US Department of State, [“2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania”](#), 15 June 2023

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding facilitating and guaranteeing access to compensation for victims of human trafficking, that:



“Compensation through the state scheme is regulated in law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009 “On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against wealth”, as amended.[...] There are only two cases with a Court decision in favor of the victim assisted by the “Different & Equal” Center in cooperation with the Center for Legal Initiatives that have managed to win court proceedings for compensation as victims of trafficking, one case in 2010 (worth 40,000 euros) and another case in 2018 (worth 44,000 euros – concluded at first instance and currently on appeal). Even for these two cases, it was not possible to execute the compensation decisions, which means that in Albania we still do not have a single case that was compensated as a victim of trafficking.”

Source: Council of Europe, “[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)”, 19 December 2022

During an interview conducted by the UK Home Office, the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives made the following observations:

“Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, 6 October 2022 [...]

[...] **Q.** As well as a lack of knowledge, is there is an element of stigma? Or are VOT afraid to expose themselves as VOT?

**A.** [...] There are gaps that exist in the execution of court decisions and implementation of the laws, in general. But focussing on VOT, we have had a lot of problems with the execution of court decisions in regard to compensation claims. Until now I don’t know if we have had any decision enforced on compensation. It has been awarded but not given. We have 4 or 5 decisions but these are only on paper but not executed. But they tried to make some legal changes to enforce the execution of court orders. Since 2016, when the last change on the anti-mafia law occurred relating to compensation of victims, we have never had any decision executed or compensation given to victims, so they have the court orders on paper, but no money.

**Q.** Is this because traffickers are found and prosecuted?

**A.** We asked the courts and also law makers to foresee some effective remedy, such as the execution of this sum to be taken from the traffickers seized assets. Because the state continues to seize these assets but don’t give the money to victims.

**Q.** Is the compensation supposed to go to victims?

**A.** The law has foreseen 2 ways: the money confiscated should be used for social programmes in the interest of the victims to rehabilitate and fund restorative justice. The other is this money should go to the victims by way of compensation ordered by the court. We have had 4 decisions from the courts ordering compensation, but no one has received anything.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 43

Vatra described challenges experienced by victims of trafficking in relation to the process of prosecuting their traffickers during an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission:

“Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]

[...] **Q.** Do you tell police that the referred case is not a victim of DV but a VOT?

**A.** Yes, we report immediately to the responsible authority.

**Q.** What action is taken?

**A.** If the VOT denounces their trafficker then action will be taken, we help together with lawyers and police. If they do not want to denounce we cannot force them. Sometimes the VOT do not trust the justice system. We have cases where traffickers have been denounced and the process has been so long, 2 or 3 years, so they have a lack of trust and patience in the process. The other VOT share what has happened to them (in the justice system), and, based on the experience of others, they choose not to make the denunciation. [...]

One case in 2009 or 2010 was assisted by Vatra and stayed in a shelter for 3 years, she was considered high risk, as well as her family members. Even her family had to come to the office to meet with her secretly. She was trafficked to England, and her traffickers have been linked with politicians. When this issue was raised by our office to the prosecutors who were investigating the case, even when the woman’s body had a lot of signs – bruises, burns, including information from hospitals where she had multiple abortions in the UK – even after that the prosecutor did not accept to refer this case to the Witness Protection Programme Office. She was later referred to the US



Embassy witness protection and she is now living in the US. Albania has very good legislation and policies, it's the implementation that is the problem."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.65, 68

In a 2022 guide for practitioners on the stages of reintegration of survivors of trafficking, Different and Equal noted common issues that stall reintegration:

"Many trafficking victims face crises and set-backs at various stages during their reintegration that may stall their progress or even cause them to regress to previous stages of reintegration. Common crises and setbacks in reintegration include, but are not limited to:

[...] Security issues as a victim-witness (threats and intimidation, when the trafficker is acquitted or released) Long legal process and lack of effective access to justice [...]"

Source: Different and Equal, "[Stages of Recovery and Reintegration of Trafficking Survivors: A reintegration guide for practitioners](#)", 1 March 2022

A May 2021 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime on commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans stated with regards to Albania that:

"In Albania, even though there is a cybercrime unit in the Tirana police directorate, the staff are not adequately trained and lack forensic tools and technologies to investigate these offences. The cybersecurity unit has undertaken several, mostly donor-supported, capacity-building programmes on investigation of cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, but lacks an in-house system for transferring specialized skills in this area. [...] Neither the police nor the prosecution are fully equipped with the proper infrastructure to effectively investigate these cases. [...] Lack of rapid response by the ISPs [Internet service providers] to prosecution requests, as well as difficulties in identifying the IP addresses of alleged offenders, affects the quality of investigation and, consequently, the possibility to hold perpetrators accountable. Until now, there has been no psychological or psychosocial services or support offered. These are vital to help professionals who work on the issue deal with the mental stress and physical burnout related to the horrendous nature of the crimes. [...]"

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "[EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#)", May 2021, pp. 47

A May 2021 academic article by Dr Klea Ramaj, published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking*, addressing the return and reintegration of Albanian trafficking victims based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – set out a number of findings in relation to the shortcomings of the judicial system, from the perspective of victims of trafficking:

"Challenges to Reintegration II: Legal and Institutional Barriers [...]"

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the risk of reprisals from the victims' traffickers: [...]. Trafficking victims were protected by special security forces while living in the organizations' shelters. Hence, in those cases, threats were mainly directed toward professionals or the victim's family members. The reasons behind the lack of measures taken against the traffickers were tied both to the complexity of trafficking cases and to Albania's weak judicial system.

Lawsuits against the trafficker were initiated either in destination countries (and then transferred to Albania) or directly in Albania following the victims' return. According to the interviewees, the former case proved to be a lengthier and more challenging process:

The files need to be translated and transferred, communication letters between foreign and local institutions first need to go through the Ministry of Justice before reaching Albanian courts ... given Albania's lack of institutional infrastructure ... that takes a lot of time (LAW1).

However, even when the case was initiated in Albania, legal proceedings were unnecessarily long:

Every step of the judicial process – from the moment the victim denounces the trafficker to the police, to when the case is sent to the prosecutor, and until it reaches the court – can be dragged on for months or years (LAW2).

Some interviewees claimed that in addition to the obstacles involved in investigating trafficking cases, legal proceedings were also prolonged because of the Albanian policemen's and prosecutors' negligence (e.g., LAW1, LAW2, SW3, SW4). Most practitioners stated that delayed trials negatively impacted the victims' reintegration, both from a security and a psychological perspective.

Achieving justice was impeded by judicial delays as much as by accelerated criminal procedures. Article 334.1 of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code (2017) states that every defendant has the right to request an abbreviated trial, which allows for the case to be resolved under the existing state of evidence. In addition, Article 406 stipulates that if a defendant has demanded an abbreviated trial and a conviction decision is issued, the court shall reduce the sentence by one third. A concern expressed by both lawyers interviewed in this study was the controversial application of these two articles in most trafficking cases:

Let's assume that the trafficker is sentenced to seven years – one-third is lowered before he enters prison and a couple of years are reduced due to good behaviour in prison – he ends up getting out of prison in no time (LAW1). Another issue raised by three interviewees was the victims' lack of notification following traffickers' furloughs<sup>7</sup>, thus not allowing the former to take appropriate protective measures (SW3). Several practitioners suggested that the lenient measures taken against the trafficker were also an outcome of corruption:

You know how things work in Albania ... the trafficker can 'buy' the policeman/prosecutor/judge ... Although I don't have concrete evidence regarding this transaction, corruption can be implied by the low sentence length demanded by the prosecutor or the early groundless release of the trafficker (LAW2).

[...] Other difficulties experienced by trafficking victims related to the stress of being a witness in criminal cases and to compensation claims in civil cases. Most interviewees stated that testifying either in court or at the prosecutor's office was very challenging for the victims: [...]

The victims' psychological state was further aggravated by confronting their trafficker in the court room. Article 361.<sup>7</sup> of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code (2017) provides that witnesses of grave crimes can be questioned at a distance using audio-visual equipment. Nevertheless, evidence from the interviews indicates that such practice was not employed in trafficking cases, thus putting victims' well-being in jeopardy: "In practice, video-conference rooms don't work. Victims have often provided court testimonies in front of traffickers, while facing numerous threats and insults by them" (SW3). The last challenge faced by Albanian returned trafficking victims during judicial proceedings is related to the right of compensation for the harm done to them. According to the EC (2004), compensation is one of the essential steps for the socio-economic reintegration of trafficking victims. However, most interviewees claimed that the enforcement of compensation claims is problematic: "Traffickers usually transfer their assets to their friends and relatives. Consequently, the execution of the victim's compensation is rendered impossible" (LAW1)."

7 Antkowiak, T. M. (2011). An emerging mandate for international courts: Victim-centered remedies and restorative justice. *Stanford Journal of International Law*, 47(2), 279. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/stanit47&i=285>

Source: Klea Ramaj, "[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)", *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

The annex to a Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime report on commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Western Balkans indicated that there was low awareness among prosecutor's offices in the region of the phenomenon of Roma children being commercially exploited for sexual purposes. Based on interviews with the Albanian police, an Albanian child protection worker and other interlocutors in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following was noted:

"Roma NGO representatives furthermore report that public officials, prosecutors and judges avoid issuing trafficking indictments.<sup>38</sup> In addition, some representatives from prosecutor's offices in the region interviewed were not even aware of the phenomenon of Roma children being commercially exploited for sexual purposes.<sup>39</sup>

38 Interviews with a representative of the cybercrime unit of the Albanian Police in Tirana, a civil society representative working in child protection in Skopje, a representative of the anti-trafficking unit of the Kosovo Police in Pristina and a civil society representative working on child protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina, November 2020.

39 Ibid."

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "[Annex to EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#)", May 2021, p.8

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Judge Albana Boksi and Dr Arta Mandro, regarding the compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the *Acquis Communautaire* of the European Union relating to trafficking in human beings, it was noted that:



“The Albanian legislation is in line with Directive 2011/36/EU, by stipulating that victims of trafficking shall be exempted from the punishment for their involvement in criminal activities during the time of trafficking. However, an issue that has been identified in practice is related to the occasions where victims of trafficking have been prosecuted for various criminal offences, such as practising prostitution, and have been convicted for such offence, while later they have been identified as victims of trafficking.”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Authors: Judge Albana Boksi, Dr Arta Mandro, “[Compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union in the area of the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)”, 2021

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“Despite the legal improvements that have been made in recent years, even the justice institutions are not managing to properly fulfil the needs of the victims of trafficking for protection and respect for their legal rights. Justice institutions, including the Courts, the Prosecutor’s Office and the Police, continue to have a mentality and behaviour oriented towards the perpetrator and less towards the victim.[...] In practice, this programme is still seldom used. Only two victims of human trafficking in Albania have benefitted from this protection programme (one case in 2012 and another case in 2018).”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“[...] [W]hat we have known from our cases with support is that we have a lot of work to improve on that part, especially in our judicial and law enforcement agencies in the court, judges. They have been trained but this process needs to be in overall process. Also, the court proceedings delay very long because we had vetting process for the law judicial reform, so a vetting process for all the judges and prosecutors. And this has impacted the overall process because we have a few number of judges and prosecutors available for the court proceedings. And this has delayed a lot of the process not only for the victims of trafficking; for all the cases. And how it impacts is that one court proceeding can go for three or four years. And if you are a victim, you cannot be part of this court proceeding for so long to have, for example, the rewarding part from the state authorities. So in my opinion, there is a process of improvement, but still we lack a lot of somehow, as I mentioned, professionals, and second one, the law enforcement agencies need to be a lot of part of the capacity-building process in continuance.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

“[...] if the child is with the mother and the mother is the victims of trafficking and indirectly the children are affected by this process, for sure we support the mother legally to follow up the case in the court. But this is not an easy process because not all the mothers are willing to cooperate and to follow up because they are threatened, they have fear of their own children, or they are not duly supported by the legal system [...]”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist stated with regards to victim compensation that:

“We only are aware of one or two cases in the past [in which victims received compensation]. I think one or two cases maximum. So I would say it’s very limited and almost nothing. [...] Because what we know is that it takes years. It’s very complicated. It’s costly and it’s very difficult.”



Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated:

“[Compensation for victims of trafficking] is not happening, from what we have learned [...].”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“Before, all the cases that have some legal issues or denunciation, they went through the central criminal court and prosecutor in Tirana. But then through the changes in this law, they say that all the cases of people that are trafficked can be judged in the regional courts. So only the criminal cases that so have been organized by organized crime have the right to be judged to this criminal court in Tirana. And all the other cases for individual traffickers has been to judged by the local courts. So this has been very difficult for us, for the victims, and for access to justice for the victims because the judges and prosecutors that work in the local field, they don’t have the training capacity how to deal with cases of human trafficking. And so this has made a lot of postponement of the cases and sometimes not right identification of the cases so if the case has been involved by an individual or a criminal group, etc. So this has been a problem, but now it is moving better forward because most of the judges and prosecutors are trained and are going to be trained regarding to treat these cases in the local courts. So this was just the problem, but I think that it will be it will be okay in the future..”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, reported that:

“I think [the judiciary providing protection] is quite a challenge. And Albania has been going through the review of all the judiciary personnel. So they’ve gone through very thorough investigations, and quite a lot of judges and other judiciary personnel have been removed, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that things have been solved. There are those that have been removed and then they’re are still lingering in the background. And I think it’s probably the most corrupted link that is also very much detrimental because that’s where people look for justice, and they never get it or it takes ages.

[...] when I spoke to the traffickers or the alleged traffickers [as part of p.h.D fieldwork conducted between 2018 – 2020], that’s what they pointed towards. That it’s very corrupt, usually the ones that should be on trial or should go through these legal proceedings are exonerated immediately, and then it’s the little soldiers, if you want that, are caught, which are then used for statistics because statistics would look good.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

The same interlocutor commented that:

“[...] I found out that there is a witness protection program [...] But it’s not popular, so it’s not that everyone goes through this protection program. And it’s very difficult to go through it because, essentially, what it would need is for a court case to also be ongoing and for the people to have evidence to prove why they are still at risk of exploitation.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“In terms of how effective the legislation is in prosecuting traffickers, this has not been very effective because of challenges in the judicial system in Albania and a continuous judicial reform that Albania is undergoing since 2016.



We have seen a decrease in the number of prosecutions. For example, in 2020, we had zero prosecutions. And after that, we've seen an increase in persecutions. In terms of the Albanian State Police, we had last year 61 investigations of possible cases of human trafficking with 27 suspects: 15 suspects for adult trafficking and 12 suspects for child trafficking. And the general prosecution office prosecuted 60 cases last year with 19 defendants: 6 defendants for adult trafficking and 13 defendants for child trafficking. We have seen an increase based on the previous years, but still, we believe as professionals involved in this field that this is not enough compared to 130 cases approximately every year and many more who go unreported because we don't have the necessary capacities to go on the ground and identify victims. [...]

"[...] Compared to 2020, where we had zero prosecutions, we've seen an increase in prosecutions from the judicial system in Albania. Also, with the Special Structure Against Corruption and Organized Crime in Albania, the SPAK Authority, it has helped in order to prosecute more traffickers but still does not affect it because, when we see the data, we do see that for last year, 60 cases were prosecuted with 19 defendants. And the Special Authority Against Corruption and Organized Crime prosecuted two new cases and continued two cases from the previous years of investigation. That's still very low compared to the number of victims we have every year."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

The same interlocutor commented that:

"And in terms of the effectiveness [of the witness protection programme] - and this is also something that I say on a personal level; I don't have the statistics – usually, the high rates of corruption that might exist within the prosecution system or the involvement of some traffickers having connections with police officers or within the judicial system might make victims not even want to be part of this witness protection scheme or program because they will feel very exposed and not believe that their identities will be kept safe."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

#### 2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations

\*The original research terms of reference did not include research questions seeking specific information about treatment of minors and young people within the criminal justice system, however, this section has been included as it corresponds to a theme that emerged from the research findings.

#### Desk review material

In its report on human rights practices in 2022, USDOS observed that:

"[...] law enforcement entities lacked appropriate facilities and training for age-appropriate interrogation techniques of juveniles at police stations and prosecution offices."

Source: US Department of State, "[2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania](#)", 20 March 2023

Six young researchers with first-hand experience of the criminal justice and victim protection responses in relation to trafficking and sexual violence in Albania co-authored a report, published in 2023, entitled "The Evidence Speaks for itself", supported by Different and Equal in Albania and the Safer Young Lives Research Centre at University of Bedfordshire in the UK. The report explored the perspectives of 18 girls and young women on seeking support and justice in relation to trafficking and sexual violence in Albania:

"Survey respondents were then asked to express their views about the reasons for why it might be difficult for young trafficking victim-survivors to approach the police. Although only 11 people answered that young people found it difficult or very difficult, the vast majority (n=15), had an opinion on this matter. Young people gave the following reasons: • Victims' fear of being judged: "They [young victims] have a hard time because they are afraid of prejudices, what will people say about me, what they will say about the event. I also talk about my experience. This was the first thing I thought, and [I felt] fear." (Respondent No. 11) • Victims' fear of receiving threats and intimidation from traffickers: o "It is very difficult for them [young victims] because she or he may be threatened from someone or

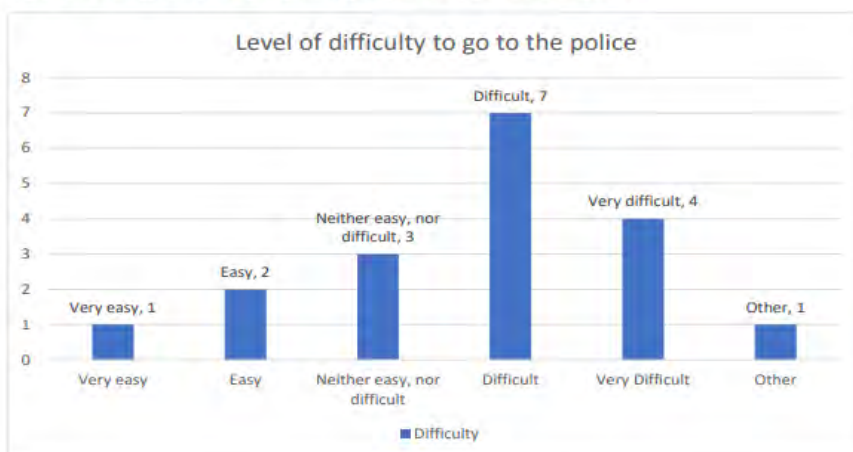
some may be afraid of their family because if he goes to prison, he will take revenge outside.” (Respondent No. 11); o “Given that the traffickers have not been caught - they put pressure on the victims” (Respondent No. 14) o “Fear that the trafficker will find out that he has been reported - and will harm her” (Respondent No. 17); • Victims’ fear of attracting media attention and losing anonymity: “when you go to the police, everything is treated by the media and affects the family and many other things” (Respondent No. 7). • Victims’ lack of family support: “It depends if they have family support: I, for example, did not have family support” (Respondent No. 8);

Victim’s difficulty of expressing oneself in front of the police: “It is normal for them to find it very difficult because victims, however, cannot express what they feel.” (Respondent No. 9); • Victim’s lack of information about what will happen after going to the police: “It’s difficult because they don’t know what will happen next” (Respondent No. 18).

• Criminal justice professionals’ lack of trust in the statements of young victims: “from what I heard they did not take it as a basis as they did not want to and they passed it off as a case” (Respondent No. 3); • Intimidating behaviours by police: “There are cases when they were interrogated, the officers raised their voices and the young people were frightened, were afraid” (Respondent No. 5);

The findings show that young victim-survivors of trafficking face a range of significant barriers in contacting the police for help. We - the young researchers - are concerned about the large number of respondents reporting barriers in approaching the police and the wide range of reported barriers. Another significant worry is that going to the police can lead to various negative consequences for young victims. For example, it can jeopardise a victim’s relationship with their family or invite harmful attention from media and society, whereas it appears to have no effect on capturing traffickers and abusers.”

Fig. 4: How difficult is it for young people to approach the police?



Source: Different and Equal & Safer Young Lives Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire, “[Research Report – The Evidence speaks for itself](#)”, March 2023, pp. 25-26

The same report stated:

“Prejudices encountered by victims. The survey did not directly ask whether respondents felt judged by professionals, nor were respondents asked whether issues around judgment may have had any impact on their ability to seek justice. Prejudice, however, emerged as a key theme and featured repeatedly in responses to survey questions about why young people might be reluctant to go to the police and what they felt was the most important message to give to criminal justice institutions. 3 out of 16 people noted prejudice as a significant barrier that deters young victims from contacting the police. Young people explained that: • ‘It is difficult for them because they are afraid of prejudices, what will the people say about me, what will they say about the event. I speak from my experience, and this was the first thing that I thought’ (Respondent No. 6); • ‘The moment you go to the police, everything is covered by the media. This affects the family and many other things. People are prejudiced by the society and work. It’s just a matter of mentality and fear’ (Respondent No. 7); • ‘... (Victims) feel judged’ (Respondent No. 15) Respondents noted that prejudices can be informed by racist and ageist biases. One respondent explained: ‘...don’t look down on the victims, what race they belong to, what is their colour...black people are looked down in Albania. The racism mentality exists... When you are asked what you are and after telling them who you really are, people start looking at you differently, particularly the police officers. They immediately start harassing you’ (Respondent 12).”

Source: Different and Equal & Safer Young Lives Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire, “[Research Report – The Evidence speaks itself](#)”, March 2023, p.33

The same report further stated:

“6.1.3 Procrastination of cases by professionals In addition to delays, the information gathered shows that cases are not always given due diligence or adequate and timely consideration. Two of the respondents pointed to the problem of procrastination. They suggested that cases can get delayed because they are not prioritized and pushed forward by relevant professionals, which impedes the progression of cases. One research participant recounted: “After a year, I was called to the court and they asked me whether or not I would continue the denunciation against that person and I told them no, I will not continue because I have moved on with my life and don’t call me again because I don’t have time to appear at the courts. They told me. That was all with you, we will not call you again” (Respondent No. 7). Another research participant stated: “maybe those (cases) are treated by all the units at all their stages and therefore the process is prolonged.” (Respondent No. 17)”

Source: Different and Equal & Safer Young Lives Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire, “[Research Report – The Evidence speaks for itself](#)”, March 2023, p. 28

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, an official from the OSCE noted that the police are not able to do child focused interviews:

“OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Is there any evidence of re-trafficking?

**A.** [...] There is no practical implementation of such an approach. The police are not able to do gender sensitive interviews or child focused interviews.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 22-23

In its report “Albania Child Notice”, published in 2022, UNICEF noted that:

“In 2017, two major pieces of legislation were passed: the law on the Rights and Protection of the Child (updated from 2010), and the Code of Criminal Justice for Children (CCJC). The CCJC and another 2017 law guaranteeing free legal aid incorporated international child-friendly justice standards. They have had some effect [...] although independent analysis showed that significant gaps in achieving child-friendly justice remain [...]”

Sources: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#),” 2022, pp. 15, 21, 93

A May 2021 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime on commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans stated that:

“[...] Increasing the effectiveness of investigations into, and the fight against, cybercrime is part of the strategic objectives of both the state police and the prosecution office. The police have set up and operate a cybercrime unit specialized in investigating cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. However, there is insufficient coordination between this unit and other parts of the child protection system, which could prevent the victim from receiving other services to which they are entitled. The unit does not have procedures to ensure the inclusion of child protection professionals in the investigation. [...]”

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “[EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#)”, May 2021, p. 49

### 2.4.5 Child protection system and anti-trafficking efforts – limitations

• Refer also to [2.4.1.2 Children – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 127](#).

#### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

"Anti-trafficking efforts should increase, in particular [...] by strengthening the child protection system. [...] Border and Migration Police officers should increase their ability to identify vulnerable refugees and migrants with specific needs. Coordination with child protection and anti-trafficking departments should also improve."

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, p. 52

The same report further noted in relation to the child protection system:

"Violence and sexual violence, including online, remains an area of concern. In 2022, Child Protection Units managed 2 496 cases of children in need of protection (mainly cases of children at risk or victims of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation). The number of child protection workers (241 in all 61 municipalities) remains far below the total number needed. [...] Further efforts are needed to ensure an adequate and systematic response to all types of violence against children. [...] As a member of the Lanzarote Committee, Albania needs to provide cross sector training to professionals for the provision of integrated services for children victims of sexual abuse and other serious forms of violence. The full inclusion of unaccompanied or separated foreign minors in the national child protection system is needed. Child labour prohibition needs to be effectively implementing, and working conditions of young people need continuous monitoring."

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, p. 52

The 2022 USDOS report on human rights practices in Albania reported that:

"Nisma ARSIS alleged that police sometimes reacted late or not at all when a protection order was violated, especially in cases involving Romani or Balkan Egyptian families. [...] At year's end an Amber Alert system, pending since a 2020 international workshop organized by Child Right Center Albania and the Global Center for Missing and Exploited Children, had not been implemented. [...] Since the law prohibits the prosecution of children younger than 14 for burglary, criminal gangs at times used displaced children to burglarize homes. [...]"

Source: US Department of State, "[2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania](#)", 20 March 2023

As part of the UK Home Office fact-finding mission, SHKEJ discussed child protection responses, and pointed to challenges in coordinating responses between actors, including the police and the education sector, to protect children at risk:

"SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** What does surveillance mean?

**A.** The police monitor the situation. Even when I call the police about a child at high risk I have to be very clear and very specific for the police to intervene, otherwise the police do not have time to look into the case. [...]"

**Q.** Because they don't recognise those people are at risk?

**A.** They don't recognise the signs.

**Q.** Some children might be trafficked and might be forced to engage in criminal activities, if the police encounter a child in a criminal situation would police consider them as trafficked?

**A.** I don't know, we have police on the border. The police say whether the child is at risk of being a criminal or not, and then they return the child to their family. But there is no follow up. Police won't go to the home to see if the child is ok. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 80, 82



During an interview with the UK Home Office, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection stated the following regarding removing children from situations of potential harm within the family:

**Q.** If the child is suspected of being trafficked or exploited by parents what happens?

**A.** This is actually a problem in Albania. As soon as the police receive such a report they carry out investigations. However when the case goes to court the judges sometimes decide that there is not enough evidence which means the case will be dismissed.

**Q.** Will the child then be returned to their parents?

**A.** The emergency protection measure for removing a child from the family and placing the child in alternative care is a temporary protection measure taken for the child who is in a situation of high and imminent risk because of abuse, exploitation, neglect or any form of violence and the child protection worker and state police or prosecution structures have allegations or possess facts that the family or environment where the child stays is not safe for the child. The parents may not exercise their parental responsibility during the period of validity of an emergency protection measure taken by the director of the structure responsible for social services, or of a court decision confirming the measure. The child, child's parent, relatives and any other person, who has a lawful interest, have the right to appeal with the court within 5 days from the taking of the emergency protection measure by the director of the structure responsible for social services. The appeal shall not suspend enforcement of the measure. The appeal shall be examined by the court along with the request for evaluation of the measure by the court

**Q.** Are you saying the court's want more evidence despite concerns of child protection workers?

**A.** Yes – it is a new system so it's challenging for courts and the community to become familiar with it. We should not forget that the justice reform has left us with fewer staff. There has been a cultural shift with our awareness raising. We now have 2,389 (in 2021) children in protection. Before these children were not identified, but with awareness raising at a local level we manage now to have these children under protection. So all categories of risk, abuse, VOT and so on.

**Q.** Do you have figures for 2017 before the law was introduced?

**A.** It could have been 500 or 600. The department has a lack of resources. We need them to be involved as much as possible. We have a lot of children under protection and all of them are in management. At the same time we need to improve our human capacities for cybercrime. This is my recommendation. Many of the children are exploited online."

UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 86-87

The same interlocutor described to the UK Home Office further issues relating to budget and training:

**Q.** Does the ministry have a sufficient budget to carry out all the services?

**A.** The budget for child protection services is allocated at local level, by each municipality. No we don't have sufficient budget, the budget for case management is not enough. I think that all child protection workers should have a budget for each case, but there are not enough financial resources.

**Q.** What is the impact of this?

**A.** We have problems with the legal side, there is a gap in law regarding procurement of services for children. Needs can arise at any time, we should be ready and have a budget for that. In most cases we have worked with partners and donors, but they won't be there forever so we need to solve this gap. There is also an issue that, in general, partners and donors mainly focus on training the staff. They have enough training but they don't have enough money to put it into practice. If there is no money to help children then why have all the training.

I have seen a slight shift over time, a slow one but it is on the right path. What we need to focus on is empowering families and increase their capacity, as staff are already trained. Yes they do need to refresh and update knowledge time to time, but on the job training is the best option. We as an agency call for transparency, anyone who wants to provide training to child protection workers should go through the state agency first as we are the ones carrying out professional assessments and we know where the gaps are. So training could be irrelevant if they go to a municipality without letting us know. That's just training for the sake of training. [...]"

UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.87



A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes. The report stated:

“[...] In 2019, GoA [Government of Albania] set up a Social Fund at the national level, along with mechanisms for the calculation of funding in an effort to roll out new social services.<sup>67</sup> Each municipality is supposed to have a Social Care Plan, a pre-requisite to apply for funding under the Social Fund. However, many municipalities lacked the capacities to assess needs and prepare a Social Care Plan. Moreover, the Fund had scarce resources, with funding insufficient given the extent of work that needs to be done. In 2019, 73 percent of local government budgets came from national transfers. The central budget allocated only one percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to local governments, the lowest in the Western Balkans. Moreover, most municipalities are ineffective at collecting revenues. Thus, the ability of local institutions to deliver quality public services remains limited.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the Needs Assessment and Referral Unit, recognized by the Social Services Law of 2016, has still not been installed in all the municipalities. With the support of CSOs, only a few Units have been established, and these as pilots. Lack of the financial and human resources needed for effective case management of children in need of protection is an ongoing issue and affects child VoTs [Victims of Trafficking] and those at risk of trafficking. [...]

<sup>67</sup> DCM no. 111, On the creation and functioning of the social fund, 23 February 2018; DCM no. 150, ‘On calculation of the funding of social care services’, 20 March 2019.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission (2019). Albania progress report. Brussels: EC, 2019.”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, “[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)”, November 2022, p. 14

The 2022 UNICEF report “Albania Child Notice”, noted challenges in the functionality of the child protection system:

“There is a well-established child protection hotline operated by a civil society organization (CSO). This obligatory provision is managed in cooperation with the SARPC. In 2020, 1,000 calls (of 35,000) received were referred on for further advice and support. Meeting wider community child protection requirements in practice has been problematic. Insufficient human and financial resources and frequent organizational change—partly due to the 2015 decentralization reforms—mean that laws and policies have not always been well implemented. Child protection units (CPUs) are established at district level, but many do not fully function. By 2020, 240 CPUs were in place, covering half the country, a slow increase compared to the 196 in 2014. CPUs are particularly scarce in the north of Albania. Many CPUs lack qualified child protection workers (CPWs) that the Child Rights and Protection law requires. Of all public-funded social services, only 27 per cent are for children and these are predominantly in Albania’s main cities. Some local staff are without the training to process requests for economic aid, so that families cannot obtain this support when they need it. CPWs lack training over the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Community programmes to reinforce parental responsibility, and to strengthen families have remained weak. CSOs support families and children but CSO’s provision can be uneven, geographically and over time.”

Source: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#),” 2022, p.17

Regarding the situation for unaccompanied refugee and asylum-seeking children, the same report noted:

“Unaccompanied children are not assigned a legal guardian, putting them at greater trafficking risk and making them ineligible for social and other services [...]. An unaccompanied child with a remand order is designated to be held elsewhere (e.g., at one of the two NGO-managed shelters mentioned), but so far this has not happened in practice according to UNHCR.”

Source: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021](#),” 2022, p.84

In a situation analysis of children and adolescents in Albania in June 2021, UNICEF provided the following background information and commentary about the child protection system in Albania:



“The State Agency for Child Rights and Protection (SARCP), established in 2011, is the executive body within MHSP [Ministry of Health and Social Protection] charged for both coordination of the integrated child protection system pursuant to national policies and monitoring implementation of NACR [National Agenda for Child Rights]. It is generally acknowledged<sup>75</sup> that insufficient resources, whether financial or human, are awarded to SARCP. The structure, authority and mandate of SARCP needs to be strengthened and expanded so that it can facilitate development of clear cross-sectoral strategies to address the social exclusion of particularly vulnerable populations, including Roma children, children with disabilities, migrant children and children in detention or institutional care.<sup>76</sup> [...]”

<sup>75</sup> See CPR, 2019, p. 29, and State Report to CRC, 2019, para. 27.

<sup>76</sup> CPR, 2019. op. Cit.”

Source: UNICEF, “[Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Albania](#)”, June 2021, p. 21

A May 2021 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime on commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans stated with regards to Albania that:

“As for SECTT [sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism], no child protection action plan in the region specifically addresses this phenomenon. [...] In Albania, experts are currently hoping it will be included in the new 2021–2026 Strategy for Child Rights as well as a new strategy addressing child abuse. [...]”

Most countries in the region have signed bilateral agreements with their neighbours on human trafficking.<sup>139</sup> In addition, in 2007, the Albanian Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport, signed an agreement with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe that aimed to protect children from sexual exploitation in tourism. However, many of these initiatives have yet to be fully implemented.<sup>140</sup> [...]”

In Albania, child protection workers face challenges due to the lack of knowledge of online safety for children and a lack of basic funding for case management. The limited number of child protection workers and their uneven distribution across the country makes their work even more difficult. Increasing the effectiveness of investigations into, and the fight against, cybercrime is part of the strategic objectives of both the state police and the prosecution office. The police have set up and operate a cybercrime unit specialized in investigating cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. However, there is insufficient coordination between this unit and other parts of the child protection system, which could prevent the victim from receiving other services to which they are entitled. [...]”

<sup>139</sup> Bilateral agreements address the identification and reporting of human trafficking cases between Albania and Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia; North Macedonia and Serbia and Kosovo; and Montenegro and Kosovo.

<sup>140</sup> Children’s Human Rights Centre et al., Albania: Alternative report to the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, January 2012, 7, [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1175112/1930\\_1350313059\\_albania-albaniancoalitionagainstchildtraffickingsexualexploitationofchildren-crc61opsc-report.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1175112/1930_1350313059_albania-albaniancoalitionagainstchildtraffickingsexualexploitationofchildren-crc61opsc-report.pdf).”

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “[EXPLOITED IN PLAIN SIGHT: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#)”, May 2021, pp. 43-45, 47, 49

## Interview material

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“We have a new child protection system in my opinion. So only 13 years of an existing real system with dedicated resources, with people, professionals, with laws and by-laws developed through years. So for me, it’s still fragile and still needs a lot of enforcement and strengthening in three directions. It’s professionals. We need more professionals, especially at the local level for the identification, prevention, and support. We need money, so we need financial support in order that these professionals to be engaged and to be on the field and to be reacting professionally. They need social care services with them. If they identify a case, they need an emergency shelter. They need support for the parents, support for the child, trauma rehabilitation, and all the other services. And they need a better responding mechanism. What it means is that coordination needs to be between not only the child protection unit, but with schools, with health centres, with police, with informal education agencies. [...] you can do a huge big package of training for all the health sector, for example, but the people rotate, the professionals change. So you should do it



continuously to keeping on the loop. For example, once per year to make workshops, to engage them, to participate them in the round table. And then this needs money. This needs the resources. It needs the engagement. It's not easy. And in the local-- in a very small country as we are, they see this social care approach as not very important because we had a lot of gaps in infrastructure, in the health sector, in the education sector. [...]"

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

"[...]We came from a system that we do not have child protection units. For example, in 2008, we have only one employee or two employees in all Albania working on protection. So you can imagine from the last 13 years, we had a great development. Now we have more than 240 child protection workers who are responsible for the identification and protection and support of the cases of children that are victims of trafficking from 0 to 18. So this is a very big difference and big change. But it's not enough [...] So the need for their presence is higher in order to duly identify on time or to work on prevention or to work on providing support to the victims. So dedicated human resources, professional resources, it's a must, and it's need to be improved. The law is very well written. It's written one child protection worker for 3,000 children, but we have a higher number of children who are taken care of. This is the big issue in my opinion. [...] [Child Protection workers] are working with all the categories of children at risk: sexual abuse, violence, exploitation, neglect, children in conflict with the law. So there are different profiles of children. That is not an issue because the law is the same for all the children. They should provide protection to all the categories at risk, including children of trafficking. But the overload, if you have too many cases to provide support, your quality of services, your interventions are reducing because you are only one person. You cannot do everything."

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Officer posited that:

"[...] Still, there are some remaining challenges [in relation to the child protection system], especially in some areas of the country where there is absence of social services, especially in some rural areas and where there is a lack of human resources as well from the child protection system. So, [...] there has been a lot of progress, but there's still a lot of challenges as well."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

"As I said, as a system, it works. It works because immediately you identify even by yourself walking on the street and you call the toll free number and say, I saw that child here, immediately social workers from the municipality would come and contact the child and in that moment the child enters a system and is recognized as a beneficiary from the system and technical working groups are meeting together. The problem is the state cannot provide much of the services that this child needs. That's the gap."

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation observed the following, regarding the efficacy of the child protection system:

"But [...] there is this lack of financial resources that makes this [child protection] system not always effective. So in general, the system is set up and work, but mostly our NGO civil society organization that support with services of the children and the victims in general because they so have projects so based on donor project, donors' money, international, that have projects to support the children.[...]"

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023



## 2.4.6 Alternative care for children without parental care – limitations

### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

“Children placed in institutions [...] are particularly vulnerable to trafficking”.

Source: European Commission, “[Albania 2023 Report](#)”, 8 November 2023, p. 52

The 2022 USDOS report on human rights practices in Albania reported that:

“Terre des Hommes also asserted most municipalities did not offer child-friendly options for children in need of alternative care. Care programs were designed to serve orphaned children rather than survivors of abuse or neglect. [...]

There was a large population of unaccompanied, displaced children who were homeless, particularly in the Romani community. Some children begged, and some became trafficking victims. [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania](#)”, 20 March 2023

In July 2022, an Alternative Report was prepared by the Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA/ECPAT Albania), together with the Tirana Youth Parliament, in response to the fifth and sixth official report of Albania, to be considered during 2022 by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. With regards to alternative care in Albania, the report stated the following:

“The Government provides care and protection to most of the children deprived of a family environment. In 2021 the Government approved a national plan for the placement in foster care of all the children who currently are living under public residential care. The plan has been criticised from the civil society because it lacks strong parental supervision of the foster families and financial support to guarantee child welfare. However, 30 years after the collapse of the communist regime, the foster care is still non-existent in Albania. This prevented many children from enjoying a life with a foster family and many children between early 90s till 2010, ended up being exploited in trafficking and prostitution.[...] In 2016, the Albanian government approved the new Law on Social Care Services. Despite numerous improvements to the social care system, consideration was not given to the process of deinstitutionalization and harmonisation of legislation with the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. In addition, the Albanian Family Code needs to be improved so that it reflects the recent law developments and respects international standards on children rights.”

Source: Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA/ECPAT Albania), “[Alternative report to the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)”, July 2022, pp. 10-11

### Interview material

Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

“Long-term reintegration of children victims of trafficking is a long and difficult process, because alternative services such as: foster care and specialized services for children are limited.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“[...] Placing the child victim of trafficking or sexual abuse in residential care institutions with all the other children does not treat the traumas or the situation with the child.[...] Because in some cases, a mother that has been victims



of trafficking has left the child in the residential care institution. We don't have a foster care system, unfortunately. We have a good legal provisions on that, but we don't have a system. We are still facing problems on identifying potential foster care families in local levels. So the local authorities are not able to provide a list of families who are potentially willing to provide care for children. And if you don't have potential foster care list of families-- the first solution of a child without parental care is placing them in residential care institutions.

[...] we are still with the old type of residential care institutions. So big institutions with a big, high number of children, with a high number of staff, but without the approach of the best interests of the child."

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Further describing conditions in residential care institutions for children, the same interviewee commented that:

"[...] we don't think that we have the best conditions, but even though they are very good, nice buildings, the approach and the services, how it is provided, it's not guaranteeing the child well-being."

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"[...] At the moment, in terms of preventing re-trafficking, we haven't seen any effective state measures in Albania, we have challenges with the foster care system and adoption in general. And that's also a cultural issue that we have inherited because we are a post-communist country. We have only 33 years that we are free from this regime. And it's not in the mentality of the citizens to go through the adoption or to have foster care family programs such as the ones that are being implemented in the UK. And that makes the child protection system in general, when it comes to reintegration and preventing re-trafficking, very vulnerable, because we do see children being placed in public institutions or in those big buildings where the family support or the role of the family is very limited. [...]

In the case where children don't have any parental care, they will be under the authority and responsibility of the government of the state, where they will be placed in the house for children with no parental support and stay there until the age of 18 years old. After that, there are sporadic programs that they can help adults to move into rented apartments. And the rent might be supported by the municipality grant in Albania, but that will last up to a year. And what happens after this year ends? Usually, they need more support."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 2.4.7 Internal relocation, re-trafficking, reprisals

### 2.4.7.1 Internal relocation

- Refer also to [2.4.7.2 Re-trafficking and reprisals on page 154](#).

#### Desk review material

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Vatra discussed reintegration:

"Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Do you think that a VOT can be relocated back to Albania and reintegrate into the country?

**A.** Considering the many cases we have protected and provided services, of course they can. But before that the Home Office need to make a risk assessment. If the trafficker is in prison, the VOT can return and follow the process of reintegration.

If the trafficker is not in prison then the VOT would be at risk. Sometimes the women are victims at first, then they become the exploiter or pimp. In shelters, some of the girls (especially adult women) manipulate the other girls, especially minors. Of course, the staff are very vigilant and prevent this phenomenon."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 68

As part of its fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) and Caritas in October 2022, during which the issue of relocating was discussed:

“Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) [...]

**Q.** Could a VOT internally relocate to avoid being found by their trafficker?

**A.** It is difficult. Albania is very small and it is easy for the traffickers to find what they’re looking for. There is less possibility to reintegrate and have a normal life. [...]

Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** If someone could relocate would it be easy for a trafficker to locate them?

**A.** Yes of course, most of them are not usually forced. [...].”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.13, 38, 52, 97

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with Tjeter Vizion in October 2022, during which the issue of victims of trafficking being located by traffickers were addressed:

“Tjeter Vizion, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Could you provide information on re-trafficking and people being located by traffickers if they return to Albania?

**A.** There have been incidents of re-trafficking and reidentification. Why? If the services are inadequate or support from the government is inappropriate, or expectation of support by the VOT is too high or unrealistic. Then the victim leaves the train of support and there have been incidents when we have identified VOT once again as being trafficked. There are instances when the traffickers are stronger than institutions. In Tjeter Vizion in the last 2 years we have had 6 cases of re-trafficking, 4 men and 2 women. This is out of 117 cases we assisted in the last 2 years. To me even one re-trafficked case is a lot, and 6 a whole lot. However this is reality.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.12, 27, 28

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated that:

“Victims may have security problems and problems with their transportation from one place to another [...] Albania is a small country and it is not easy to escape the traffickers by moving to different places in Albania. [...] There are several methods for finding victims, using personal social messages and their search through social networks.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“When cases of VOTs/PVoTs are relocated in Albania [...] the national coordinator coordinates the action with all anti-trafficking actors to offer [...] proper assistance after a deep evaluation of the case from central and local structures. We see that mostly the cases have difficulties in adapting to the new restricted life of the shelters and the reintegration programme we are offering. Some of them have mental health problems, some are not accepted by their families of origin, and some need specific assistance and reintegration far from where they originally come from, as it is where the perpetrators are too from.

When the cases are categorised as high risk cases they are placed in national reception centre which is offering high state protection and are under the witness protection programme in case they are involved in the reporting process of the trafficking. Adaption is one of the most challenging processes for all the VoTs/ PVoTs re- entering Albania.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

In relation to the question of whether individuals are able to avoid their traffickers by relocating, the same interlocutor stated:

“In some cases they are able to avoid [their traffickers], in some cases they are not. Albania is a small country and sometimes there is information flow.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, stated in relation to the issue of re-trafficking:

“I think that unemployment rate in Albania is high, and this is officially [...] And if it's high, this is high not only for all the citizens who are job seekers, but also for victims of trafficking. [...] it's difficult because, as I mentioned, especially the victims of trafficking usually do not come back to their country of origin or to their city of origin. They especially want to change the place where they have lived before, and this makes it more difficult to be potentially integrated in a new area and a new community with a new job. It's done, but it needs a lot of effort [...]”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained:

“Albania is a very small country and everybody knows everyone. So I think, it's very difficult for someone to relocate to a place where nobody else would know where they are, basically. It's very [...] small country and a place where everybody knows everyone, or everybody knows someone who knows someone. [...] we don't have a lot of information on internal relocation, but [...] we have some cases of re-trafficked persons, people who returned to Albania and they moved to a different location or near a city and then they were re-trafficked. Most of the cases that we have documented from re-trafficking fit [...] into this category.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Most of them want to come to Tirana even if they are from the north, for the shelter services they [...] receive in the south where the shelter is located. And when it comes to going out of the shelter and starting an independent life, all of them want to [...] relocate in Tirana because of two reasons. First, because they are unknown. It's a much bigger territory, meaning they can be hidden from the sight of the people that might know them, and because of the employment possibilities that are bigger in the bigger cities. So the good thing is that the organisations refer the cases to each other, and the ones that are followed by one organisation up to a certain point can be taken over by the other one covering the [other] territory. [...] But for the victims of trafficking, they want to be away from circles that might be familiar to them.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated:

“[...] [I]n my opinion, and I base this on security issues and how safe the information about the case is, like we know NGOs have their data protection systems, but then if the victim is assisted by many stakeholders, [...] then the safety of the information is very crucial in this case. And the leaking of the information – traffickers know these NGOs, [but] they have secure shelters that are not known to the public. Out of the three that I've mentioned, I've visited only one here in Albania and the other locations are unknown even to me, but for traffickers as well. There are risks, I would say, [...] because even while they are [...] in the shelters, the victims, they are put in contact with their family members. [...] Like, the NGO helps them to reestablish contact and communication and a relationship between the victims and their family, and the communication is kept online or at the field visits to the cases. So, yes, there is the potential that the victim is being identified by the trafficker.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“So, okay, the relocating, that depends so the reason why they are relocating.[...] People that are from different regions and go to a different region because of human trafficking, so for example, [...] we are in south but we have victims that’s coming from north of Albania or central, that depends on the cities. So because their lives are at risk, that’s the main reason that they are relocated. And so this is the most difficult because Albania, it is a small country and very small and a lot of people are in acquaintances with each other. We have this common structure of a large sense of community as well. It’s still from the period of communism, and so a lot of problems that family has, for example, it is a problem of all the large family. And victims of human trafficking that live in rural remote areas and suffer from this stigma and patriarchy, for example, are always prejudiced, they are discriminated from the large family, from the community members. [...] The second reason that they are relocated. So the first one is the risk that depends on the traffickers. And second one, it is from this stigma [...] So a problem for them, it is the problem of being adopted [...] in a new place. And to follow with new place-- not culture because we have the same culture. So we don’t have cultural differences. This is not a gap or difficulty. But it is to leave the family and to go in other city, difficulties are because their vulnerability is higher when they relocate. They must have some possibilities [...]. But for this reason, we, in our programs, support victims with a lot of [...] social activities such as to being resilient, adapting to have skills in order for them to live independently more [...]. For that reason, we have this program of psychosocial support for the victims in order to protect them from this vulnerability of relocating or lacking skills, etc.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In relation to the question of whether individuals are able to avoid their traffickers by relocating, the same interlocutor stated:

“So did this happen [traffickers finding victims of trafficking]? Yes. And the possibilities are very high in the first moment when the victims don’t go to a program or are not accommodated in a shelter, for example, and they have higher risk for life because they didn’t announce, for example, traffickers and they escape. They didn’t go to the family [...] so the risk is very high. And because they use all the social media, etc. But it is not the victims that are identified. So we don’t let the victims going outside the shelter or without protection if we identify victims and we support them. So we make them aware of the risks and we work case by case with the victims because there are some victims that are very-- so they want to speak with the ex-traffickers because they have feelings for them. But we try to make them aware and to educate them [...] And if the victims come to one of our programs, she is safe. And if a victim can leave by her will-- because there are victims as well that say, “I don’t want. It is enough. I don’t want any more to be here.” But if we refer them or the victim to a safe place, it is okay. The traffickers cannot find them, but sometimes it’s easy. It is easy because it is a small country. Albania, it is a small country. And the victims, without being supported and counseled, etc., are very vulnerable as well to call traffickers again and to tell them where they are. So that depends on the case and in which state of the reintegration process the victim is in.[...] [O]ne of the methods used by the traffickers is to threaten them through their family members [...] For example, the victims that have children, and they threaten them [...] or try to get close to children of the victims in order that the victims escape. And they call them and say that I have your children, etc. Or through other family members such as brother, sisters, and they say that I will traffic your sister too if you leave or if they go to the families. And they threaten and they say to the family members to call the victim to not do something else, to not denounce or find victims through the family members. And these are the most cases of victims that the traffickers find. The most appropriate for them to trap victims, too.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“If it is a victim of trafficking who has escaped a genuine trafficking experience or situation in Albania, the idea of internal relocation is very much impossible just because of how small the country is and you don’t necessarily need much research about it. I mean, we are so tiny and you can go through the whole country in, I don’t know, seven,

eight hours. And everybody knows everybody, or you can find people easier if you wanted to. [...] if there is an open trafficking case that is ongoing or the source of exploitation has been in Albania, it would be very difficult for them to find safety even if they move to a different town. [...] you can find anybody in Albania and not just victims of trafficking, and it's not to be disputed because you can go and find anybody -- and I'm talking about Albanians because from a foreign national person who doesn't know Albania, that might sound bizarre"

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth, with a recent research focus on young people at risk of criminal exploitation in Albania stated that:

"The relocation. Okay. So the problem with relocation in Albania is that society works in ways where you are as an individual always socially located. What family you are from, even through your grandparents, good family, bad family, the biography, the history of the family. So you're literally asked upon a first encounter, who's your dad, who's your family, what is your family? And people would know. So you can't really easily pretend to be from another family. Because it's always complex socially, and it's based on the social knowledge. This is how you can find people, and so why it's so difficult to hide. But also, how you have a network of support. So those people who are outside this network of support are by the same logic absolutely left to destitution. Yeah. But you can be found exactly because you will stick out like a sore thumb if you are there. And a woman on her own being dropped into somewhere where you have such social networks, a family, and then also friends that you make from school, etc., etc. People know each other. It's very personalized knowledge in Albania [...] If you have fled an exploitative situation, and the traffickers are worried that you might seek judicial redress [...] you're under a particular criminal threat to be found. So they can use those social networks to trace you down fairly easily. And because you would stick out like nothing else as an individual woman. And I know one or two women who live on their own in Tirana, but they are from elite families and their family is known, and they have high-profile jobs. I mean, really high-profile jobs. They are sort of part of these cosmopolitan elites. [...] But for the ordinary woman, and particularly these women who are in these exploitative situations. They don't usually have this culture or social capital at all at their disposal. And they would be expected-- this is also this patriarchal context where you always have a man in your life. It's either your husband or it's your father or brother. Right? So it's your parental family or it's your marital family. And if you're outside that, you're open prey. I mean, this is the logic of classic patriarchy. And we find that in Albanian society still, as very, very prevalent."

Source: Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

The same interlocutor further noted:

"[...] I found people just by name, just going somewhere and asking around. There's no telephone book or so, but you just ask, and somebody says, "No, I don't know, but this family, okay, okay. Why don't you speak to this person?" And a few steps on, you've found the person. Know where they live."

Source: Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"I'm aware of mostly not legal but documentation issues. With some of the survivors I have worked with, when they had children, they had a lot of problems with the name of the father of the children. And that would make it very difficult for them to register their child in a new city because they would need to go through a different judicial process to be entitled to change the city where their child would reside. Another challenge is the unregulated real estate market in Albania, where, if you would like to rent a house, the person who is renting you the house would not give you an agreement because they wouldn't want to pay taxes to the government. And without this agreement, you can not apply to change your residence to a different city because you would need to prove you have a rent contract. And that has been a huge challenge because, if you want this rent contract, you will have to pay 30 or 40 percent more of the price of the rent that you would pay if you did not need this contract."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

#### 2.4.7.2 Re-trafficking and reprisals

##### Desk review material

Six young researchers with first-hand experience of the criminal justice and victim protection responses in relation to trafficking and sexual violence in Albania co-authored a report, published in 2023, and titled “The Evidence Speaks for itself”, supported by Different and Equal in Albania and the Safer Young Lives Research Centre at University of Bedfordshire in the UK. The report described coercive mechanisms used by traffickers to control and intimidate victims, including the threat of reprisals:

“We found relevant information on coercive mechanisms that traffickers use to control or intimidate victims in answers to why young people might feel reluctant to go to the police. There were references in our data that suggests that traffickers may use threats, revenge, and pressure to exert influence over victims: • “Some may be afraid of their family because if the perpetrator is convicted and sentenced to prison, he shall surely take revenge upon being released.” (Respondent No. 11); • “[Victims] may be threatened.” (Respondent No. 10); • “Given that the traffickers have not been arrested - they put pressure on the victims.” (Respondent No. 16); • “It is difficult for them [victims] as they may be threatened. They do not know what will happen next.” (Respondent No. 18)”

Source: Different and Equal, “[Research Report – The Evidence speaks for itself](#)”, March 2023, p.43

In an interview with the UK Home Office, Different and Equal noted that lack of functionality in the justice system can be an issue in relation to risk of re-trafficking:

“Different and Equal, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Are these cases where a VOT is trafficked by their original trafficker or a new situation of exploitation?

**A.** There was a case in 2021 where the woman denounced the traffickers. She was trafficked both inside and out of Albania by both her original trafficker and a different one.

I would like to say that if justice does not work properly, even protection is at risk. Especially for children at risk of committing petty crimes, we work a lot with them. They are young children so they can be manipulated easily, so if the trafficker is not arrested then re-trafficking is a risk.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.20

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Tjeter Vizion observed that re-trafficking happens if services are inadequate, or support from the government is inappropriate, or if the expectation of the victim of trafficking is too high:

“Tjeter Vizion, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Could you provide information on re-trafficking and people being located by traffickers if they return to Albania?

**A.** There have been incidents of re-trafficking and reidentification. Why? If the services are inadequate or support from the government is inappropriate, or expectation of support by the VOT is too high or unrealistic. Then the victim leaves the train of support and there have been incidents when we have identified VOT once again as being trafficked. There are instances when the traffickers are stronger than institutions. In Tjeter Vizion in the last 2 years we have had 6 cases of re-trafficking, 4 men and 2 women. This is out of 117 cases we assisted in the last 2 years. To me even one re-trafficked case is a lot, and 6 a whole lot. However this is reality. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.27

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, NISMA ARSIS noted the following in relation to re-trafficking:

“NISMA ARSIS, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Are there concerns around re-trafficking?

**A.** A lot, it's related to the level of services, it's easy to be re-trafficked. We see the same cases repeatedly. During the 2-3 year programme, if something is missing in case management, they leave the programme and turn back (to trafficking). Or when they are easily identified as someone that could be exploited. We have had the same cases 3 or

4 times.

**Q.** Are they being re-trafficked by the same people?

**A.** I don't have that information, we understand they are the same as the VOT identify the same persons."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.31-32

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the General Directorate of State Police suggested that societal attitudes, the difficulty of living as a single woman / mother in Albania and lack of capacity of NGOs play a role in the possibility of re-trafficking:

"General Directorate of State Police, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Are you aware of any victims that have been re-trafficked?

**A.** Yes, there is re-trafficking and cases of this in Albania. So victims are mostly female and re-trafficking is due to different reasons including societal attitudes towards women and girls. If links in the chain don't work properly women and girls are forced to go back into trafficking. So maybe the centres for these women and girls, where they go to for reintegration, don't have enough capacity to help them and that is why they end up being trafficked again. In terms of statistics re-trafficking is rare, it doesn't happen often, however it happens. So there is a lot of work to be done on our part in this regard. [...]

**Q.** You mention societal attitudes can lead to re-trafficking?

**A.** Unfortunately Albanian society is not very welcoming to these VOT, these women have already suffered and had pain and it's extra difficult to be reintegrated into society. The state police deals with things from a police perspective so it's more rigid, so this is just our impression. The reintegration is related to economic development of society and concerned with the mindset of people, which is a bit conservative and traditional.

**Q.** In your view do you think that a single woman or a single woman with a child could live alone in Albania?

**A.** It is very difficult for a single woman or single mother to make it in Albania unless they are provided with a job or economic support. If they have neither they can never make it. So this is not official information but I know it happens. There are cases of women who have been trafficked, and then placed in centres and have later and willingly returned to the trafficker and been re-trafficked as they think that this is more convenient, economically speaking, as they can earn more that way. If you go to our shelters you won't need to ask. You will see why they are willingly re-trafficked. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.35-36

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the Albanian Women Empowerment Network observed several factors associated with re-trafficking:

"Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) [...]

**Q.** Is there any evidence of re-trafficking of women?

**A.** Yes, though I'm not sure of the percentage. But due to issues and challenges many are re-trafficked as the families don't accept them, they can't afford to live and also due to extortion and threats against the families. Criminal groups are responsible for re-trafficking the same women they trafficked in the first place."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.37

In an interview with the Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Caritas pointed to reasons why re-trafficking can occur:

"Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Do you have any information on re-trafficking – men and women?

**A.** Many women are trafficked. I don't have a lot of information on men. Before COVID we had several projects on anti-trafficking and now only one project with an American bishop. We are now trying to activate prevention through inter-religious groups. For 2 to 3 years the integration service was only done by the sisters in the shelter.

Women are the first target. It is easier to traffic women who are not stable or who are fragile and sensitive. One girl worked (legitimately) every day to earn 200 euro per month and she was very tired. She said that she could earn this amount in one night. Sometimes, when the economic situation and integration process is not going well, then it is very easy to re-enter trafficking. That is why work with victims is very important. When you work with VOT it should

be for life. A 2 to 3 year project cannot resolve the issue. VOT need support, their family may not accept them and the public may not accept them.

**Q.** Do you think VOT can be supported if returned to Albania?

**A.** Victims are better supported when they are identified. They mostly want to live in Tirana, it is another reality, it's different. For women from outside it is difficult for them to reintegrate in Tirana. Most students are facing economic difficulties, they are very easily recruited by traffickers.

**Q.** Those that are re-trafficked, are they trafficked by their original trafficker or picked up by someone else?

**A.** We are a very small country, we all know each other. It might not be the same trafficker, but someone from within the same network.

**Q.** If someone could relocate would it be easy for a trafficker to locate them?

**A.** Yes of course, most of them are not usually forced. Traffickers give the VOT a small percentage of the profits. So they are not a victim, they want to be recruited. If they've been in the UK and returned to Albania, and live away from where they were originally trafficked, it is case by case. Traffickers might fear the implementation of laws so use other methods. If the trafficker is related to the family, usually they are not forced. Some VOT decide to return to their previous life (of trafficking).

**Q.** So you are saying traffickers have moved away from forcing girls into trafficking and exploitation, but have other ways for them to return to them?

**A.** That is right. Sometimes re-trafficking is the choice of women and girls. For example, when the re-integration process is not going well or the girl might find it difficult to follow the re-integration plan. [...] It's a big issue as data collection is a big challenge. The government are only recognising those identified first time, but not those on the second time. Everything is case by case. It's not like they are collaborating with traffickers, a lot want to be out, and their wish is to be like normal women, but then they re-enter (trafficking) because of the economic situation or because of the difficulties of being accepted into society."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.51, 52, 53

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with representatives from Mary Ward Loreto in October 2022, during which a situation involving reprisal was discussed:

"Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]"

For example, a boy had debts after borrowing money for medical expenses. He was trafficked to the UK to pay back the debt. He worked for 3 years to pay the debt and then the drugs were stolen so he was kept enslaved. He was rescued but didn't want to return as the traffickers in Albania knew his family well. While he was in the UK, those linked to the trafficking gangs raped his mother and sister and sent him photos of it. They did not want to denounce the attackers to the police as they feared they would be killed as they (gangs) are well known for revenge."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.95

In an interview with the UK Home Office an official from Tirana Municipality noted the following in relation to re-trafficking:

"Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** You mentioned re-trafficking, is that a problem in Tirana?

**A.** It's not that re-trafficking is an issue, it's just that we want to prevent it from happening, that is the aim. The possibility of re-trafficking is very high among children who are Potential Victims of Trafficking who are mainly identified in situations of economic exploitation."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.109

An article published by Vice News in September 2022 told the story of an Albanian family claiming asylum in the UK, who had experienced violence against family members in Albania in order to intimidate the father of the family who was in the UK:

"'Anita,' whose name has been changed to protect her identity, is now living in the UK with her husband and their daughter. He has been granted asylum while she awaits a decision. She told VICE World News that her husband fled to the UK after being targeted by a local gang. She stayed behind but the gang raped and assaulted her to intimidate her husband.

‘They didn’t go to prison because they [bribed] the police and the judges and were left free to harm all of us’ she said, referring to her teenage daughter, who the gang threatened to traffick into the sex trade. ‘You are living in Albania, and you see with your own eyes the Albanian reality, the organised crime and blood feuds, domestic violence, especially the honour killings of girls and women, their prostitution and trafficking, corruption, the lack of protection from the state police.’”

Source: Vice News, [“They’re Vilified As Being Aggressive Criminals. But They’re Risking Everything To Escape Poverty And Trauma”](#), 23 September 2022

Different and Equal noted the following in relation to the issue of reprisals, in its guide for practitioners on supporting child victims of trafficking:

“Children are also especially vulnerable to traffickers’ threats of reprisals and to physical and emotional violence more generally in different settings (home, school, community).”

Source: Different and Equal, [“Supporting Children Victims of Trafficking: A reintegration Guide for Practitioners”](#), 1 March 2022

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews - including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – noted the following in relation to re-trafficking:

“Challenges to Reintegration I: Socio-economic Factors [...]

The hurdles imposed upon trafficking victims by the Albanian state not only hindered the reintegration process, but they also increased the probability of victims being re-trafficked: “Various problems exist on a systemic and structural level. If victims don’t receive the required support from the state after leaving our shelter, they can regress and return to the same vulnerable position before trafficking” (SW1). Reflecting on the scarcity of state social services and nonfunctional bureaucracies under the theoretical umbrella of critical victimology, the Albanian state can be perceived as a harmful agent in the victims’ reintegration process (see Spencer & Walklate, 2016). Data from the interviews imply that the weakness of the Albanian state and its failure in providing adequate reintegration assistance had a conducive role “in the continued production of victims” (Mawby & Walklate, 1994, p. 14). Consequently, the Albanian state can be considered directly responsible for the victims’ re-victimization and re-trafficking experiences following their release from organizations’ shelter”

Source: Klea Ramaj, [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

In relation to the issue of reprisals, the same source noted that:

“Challenges to Reintegration II: Legal and Institutional Barriers [...]

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the risk of reprisals from the victims’ traffickers:

[...] Trafficking victims were protected by special security forces while living in the organizations’ shelters. Hence, in those cases, threats were mainly directed toward professionals or the victim’s family members. The reasons behind the lack of measures taken against the traffickers were tied both to the complexity of trafficking cases and to Albania’s weak judicial system.”

Source: Klea Ramaj, [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

“The victims of trafficking who are not referred in the reintegration programs and do not have access to the services might be at risk of re-trafficking.

Even the victims of trafficking who stay in the programme a short period and they decide to leave the programme (as the program is on a voluntary basis), they are in risky situations, and at risk of being re-trafficked.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In response to a question about issues that affect the likelihood of re-trafficking, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented in written communication with Asylos, that:

“VOTs/ PVoTs, especially the ones from rural areas face a number of challenges in accessing quality vocational training, lack of employment, including lack of access to free childcare, difficulties accessing vocational training in rural areas of the country and the short duration and low quality of some trainings provided in vocational training centres (see the July 2022 UNICEF Albania study on economic reintegration of survivors).<sup>1</sup> Their families are in very poor socioeconomic conditions and all these reasons make them prey to traffickers.”

- 1 Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, stated in relation to the issue of re-trafficking:

“I think that unemployment rate in Albania is high, and this is officially [...] And if it’s high, this is high not only for all the citizens who are job seekers, but also for victims of trafficking. [...] it’s difficult because, as I mentioned, especially the victims of trafficking usually do not come back to their country of origin or to their city of origin. They especially want to change the place where they have lived before, and this makes it more difficult to be potentially integrated in a new area and a new community with a new job. It’s done, but it needs a lot of effort, and there are cases when they are turning back in the situation where they were because they can’t afford all these changes. This is where I say this is a process that needs a lot of support in long term because this is the reason the victims become victims again.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated that:

“[...] if the child is with the mother and the mother is the victims of trafficking and indirectly the children are affected by this process, for sure we support the mother legally to follow up the case in the court. But this is not an easy process because not all the mothers are willing to cooperate and to follow up because they are threatened, they have fear of their own children, or they are not duly supported by the legal system [...]”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:



“Based on my 2019 study [including interviews with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters, offering rehabilitation and reintegration services to trafficking victims: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], lack of economic stability (including lack of employment or low salary), lack of familial support, stigma, lack of accommodation/ shelter, lack of access to justice, unwillingness from the victims’ side to engage in the rehabilitation/ reintegration process.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained:

“[...] the same issues [affect the likelihood of re-trafficking] that also affect the likelihood of trafficking in the first place: economic vulnerabilities, and especially the profile of the traffickers, that is 68% people that are very close to victims for example family members.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes - Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] there is the risk of re-trafficking if the victims are not empowered enough to conduct a separate and independent life, but [...] it is because they are vulnerable and they continue seeking external support in order to have this protection and they go back to the same traffickers or they fall victims of new traffickers that reside in that part of the world. But are there instances that they might fall back into re-trafficking? Yes. [...]”

What I’ve received as information from NGOs is that the data talks more about the quality of integration and the long-term integration as a process that should accompany them for a longer time, like usually it should from three to five years in order to really have somebody are empowered and recovered, because a shorter time may not enable them to be fully in command of their life.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“So this is related to the level of vulnerability. So one issue it is the poverty and not finding a sustained job and employment. Second one, it is not to have a family members have family members that support you or being like, “I have problems,” and to resolve together with them. So the lack of family, it is a risk. It is an issue that impacts the victim’s life. And the other thing, it is mental health issues. If a victims have mental health issues and not are treated [...], so the likelihood of being re-trafficked, it is high. And as well, it is being from ethnic minority groups, different groups such as LGBTIQ or being with disabilities. So these are all issues of re-trafficking people. For us, in our data that we possess, the most likely issue it is this mental health issue because we didn’t have so many so that come from LGBTQI groups. So we don’t know for sure and so we don’t have very accurate data with that. But we have data regarding the victims that have mental health issues and how difficult and some of the victims are revictimized. And this is one of the biggest problems. The other thing, it is the family members’ problems, the second one. For example, if they have family member that push them through risky work [...], so risky situations. So for example, we have had some cases of young girls that are pushed by the family members by themselves to work and to find a job immediately or children to beg because the family don’t have money or their parents are abusive or they don’t work or they are alcoholic. So this is one of the risks. Being at risk after a long period of being treated in a program by the housing-- sorry, poverty issue is still an issue, but it’s not still for victim that is treated for a long time because they will find something, they will find a job. They will work for that. But at the beginning of treatment of the victims, so these poverty and lack of employment is a risk as well. [...] So this program, all our program, it is from three to five years so that we have this program of long-term reintegration because it is like this, but we don’t want the former victims to be [...] re trafficked again, because of the vulnerability. And we do every time this thing in our reports and we see from monitoring phase we do. And we see that almost every year in our monitoring phases-- we see that, for example, 2 to 5 percent of the victims that we support in our program probably is we-- so we don’t know for sure, but we think that are re trafficked again because of this vulnerability.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In relation to the issue of reprisals, the same interlocutor stated:

“[...] the victims that don’t go to seek help and support to law enforcement institutions, [...] there are a lot of victims that don’t denounce them because they fear that the traffickers will find them or they will punish or they will punish family members and etc. And doing like this, they don’t go to seek help or they don’t go to enter in the system of protection. This is one of the issues of the victims. [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...]with regards to the cases in the UK, I must say I have never come across a case [in my own work with victims in the UK] that was trafficked [to] the UK or elsewhere and then re-trafficked. [In further clarifications, Dr Anta Brachou clarified that this statement relates to the two cases she came across who were returned from the UK to Albania, one of whom returned voluntarily. Dr Anta Brachou stated that ‘[i]n both cases, the issue of re-trafficking was not mentioned by the practitioners who supported them.’] The re-trafficking rate in Albania it’s higher. I mean, if someone is internally trafficked, and then gets out for a while, and because of the vulnerabilities persisting, i.e., not having the means to make a decent living, the person chooses to go back to the perpetrator.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth, with a recent research focus on young people at risk of criminal exploitation in Albania stated that:

“And the likelihood of being re-trafficked. I think the major thing is that you are not escaping your predicament through these supposed support mechanisms. But if you are exposed to stigma in the society or exposed to social exclusion, or exposed to forced marriage, your best option is just, again, to migrate abroad. And that’s what people do.”

Source: Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

In relation to the issue of reprisals, the same interlocutor noted that:

“If you have fled an exploitative situation, and the traffickers are worried that you might seek judicial redress [...] you’re under a particular criminal threat to be found. So they can use those social networks to trace you down fairly easily. [...] You basically become a snitch. If you tell somebody’s been criminal to the police, or if you seek support, then that heightens your risk on the other side of reprisal, rather than lowering it, I would say.”

Source: Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“For re-trafficking, what we’ve seen is usually lack of employment opportunities and income. When they don’t have an income, they would usually be more vulnerable to being re-trafficked or fall into false promises or false employment opportunities. And we’ve seen also lack of social support when survivors don’t feel reintegrated in the community or do not feel accepted by their families. It does increase the risk to being re-trafficked, and also the risk of experiencing severe mental health issues after the reintegration period.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023



## 2.5 Corruption

### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report stated the following in relation to police complicity in trafficking:

“The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. In 2021, the government permanently dismissed a police officer for “prostitution and maintaining a brothel” and, in 2020, the government suspended five police officials, including the Director of the Border and Emigration Directorate of Tirana and three chiefs of units, after media reported a story alleging their complicity in an organized trafficking operation. The Tirana Regional Court dismissed charges for the police officers, but the police authorities disciplined the Border and Emigration Director with a temporary downgrade in rank and disciplinary procedures were ongoing against the other three officers at the end of the reporting period.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The December 2022 report by CGRS-CEDOCA – Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons on the general situation in Albania summarised the following regarding corruption, based on COI sources:

“There are regular police operations to dismantle criminal organizations and to counter drug cultivation and trafficking. Various international (police) partnerships have been concluded. There is also a witness protection program. Albanian crime groups nevertheless remain among the most powerful in all of Europe. There is a criminal ecosystem in which criminal networks are linked to local mafia families and which focuses on drug and human trafficking. Criminals from this ecosystem often enter government employment to ensure the development of their activities and they also have close ties to politicians and individuals in high positions. They are also well connected with officials at the police and judicial authorities. Organized crime can be responsible for serious crimes such as murder.” [In-house translation by Dutch speaker.]

ORIGINAL SOURCE: “Er zijn regelmatig politieoperaties om criminele organisaties te ontmantelen en om de drugsteelt en –handel tegen te gaan. Er zijn verschillende internationale (politie) samenwerkingsverbanden afgesloten. Er is ook een getuigenbeschermingsprogramma. De Albanese misdaadgroepen blijven niettemin tot de machtigste in heel Europa behoren. Er is sprake van een crimineel ecosysteem waarin criminele netwerken verbonden zijn met lokale maffiafamilies en dat zich toelegt op drugs- en mensenhandel. Criminelen uit dit ecosysteem treden vaak in dienst bij de overheid om de ontwikkeling van hun activiteiten te garanderen en ze hebben ook nauwe banden met politici en personen in hoge posities. Ook zijn ze goed geconnecteerd met ambtenaren bij politie en gerecht. De georganiseerde misdaad kan verantwoordelijk zijn voor ernstige misdrijven zoals moord.”

Source: CGRS-CEDOCA – Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium), “[Algemene Situatie](#)”, 15 December 2022

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding effective implementation of measures against corruption in the human trafficking context, that:

“During the period December 2021 - June 2022, the Police Oversight Agency identified and referred to the Prosecutor’s Office 2 procedural materials on the charge and arrest in flagrante delicto of 2 police officers and 1 citizen, suspected of criminal offenses of “abuse of duty” in order to favor “illegal crossing of the border by local and foreign citizens”. For the 2 criminal referrals, the registration of the criminal proceedings was made by the prosecution body and they are under investigation with tasks delegated by the relevant structures of the Agency.[...]

The Special Prosecutor’s Office against Corruption and Organized Crime on 10.11.2020, registered criminal proceedings no. 272/2020, on the basis of the incriminating material referred by the Police Surveillance Agency (former SHCA), on suspicions of the involvement of some of the police officers at the Morina Border Crossing Point in illegal activity for the criminal offenses “Passive corruption of persons who exercise public functions”, provided by article 259 of the Criminal Code “Smuggling of goods, for which excise duty is paid”, as well as “Aid for illegal border crossing”, etc., provided by articles 172 and 298 of the Criminal Code.”

Source: Council of Europe, “[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)”, 19 December 2022

As part of its fact-finding mission, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with representatives from the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Albania who discussed links between trafficking gangs and politicians and public officials:

“BIRN Albania, 12 October 2022 [...]

Another thing that is generally accepted, even by high officials and the current (Albanian) Prime Minister (PM), is people that have been engaged in human trafficking (HT) or drug trafficking have gone into politics. This acceptance is unbelievable and should not be accepted, and the international community should address this.

An investigation published in 2015 reported that 2 members of the socialist party had been sentenced outside Albania for drug trafficking and HT. We published that story. It was hard for us to secure the documents but we collaborated with people in those countries, and we were lucky, we took huge risks as had anonymous sources, so if we were ever called into court we would be sentenced as we couldn't reveal our sources.

One story was about the Mayor of Kavaje and what he had done in Italy, we found out that he was responsible for gang rape, and was sentenced [...]. We published the story and he admitted that he had changed his name. That night the Prime Minister was interviewed about this and he threatened to send us to court. The Mayor himself issued a statement saying that he would sue us and anyone that published this story for 100,000 euro and he would send those funds for reconstruction of schools. This was the immediate reaction, and then the PM did a campaign event in Kavaje and he laughed about the story and called the candidate Mayor by both names. So he did not deny it, he just ignored the story. Now politicians have to fill in a form about previous convictions. Then the same guy lied in a form and he was eventually sentenced for lying on that form. We have had candidates from the Socialist Party being involved in sexual exploitation. [...]

**Q.** Are the Albania mafia linked to political figures in Albania?

**A.** Yes and no, some in the late 1990s and 2000s. Then they (mafia) came back and needed a clean way to be recognised as businessmen, and to enter into politics. Specifically the Socialist Party was caught in so many cases. Three years ago a local election was held, but the Democratic Party, the main opposition, had left Parliament, they decided not to enter the local election. So in 2019 we had a local election with just one political party running. We didn't think this would be accepted internationally, we thought this election will have to be repeated as communism is back again, but what happened was the Socialist Party ran alone, the election happened and no one did anything. In the following 6 months documents from the Democratic Party and media revealed that at least 5 Socialist Party candidates had been convicted for drug trafficking in different countries. So yes, they're linked (to the mafia) in different ways. We have a lot of vote buying, so it is difficult to run against the party in power. To enter and to win, organised crime finances the campaign. It is a closed list so you vote just for the party. Dubious people linked with organised crime were in the list.

The former Minister for Interior – Saimir Tahiri – a young member of the party, back when he joined, the fight against corruption was very important, and he did quite a good job in fighting it. He was a member of the Tirana Socialist Party and it was discussed that he might be the leader after PM Rama. But then after 3 years the Italian authorities sent a file of surveillance on how he had facilitated his cousins for drug trafficking in Italy. This file by the Italian police was not announced first to the Albanian authorities as they were afraid that people concerned would be notified, so they only delivered it once they did a full investigation. It was requested that Tahiri be dismissed and sent to court, so members of the Socialist Party had to vote on this. The members of Socialist Party gathered and said, no he shouldn't be prosecuted. Although now he has been sentenced to jail [...]. And they named the leader of justice reform as the new Minister of Interior, but then we saw that his brother was convicted of trafficking.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 104-106

A September 2022 Vice News article on Albanian asylum seekers in the UK described the experiences of one female Albanian asylum seeker and her views on protection and corruption in Albania:

““Anita,” whose name has been changed to protect her identity, is now living in the UK with her husband and their daughter. He has been granted asylum while she awaits a decision. She told VICE World News that her husband fled to the UK after being targeted by a local gang. She stayed behind but the gang raped and assaulted her to intimidate her husband.



“They didn’t go to prison because they [bribed] the police and the judges and were left free to harm all of us,” she said, referring to her teenage daughter, who the gang threatened to traffick into the sex trade. “You are living in Albania, and you see with your own eyes the Albanian reality, the organised crime and blood feuds, domestic violence, especially the honour killings of girls and women, their prostitution and trafficking, corruption, the lack of protection from the state police.”

Source: Vice News, “[They’re Vilified As Being Aggressive Criminals. But They’re Risking Everything To Escape Poverty And Trauma](#)”, 23 September 2022

A 2022 *Multidisciplinary Research Journal “Olcinium”* article on corruption and organised crime in Albania suggested that there is little consideration of the impact of corruption in anti-trafficking efforts:

“[...] regarding political will, most reports and key informants in the region cite corruption – in the form of cooperation between officials and the police with traffickers – as the main obstacles in the fight against trafficking. Corruption is probably the most important factor in explaining human trafficking. However, the link between the two phenomena and the current impact of corruption on human trafficking is generally set aside in the development and implementation of anti-trafficking policies and measures. This lack of attention can fundamentally weaken initiatives to combat trafficking in persons and may prevent the preparation of responses as needed.”

Source: Adrian Leka and Eraldi Ndoj, “[The relationship between corruption and organized crime in Albania](#)”, *Multidisciplinary Research Journal “Olcinium”* [Multidisciplinarni Istraživački Časopis “Olcinium” Revista Kërkimore Multidisciplinare “Olcinium”], 2022 (10/2), pp. 15-16

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – noted the following:

“[...] most victims gave false testimonies during the interrogation by the Albanian border policemen: ‘Many victims provide false confessions and claim that they have not been trafficked or exploited. They also refuse to name the individuals who have accompanied them outside the country’ (LAW2). There might be several reasons behind the victims’ reluctance to truthfully confess to Albanian police. While practitioners mentioned the psychological resistances to the traumatic past, threats from the trafficker, or fear of retaliation, another factor that might have pushed victims into falsely confessing might be related to a lack of trust toward Albanian authorities, due to the latter’s potential stigmatizing comments or involvement in corruptive affairs. [...] Challenges to Reintegration II: Legal and Institutional Barriers [...]

Another issue raised by three interviewees was the victims’ lack of notification following traffickers’ furloughs<sup>7</sup>, thus not allowing the former to take appropriate protective measures (SW3). Several practitioners suggested that the lenient measures taken against the trafficker were also an outcome of corruption:

You know how things work in Albania ... the trafficker can ‘buy’ the policeman/prosecutor/judge ... Although I don’t have concrete evidence regarding this transaction, corruption can be implied by the low sentence length demanded by the prosecutor or the early groundless release of the trafficker (LAW2). Even though the involvement of Albanian members of the judiciary in corruptive affairs cannot be proven, according to the EC Progress Report (2015), corruption in the Albanian justice system is very widespread. The report further notes that Albanian judges and prosecutors are not held sufficiently accountable for their actions. [...]

<sup>7</sup> A prison furlough is the release of prisoners on a temporary license. Prisoners are allowed to leave the prison for a short period of time and then return.”

Source: Klea Ramaj, “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021



The same source noted the following with regards to officials involved in corruption:

“Friesendorf (2009) enlists several cases of corrupt Albanian officials involved in trafficking. For example, in 2006, five state officers were arrested for various crimes relating to their involvement in trafficking, while in 2007, 12 police officers were charged with involvement in trafficking. In the Belgian Federal Prosecution Service’s Albanian case LG, one of the defendants was an officer in President Berisha’s republican guard and a former agent of Albanian security services.”

Source: Klea Ramaj, “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, Journal of Human Trafficking, 7 May 2021

A Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime 2021 report included information in relation to the movement of migrants in the Western Balkans, including Albania:

“A lawyer in Albania who helps clients apply for asylum noted: ‘It is impossible to move immigrants from one country to another or to ensure their transportation within the country without the support of the local police. Considering the fact that there are police checkpoints on all major highways, how can it be that these immigrants, who can be recognized not only by their language, but also by their physical appearance, are not stopped along the way? This is an indication and confirmation that senior officials of local police directorates are informed in advance by the traffickers and take measures to clear the path to their destination.’<sup>32</sup> Indeed, at one point the whole chain of command of the Tirana Regional Directorate of Border and Emigration was dismissed; four police officials were arrested on suspicion of being involved in the trafficking of illegal immigrants in cooperation with travel agencies.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Interview with the lawyer of an illegal immigrant from Syria, Tirana, November 2020.

<sup>33</sup> SHÇBA, SHÇBA ndalon 4 punonjës policie në DRKM Tiranë, 27 May 2020, <https://shcba.gov.al/?p=10736>.”

Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “[SPOT PRICES Analyzing flows of people, drugs and money in the Western Balkans](#)”, May 2021 pp. 11-12

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated that:

“The level of corruption in Albania remains a concern and directly affects any aspect of the life of citizens, including the victims of trafficking.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal stated with regard to the involvement of politicians or other public officials in trafficking:

“Law enforcement institutions do not report on direct connections between traffickers and employees of public institutions.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 July 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, reported that:

“[...] in my work with the police stations or with the case, we don’t have any case as an example to share. So we work very close with police and up to now have never faced a case for 13 years of work, mine especially, in the field, even with the victims of trafficking, that has been prohibited due to corruption or has been delayed due to the corruption [...] We have heard also that there are cases, especially of traffickers who try to prohibit the identification of the case. But [...] I don’t have any case as an example to share it with you [based on my personal experience].”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The same source reported with regard to involvement of politicians or public officials in human trafficking that:

“No [I do not have any personal awareness of any evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or public officials]. What we have heard in the television maybe [...] Maybe more so on corruption in overall their mandating the official offices but not specifically for the trafficking.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“The post-communist transition has been characterised by low levels of capacity and functionality for the Albanian state (Cepiku & Mititelu, 2010). There is a lack of efficiency and responsibility among governing institutions as well as a “chronic inability to provide even the most basic public goods and services” (Ruli, 2003, p. 151). The employment of civil servants who work for the government is not always based on merit and competence, but rather on personal connections and political beliefs.

Regarding this question, I would also point to the following passages from my published research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#) (Ramaj 2021):

“Economic stability was the first aspect of trafficking victims’ reintegration negatively impacted by Albania’s poor bureaucratic performance. The interviews revealed that unemployed trafficking victims had the right to register as job seekers at the Albanian National Employment Service, a government agency which is responsible for assisting Albanian citizens searching for employment. Nevertheless, ten professionals claimed that accessing such service was a time-consuming and demotivating process for trafficking victims: ‘Victims need to wait three months until their documents are processed and then normally another five months until a job is made available for them. This gap causes financial instability, destroys their spirit, and makes them depressed’ (SW1).

According to the law on social housing (Ligji nr. 22, 2018), Albanian trafficking victims are among the prioritised categories of vulnerable individuals in the application for government rent subsidy following their stay in a shelter. However, more than half of the practitioners argued that applying for affordable housing schemes was a tiring and long process, which required numerous documents that victims were unable to secure due to their vulnerability as well as to matters that went beyond their control: ‘One of the required documents is a notarised rental contract. However, most landlords don’t provide this contract...the real estate system in Albania tends to be informal in the sense that people want to rent their apartments, but they don’t want to pay income tax’ (SW3). The difficulties experienced by trafficking victims in gaining social housing endured even after submitting their application: ‘The waiting list is too long. Victims have to wait for years, without any guarantee that their application will be successful. It largely depends on the will of the Mayor. From our experience, it’s mostly an impossible mission’ (SW7)”

Based on unpublished interview transcripts from the study I conducted back in 2019 [including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], the second reintegration factor adversely influenced by weak bureaucracy relates to trafficking victims’ physical and psychological wellbeing. In order to access public medical service, trafficking victims had to register in lengthy waiting lists:

“There is a long waiting list, which needs to be respected. There are also several bureaucracies in producing the health card...this then constrains other medical procedures, such as examinations or blood tests. Hence, the dissatisfaction and frustration among victims” (MD). Additionally, seven interviewees stated that state reintegration services for victims with mental health problems were inexistent: “After our sheltered assistance, reintegration for trafficking victims with mental disorders is often impossible. State agencies are non-collaborative because they tend to think: ‘these are lost cases, there’s no point in trying.’” (PSY1).



I would further point to the following passages from my aforementioned research article, which indicate that the collaboration of anti-trafficking organisations with state agencies was further impeded by institutional barriers:

“‘There are challenges in sending requests and in receiving responses from public institutions. They normally should respond within ten working days, but that is not always the case. A delayed response also precludes us from giving the right legal assistance’ (LAW1).

The hurdles imposed upon trafficking victims by the Albanian state did not only hinder the reintegration process, but they also made the victims more prone to re-trafficking: ‘There are various problems on a systemic and structural level. If victims don’t receive the required support from the state after leaving our shelter, they can regress and return to the same vulnerable position before trafficking’ (SW1). Reflecting on the scarcity of state social services and non-functional bureaucracies under the theoretical umbrella of critical victimology, the Albanian state can be perceived as a harmful agent in the victims’ reintegration process (see Spencer & Walklate, 2016). Data from the interviews imply that the weakness of the Albanian state and its failure to adequately assist trafficking victims during their reintegration have a conducive role ‘in the continued production of victims’ (Mawby & Walklate, 1994, p. 14). Consequently, the Albanian state itself can be understood to be directly responsible for the victims’ re-victimisation and re-trafficking experiences following their release from organisations’ shelter”

Addressing such structural challenges would require an improvement of the Albanian governance by increasing transparency, enhancing the legislation on social security, strengthening public institutions, and reforming the civil administration.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist discussed the challenge of linking corruption to human trafficking:

“[...] in general there have been some reports and some evidence gathered, especially by EU, the US and other foreign governments that tend to say that there is some corruption [in Albania], especially in some areas of the government or ministries. But whether this is really linked to human trafficking or affecting the ability to protect victims is very difficult to say [...] We don’t have any information or evidence about this.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Zero cases [have been] identified and condemned, means I have no [specific] facts to tell you [...] But the example that I mentioned before [...] everybody knows where the brothel is [...] there are underaged girls down there. And because the pimp running the brothel is part of the big extended family running multiple illegal activities in the same region, I very much doubt that the police don’t know. It might be corruption, it might not be corruption in terms of bribing and money involved. For sure, there is power involved.[...]”

These are people with guns. These are people with money. If they don’t buy you, they can kill you. And they are present and running the whole region and running many municipalities. And like that, you have it all over the country. In most of the main cities, you’ll have it like that. [...]

And it’s becoming worse and worse every day. That’s the sad side of it. That’s why so many Albanians are fleeing the country, really fleeing the country. It’s not just for economic reasons like low income [...] and better income opportunities [abroad], it’s also about [...] the safety in the country. [...] I cannot point you to any study, any statistics, anything like that because they do not exist. This is what we live every day.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

“[...] as I mentioned, trafficking here [in Albania] is exercised by organized crime [...] There have been cases when mother together with the social worker approached the police to say that, “My underage daughter is missing.” And the answer from the police was, “You know, I’m sure where she is. Go and pick her up yourself.” [...] So the power of the organized crime in Albania is if you don’t have the police to follow the case, to collect the facts, then the investigation assessments are very, very poor. You’ll have one case brought to the court for the last two to three years.”



Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that corruption happened in the past but less so in recent years:

“[...] in our day-to-day work, we didn’t have any case of corruption that has been identified or prosecuted in Albania. And we don’t have any cases of state employees that are involved through corruption into this. Before, so too many years ago, when the protection system has been very weak and not very well formed, it has been very common this kind of corruption. But now it is [...] better than before. And we have some cases that say that, “So they don’t give me this service or they don’t give me this service.” And probably they must be corrupted, but they are not based on [...] any case for an employee at least the past year and this year and the recent years. We don’t have cases that are published or public. [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same source commented in relation to the complicity of politicians or public officials in human trafficking that:

“[T]oo many years ago, we had a case that reported a situation like that. But for example, the trafficker that exploited her stated that he had some people that works in politics, and the case was convicted. The trafficking group has been convicted, but as I know, not politician. And then the case has been supported by witness program because she has denounced a criminal group. But not now.

For example, we have cases so three or four years ago. One case said that I don’t go to the police because I know that the trafficker that exploited me now, for example, the police officers that work in the east district, for example. And she doesn’t want-- she doesn’t want to make a denouncement, but we supported her together with the state police.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same source noted in relation to provision of healthcare:

“So the health support system in Albania is free. And so must be free but if we can add and hold for corruption, we can say that here in this program, there are a lot of-- the victims that are unprotected and don’t have incomes, it is very difficult for them to access health [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the following clarifying question:

*Does this mean that victims who are not in the rehabilitation and reintegration program and who don’t have incomes would find it difficult to access healthcare for physical and mental health needs? Does this mean that healthcare should be free, but due to corruption, victims who are not in a rehabilitation program and don’t have an income would need to pay?*

The interlocutor responded as follows:

“Yes I mean for the population in general, and especially for the victims of human trafficking the public health services are free, but as for the population in general, even for the victims, if they [are not] in the protection system, there is a lot of corruption and their access to health services it is not granted always for free. When victims are in the system (protected by service providers, including Vatra and NCATS shelters) the access to health support is granted. There are some health services not free, for example stamatology (dental health), or some medicaments that even victims can’t access by being reimbursement and we as service providers pay for these, in the framework of the projects.”

Source: Vatra, [written clarifications](#), 19 December 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, referring to the challenges she faced as part of her P.h.D research, stated:

“[T]he general feeling is that there is a lot of corruption, and this was my experience. So when I tried to kind of get to the nitty-gritty examples of what corruption would look like, I didn’t get any personal stories. [...] It was always in reference to, “Yes, but if this happened to this person and it was a prolific media case, imagine what would happen to me,” kind of thing. So it’s very much hearsay. So the problem sometimes is how do you make hearsay empirical evidence,”

The same interlocutor commented on corruption in relation to the judiciary:

“I think [the judiciary providing protection] is quite a challenge. And Albania has been going through the review of all the judiciary personnel. So they’ve gone through very thorough investigations, and quite a lot of judges and other judiciary personnel have been removed, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that things have been solved. There are those that have been removed and then they’re still lingering in the background. And I think it’s probably the most corrupted link that is also very much detrimental because that’s where people look for justice, and they never get it or it takes ages.”

The same interlocutor also referred to interviews she had conducted as part of her P.h.D (fieldwork was undertaken between 2018 - 2020) with individuals being prosecuted in Albania for alleged trafficking crimes (not linked to the UK):

[...] two [...] young boys, they had the label-- they had been accused of trafficking [...] in both those cases, the guys denied the kind of the situation, and they did argue that there were no proof and that the police had actually produced false evidence. But of course, I was not there to assess their case from a legal point of view [...]

[...] when I spoke to the traffickers or the alleged traffickers, that’s what they pointed towards. That it’s very corrupt, usually the ones that should be on trial or should go through these legal proceedings are exonerated immediately, and then it’s the little soldiers, if you want that, are caught, which are then used for statistics because statistics would look good.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth, with a recent research focus on young people at risk of criminal exploitation in Albania, stated that:

“We know things have improved, but we also know that corruption prevails as a problem. And that is for police, judiciary, and other state authorities. And in the case of trafficking [...] First of all, it means that you have low trust because of the history even if there have been improvements. So people would not go there. In the case of trafficking [...] you don’t want to be known as a victim of trafficking because it renders you additionally vulnerable because it stigmatizes you. You are therefore in an extra weak position and exploitable and blackmailable, even, in theory. So it’s a risk to be known as such, and it could mean real constraints on your freedom. So I think people are not taking recourse to state protection unless they are found out with or against their will [...]

Source: Dr Stephanie-Schwander-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] Well, from my personal experience interacting with victims, usually it’s the perception, first of all. Generally, in Albania, there is a perception that there is a lot of corruption going on. For example, South East European Development Initiative [SELDI], for the last year, identified that Albania is the country with the highest administrative corruption in the region, where 57% of the citizens that they were involved in the study, they mentioned that they were asked for a bribe at least once during the year where they sought for public services, either in the police, asking for documentation. And 47% of those [...] surveyed, [...] in the study, they participated in corruption transactions. And also, Transparency International ranked Albania as being around 36 out of 100 - a highly corrupted country [the source can be found at: Transparency International, “[Albania: Country Data](#)”, 2022]. Where 0 is highly corrupted; 100 is not corrupted. Albania is 36. Not even in the middle. But when it comes to victims of human trafficking, that is a huge barrier because, first of all, within the police, we’ve had cases where victims of human trafficking, they’ve been self-referred to the NRM in Albania or the organizations. And usually, that is a huge barrier at the beginning because it would make them scared to reach out to public institutions. And we can prove that also by looking at the rate of



how many victims have been identified by the NGOs and how many victims by the police, for example. That seems that the victims do not trust the police. Maybe they've had cases where they've seen police officers cooperating with their traffickers when the trafficking experience happened. But we don't unfortunately have the statistics or the stories to prove that."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

The same interlocutor explained with regard to complicity of politicians or public officials in human trafficking that:

"Usually, there is a claim that there are links, but there are no official reports. But who gathers data for this official report? is actually the police and prosecution. And when the police is part of the government, it's very difficult for them to prove that. But we've had international investigations and journalists investigations who have found ties, not directly of MPs but, for example, the people closer to the MPs, who were involved in organized crime activities, mainly for drug trafficking. But we know in Albania that, usually, the organized crime groups that are involved in drug trafficking, most of them are also involved in human trafficking. That falls within the profile of the trafficker as well, who is involved in drug trafficking and human trafficking at the same time. But there are no official reports, unfortunately."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

The same interlocutor further stated that:

"[...] I say on a personal level; I don't have the statistics - usually, the high rates of corruption that might exist within the prosecution system or the involvement of some traffickers having connections with police officers or within the judicial system might make victims not even want to be part of this witness protection scheme or program because they will feel very exposed and not believe that their identities will be kept safe."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 3. Assistance for Victims of Trafficking

### 3.1 Assistance from shelters

#### 3.1.1 Shelters – capacity and accessibility

##### 3.1.1.1 Capacity

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report noted that:

“The government operated one specialized shelter and supported three specialized NGO-run shelters. [...] The four specialized shelters constituted the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NCATS); victims who required services not available in one shelter were referred to another shelter within the coalition. [...] NCATS maintained the total capacity to accommodate 71 potential and official victims, including 10 children. [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

In an interview conducted by the UK Home Office as part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, Different and Equal described the capacity of the shelters in Albania:

“Different and Equal, 5 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** What is the capacity of the shelters in Albania and how many are there?

**A.** [...] There are 3 NGO-run shelters, in Tirana, Elbasan and Vlorë – with 15 to 25 beds each. We cooperate with each other when receiving referrals and see what the best options for cases are, or if a shelter is over-capacity. The capacity for shelters is good up to now. [...]

**Q.** You say a VOT will stay for 3 to 6 months, depending on their situation. How long on average would you provide support?

**A.** Those with mental health (MH) issues can be different. For example, in 2 cases when the VOT had MH problems, we tried to collaborate with social services and provide appropriate accommodation, but this was hard so they stayed with us for between 3 and 5 years. Long term solutions for VOT with MH problems is hard.

**Q.** If difficult cases are in the shelter for a long time, do you still provide support and can they rely on you?

**A.** Yes, we then pass the cases onto the second phase, or transition. This is semi-independent living, where they go from shelter to a rented apartment, and we help pay rent on the apartment for one year (the cases are from all over Albania not only in Tirana). In this period D&E try to collaborate with municipalities to include the beneficiaries in the social housing programmes that they have. We help and support the VOT with the preparation of all the documents needed to profit from this programme. It can be difficult as different municipalities have different programmes and the cases are from all over Albania. We support them wherever they choose to live and to be reintegrated.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 16

During an interview with the UK Home Office, Tjeter Vizion, an NGO-run shelter that is part of the NCATS discussed capacity to assist victims of trafficking:

“Tjeter Vizion, 5 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** What is the capacity of support shelters for victims of trafficking (VOT)?

**A.** There are 4 shelters in Albania, we have self-organised and we have established the national coalition for human trafficking (HT) victims. The idea of the national coalition is to provide coordinated services and support for VOT in Albania. Thus far, in regards to identified potential victims of trafficking (PVOT) or VOT cases, the coalition have managed to respond to 100% of all cases, either identified or referred to us. [...] . Our shelter has capacity of 18 beds and 2 for emergencies, so 20 in total.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.24-25

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Caritas described its capacity for sheltering domestic violence and trafficking victims:

“Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...]

Since 2015, Rozalba Home, run by the Venerini Congregation, was founded as a result of several requests coming from the social services and Albanian courts to take in minor females, victims of abuse and trafficking. There is also a signed Agreement between “Venerini Youth” Center and Lezha Municipality for the 72-hour emergency shelter for the domestic violence victims and victims of trafficking run by this congregation. Currently, there are 18 girls accommodated in the house, which are referred by the State Police, Regional State Social Services and Child Protection Units.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.50

During an interview with the UK Home Office, Vatra, an NGO-run shelter that is part of the NCATS, described its capacity:

“Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** How many can you support in the shelter?

**A.** We have 16 beds, plus 2 for babies. It’s not only Vatra who have a shelter, different NGOs, such as the Different and Equal and Other Vision [Tjetër Vizion], and there is the state-run shelter. [...]

**Q.** Are shelters always full?

**A.** Not always, but all cases will be provided with shelter if necessary. In all the 4 shelters no one is without shelter, if there is no capacity in one, they go to another shelter. We make a risk assessment on a case by case basis. A VOT can choose when it is safe and where they want to go. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.64, 67

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes. The report described the capacity of state-run shelters as such:

“In terms of service provision to VoTs [Victims of Trafficking], GoA operates one dedicated shelter and partially supports three shelters operated by NGOs. [...]

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, “[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)”, November 2022, p. 14

The report submitted by the government of Albania to the UNCAT in July 2021 described the shelters as follows:

“119. The government supports a specialized national shelter, as well as three specialized shelters run by NGOs. Centers handling victims of trafficking provide services for Victims of Trafficking and Potential Victims of Trafficking VT / PVT, foreign or domestic, children, men or women.”

Source: United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Committee Against Torture, “[Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 19 of the Convention, due in 2016 \[Date received: 19 July 2021\]](#)”, 5 April 2022, p. 23



## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

“The capacity of the state-run shelter to provide accommodation is 100 persons, girls and women victims of trafficking of all ages [...] The duration of the victims of trafficking in the shelter run by the state depends on the case, mostly when they resolve their security problems that comes from the denunciation towards their traffickers.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated:

“The capacity of three NGO-run shelters is 49 VoT/PVoT and 8 children of them. Two shelters accommodate only girls and women victims/potential victims of trafficking [...]”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated with regards to the duration of assistance from the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes it offers that:

“The duration of the beneficiaries in the reintegration program varies from case to case. Some categories of the beneficiaries VoT need to be assisted in the program for a longer period compared with the others. These categories are: minors VoT cases; cases who have denounced the traffickers; cases who have entered in the program accompanied with their children and cases with mental health problems. So, the duration of the cases in reintegration program can go from 2 to 5 years.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“[...] For the time being, the beneficiaries accommodated in National Reception Center [state-run shelter] are receiving these services in a building with limited physical spaces, for this reason the current capacity of the shelter is 12 cases. They are waiting for the start of the work for the construction of the new building, which will offer maximum quality and standards services for VoT/PVoT. [...] The three NGOs of NCATS (Vatra Psycho – Social Center, Different & Equal and Another Vision) offers a full package of reintegration services.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“So right now, in Albania, there are four shelters that exist. One out of the four is 100% run by the state.”

The same interlocutor further explained:

“[T]he [total capacity of the shelter] that is run by the state is up to 20 [individuals at a time] [...] for the three [NGO shelters] that are supported by UNICEF, they can support [...] 140 [The length of support] ranges from three to nine months on average.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Describing the services offered by the emergency shelter of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS (NISMA ARSIS), an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, [not part of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters], its Executive Director, Ana Majko, reported that:

“I can say that [...] we have-- in our emergency shelter, we have capacity for 20 people per night because it’s an emergency shelter. [...] This is boys and girls, with dedicated spaces for boys and dedicated spaces for girls [...] but also for mothers with children.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] I don’t know exactly how many beds one or the other one has. I know [...] that the state is running one shelter with thirty employees and only two victims inside. And then in total, the state is supporting the three NGOs with the salaries for twenty-nine staff. All in all, the three of them. And they are the ones doing the majority of the work, and also [providing the] living allowance [...]. Only for the victims of trafficking, not for the children that are accompanying their mothers in the shelter. [...] So far [there] are [about] 100 cases identified a year. And this number can be accommodated. I mean, I haven’t heard from shelters complaining of running out of capacities. If the numbers increase, then for sure they have [...] problems.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation noted that:

“So Vatra is a member of National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in Albania. There are four members of this coalition, and all these members have the same responsibility, duty, and activities that Vatra has. So they are supporting victims of human trafficking coming from different regions of Albania. So three of the members are NGOs such as Vatra. One it is in Tirana, Different & Equal. The other one, it is in Elbasan. It is Other Vision, the name. And the other member is a state center. It is National Reception Center for victims of human trafficking. [...] And all these [rehabilitation and reintegration] programs are divided into three phases. The first phase, it is the immediate and empowerment support. That is in shelter or in community during the first year when the victims enter in a program. And we say first year, it is because some victims stay, for example, one month in the shelter and then go in the community or they stay for six months. That depends in case by case and by their profile. [...]

And then if the victims are minors, so if the victims are children, it is very difficult for them to find a place for a long-term accommodation, for example. So for victims, another category is victims that have denunciations. For example, has denunciations in process in the courts or persecution offices. And they go for longer in a shelter because that depends on the situation of the process.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] usually, the victims who are placed in the state-run shelter, after they receive the rehabilitation services and the case workers assess and identify that the victim has moved now from the rehabilitation period, which, usually, in Albania, lasts from six months up to a year, but it can depend on the case, there is no specific timeframe. And that’s positive about Albania, that we don’t have a specific number of days that you are entitled to receive the service.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.1.1.2 Women - access to shelters

Refer also to [3.1.1.3 Men – access to shelters on page 175](#).

#### Desk review material

In its 2021 Annual Report, the institution of the Ombudsman, 'The People's Advocate', described the National reception centre for Victims of Trafficking in Linza as providing a centre of rehabilitation for women and girls:

"[...] The purpose of this Centre is to rehabilitate women [...] trafficked or at risk of trafficking. It offers a safe temporary place of residence, out of danger, and specialized assistance for the rehabilitation and return to normal life."

Source: The People's Advocate, "[PA 2021 Annual Report](#)", p.59

#### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

"The capacity of the state-run shelter to provide accommodation is 100 persons, girls and women victims of trafficking of all ages [...]"

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor further noted that:

"The capacity of three NGO-run shelters is 49 VoT/PVoT and 8 children of them. Two shelters accommodate only girls and women victims/potential victims of trafficking [...]"

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

"Three shelters run by Different & Equal, Vatra and National reception center provide specialized services for women and girls VoT/PVoT of all ages"

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation noted that:

"So most part of the support system, it is directed to women and girls because they are mostly-- so as I told you before, the most part of affected people that are involved in human trafficking but as well children. I explained to you that three-- so two of our shelters support victims in the shelters that are only women and girls up to 14 years old. And if they have children, together with children. For example, if they have children [...] if one of the children, it is a boy under 10 years old, it is okay. They will be accommodated in the shelter. But if the victims have children, boys for example, more than 10 years old, we support them in the community through other phases of the program. For example, we support them with the payment of rented apartments. So if they cannot be accommodated in the shelter, we support them directly in the rented apartment. We support them with financial support and with other services.""

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023



Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“Different and Equal and Vatra, they host women usually over 18, but I think they’ve had cases of 17, I think, in the past.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 3.1.1.3 Men – access to shelters

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report stated that:

“One NGO-run shelter provided [...] rented apartments for male victims, where they received assistance from NGOs.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

#### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

“[...] There are no specific shelters for men victims of trafficking. Males are assisted mostly in rented apartments, in the family of origin or in other alternative placements. [...]”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Vatra and Different & Equal provide as well as for adult men and boys VoTs/PvOTs rented apartments and all the rehabilitation and reintegration services same as the cases accommodated in shelters. TVO NGO based on the projects and donation provides high autonomy apartments for minors who are aged 18 years and up for both targets of males and females.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“So right now, in Albania, there are four shelters that exist. One out of the four is 100% run by the state. It can accommodate families with children with dependents, men, and women. So basically all types of cases. [...] The approach that has been followed [...] is that men are mostly supported outside the shelters. So accommodation is provided, for example [...] renting accommodation outside the shelter. And men are supported by them financially [...], but they’re not hosted within the shelter.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“What the shelters [the four shelters of the NCATS] always highlight, there are two moments that they are continuously seeking support also raising the issue within the interim, but have not found any solution yet, it is for the separate shelter for male victims of trafficking because to now there is no shelter for that. Usually, they accommodate the male victims in rental apartments, which is not that good because there might be cases that need 24-hours assistance rather than living separately.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, stated:

“I’m not aware of a shelter for men only.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 3.1.1.4 Children (boys and girls) – access to shelters

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons reports indicated that one NGO-run shelter provides services for minors:

“One NGO-run shelter provided specialized services for victims younger than the age of 18 [...]”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

The report submitted by the government of Albania to the UN HRC in August 2022 noted that the state-run shelter dealt with integration and reintegration of women and girls:

“[...] 90. [...] The National Center for the Treatment of Victims of Domestic Violence and the National Center for Victims of Trafficking deal with the integration and reintegration of [...] girls, survivors of domestic violence or trafficking. [...]”

Source: United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Human Rights Committee, “[Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, due in 2022 \[Date received: 2 August 2022\]](#)”, 10 January 2023, pp. 18

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with Tjeter Vizion, an NGO that runs a shelter for VoTs in Albania, in October 2022, during which its remit was discussed:

“Tjeter Vizion [...]”

Tjeter Vizion (TV) manages a shelter that provides support and services to children VOT, [...]. It is the only shelter that provides such support to minors. This means any minor children identified as VOT are immediately referred to TV. [...] 60% of beneficiaries are men and boys and 40% are women and girls. The reason why the rate of trafficked men and boys is higher than girls is the former can be exploited for forced labour, begging, criminal drug dealing and theft.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.24

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes. The report indicated that the state-run shelter supports children:

“In terms of service provision to VoTs [Victims of Trafficking], GoA operates one dedicated shelter and partially supports three shelters operated by NGOs. Each shelter was established to support [...] child victims [...]”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, [“Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022”](#), November 2022, p. 14

UNICEF’s 2022 report “Albania Child Notice” indicated that the state-run shelter accommodates child victims of trafficking.

“The Government continues to operate one shelter for trafficking victims and supports three that are NGO-operated. They all shelter [...] child victims and are managed on the basis that all victims, potential or actual, have equal access.”

Source: UNICEF, [“Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf”](#), p.94

In its 2021 Annual Report, the institution of the Ombudsman, ‘The People’s Advocate’ described the National reception centre for Victims of Trafficking in Linza as providing a centre of rehabilitation for girls:

“[...] The purpose of this Centre is to rehabilitate [...] girls trafficked or at risk of trafficking. It offers a safe temporary place of residence, out of danger, and specialized assistance for the rehabilitation and return to normal life.”

Source: The People’s Advocate, [“PA 2021 Annual Report”](#), undated, p.59

### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

“The capacity of the state-run shelter to provide accommodation is 100 persons, girls and women victims of trafficking of all ages [...]”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated in written communication:

“[...] Two shelters accommodate only girls and women victims/potential victims of trafficking. One of these shelters accommodates children VoT/PVoT, both females and males’ children. The services offered by this shelter are dedicated to PVoTs/ VoTs as minors in a mixed group, composed of male and females of age 6 to 18 years old. The facilities within the shelter are divided for both target groups.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“The services offered by the shelter of TVO NGO [Tjeter Vizion] are dedicated to PVoTs/ VoTs as minors in a mixed group, composed of male and females of age 6 to 18 years old. The facilities within the shelter are divided for both target groups. [...]”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Tjeter Vizion, Another Vision. It’s in Elbasan, and it takes only children.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“So most part of the support system, it is directed to women and girls because they are mostly-- so as I told you before, the most part of affected people that are involved in human trafficking but as well children. I explained to you that three-- so two of our shelters support victims in the shelters that are only women and girls up to 14 years old. And if they have children, together with children. For example, if they have children [...] if one of the children, it is a boy under 10 years old, it is okay. They will be accommodated in the shelter. But if the victims have children, boys for example, more than 10 years old, we support them in the community through other phases of the program. For example, we support them with the payment of rented apartments. So if they cannot be accommodated in the shelter, we support them directly in the rented apartment. We support them with financial support and with other services.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“Another Vision [Tjeter Vizion] is the only [shelter] who hosts children as well. So under 18. [...]The other two, so Different and Equal and Vatra, they host women usually over 18, but I think they’ve had cases of 17, I think, in the past.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 3.1.2 Rehabilitation and reintegration assistance – shelters

- Refer also to [3.1.3 Limitations in rehabilitation and reintegration assistance on page 184](#) and [3.3 Barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration accessing assistance on page 212](#).

#### Desk review material

The 2023 Trafficking in Persons report noted the following services provided by the government as well as the shelters of the NCATS:

“The four specialized shelters constituted the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NCATS); victims who required services not available in one shelter were referred to another shelter within the coalition. NCATS and the government provided food, mental health counseling, legal assistance, health care, educational services, employment services, assistance to victims’ children, financial support, long-term accommodation, social activities, vocational training, and post-reintegration follow-up; NCATS and the government supported all official and potential victims in both 2022 and 2021.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

During an interview with the UK Home Office, UNICEF provided an overview of the rehabilitation and reintegration services provided by the NGO-run shelters:

“UNICEF, 5 October 2022

[...] **Q.** What is the capacity of shelters and who can access them?

**A.** The programme we engage in is with 3 out of 4 shelters, providing reintegration services. There is a coalition of trafficking shelters, a state-run one and 3 NGO-run. We collaborate with the NGOs, they are a consortium of programmes, we have supported and provided services for VOT for the past 3 years. We provide a range of services including wellbeing, housing, health care and education. We have quite a few people who require assistance from the programme and 40% reach a level of reintegration as a result of our assistance. [...]

**Q:** You mentioned support and vocational services, please expand.



A. Once a person has left the shelter, support is still available.

They have a cycle of support for 3 years, though this can be extended beyond 3 years, with professional support as well. This can continue with payments provided for accommodation, basic living needs, food and clothes. This is especially available to single mothers and for those in rural areas, as well as support beyond those leaving shelters. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.10

During interviews with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Different and Equal and Tjeter Vizion confirmed that they provide services to Roma and Egyptian victims of trafficking:

"Different and Equal, 5 October 2022 [...]"

Q. Can VOT re-access services if they leave the programme?

A. Yes, we have seen that reintegration is not linear and we understand the ability factor and the need for asking for support again. We keep in touch for up to at least 5 years to see how they are doing and if they need more support. We see sometimes that if a trafficker is released from prison, for security reasons we need to support the VOT again. Or we have cases that are for one year supported in the programme and after one year they decide to denounce their trafficker, so we reevaluate the situation.

So in some cases we are open to accept them back. [...]"

Q. The Roma and Egyptian community, can they access shelters and the same support services?

A. Yes, both. They are equally provided with services.

Q. NGO or government services?

A. Both. They can access shelter services regardless of status – Roma, Egyptian, foreigner, domestic. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 17, 18

"Tjeter Vizion, 5 October 2022 [...]"

Q. Is the support you give mostly given to those trafficked within Albania, and does this include ethnic Roma and Egyptians?

A. To us a VOT is a VOT regardless of where they are from or their ethnicity. We support anyone who needs us. Lately we have had incidents of Syrian and Afghan child VOT. According to the NRM, as well as our standard operating procedures (SOPs), we are responsible for supporting any child that is identified as a VOT or PVOT in Albania."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 26

During an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, NISMA ARSIS stated that:

"NISMA ARSIS, 5 October 2022 [...]"

Q. Could you provide information regarding the support your organisation provides to victims of trafficking (VOT)?

A.. [...] Our team of 12 (psychologists and social workers) provide psycho-social service support in police stations during the interview of the child. Or if a child has been encountered with drugs or crime, the police contact these services for psycho-social support and to help interview the child. So the police call us and we go there. [...] VOT are girls and boys who are part of exploitation criminal networks, or have behaviours where they leave their homes, children in conflict with the law and so on.

[...] Q. Is there any public support that a VOT can access?

A. We have a programme with the British Embassy and UNICEF, a holistic approach, policy, reintegration, trying to cover all, but when it's finished what happens? There are not enough public financial resources to cover all the needs.

Q. You think support needs to be long-term?

A. Yes [...]"

Q. Is there a reason why they have such difficulty accessing support?

A. [...] This [House of Colors] is an emergency shelter for children, and mothers with children. It's not part of the national coalition of shelters and we refer VOT for long term support to the 3 NGO shelters and state-run shelter if needed. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 29, 30, 31, 32



During an interview with the UK Home Office, Vatra described the services it offers:

“Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]

[...] We have a multi-disciplinary team with social workers, nurse, doctor, psychologist, teacher and lawyer. Some cases have never gone to school and we provide support to enrol children or get them back into school. We also have shelter security and use a private security company, licenced by the Ministry of Interior, and the service is 24 hours for VOT and staff. We provide medical assistance and a doctor and collaborate with health institutions.

Psychologists work in the legal clinic which gives legal support to VOT, PVOT and victims of GBV. [...]

**Q.** How long is rent provided?

**A.** Sometimes 6 months and sometimes a year, especially when the victims have children. We do advocacy work to local authorities in order for them to provide support for victims through receipt of social housing bonus, after 6 months (or 1 year's) support provided by Vatra. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 65

During an interview with the UK Home Office, the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection described assistance available to victims of trafficking:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

We have helped 6,074 cases (not all VOT) (legal assistance, face-to-face counselling, online counselling and psycho-social support and cases referred to care institutions) in 2021.

For over 3 years we have also financed the LGBTI shelter as there have been instances of sex abuse, violence and trafficking against LGBTI persons as well. In Tirana hospital, the Lilium centre provides assistance to victims of violence, including sexual, and VOT. Such assistance is provided for men boys, girls and women, so for all individuals. In 2 regions, we have established 2 one-stop shops that provide support to children who are victims of serious forms of violence, mainly sexual abuse [...]

Subordinate to the MoHSP and funded by the state budget are 2 national centres, one for treating victims of DV and the other for treating VOT. Until June 2022, 48 individuals have had assistance from the national centre for domestic violence, of whom 13 were boys. Currently only 5 women receive support at the national centre for VOT. This is up to date information, as we speak to the trafficking centre.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.75-76

A 2022 report authored by Robin Haarr evaluated the programme “Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania”, implemented by UNICEF Albania, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Presence in Albania, Terre des Hommes, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra, and Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë. The evaluation was based on mixed methods research, and included interviews with implementing partners including UNICEF country office staff, some shelters of the NCATS and Terre des Hommes. The report discussed the services available in shelters for victims of trafficking as such:

“In terms of service provision to VoTs [Victims of Trafficking], GoA operates one dedicated shelter and partially supports three shelters operated by NGOs. [...] The four shelters were organized to establish a National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NCATS), enabling them to coordinate efforts and provide services to VoTs, including short- and long-term accommodation, psychosocial counselling, legal aid, health care, education, vocational training, employment services and financial support and assistance. They also provide reintegration and follow-up services.”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, [Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#), November 2022, p. 14

**Interview material**

When asked about what was helpful for their rehabilitation and reintegration, a Beneficiary from Different and Equal stated:

“In fact I wanted the best for myself but alone it was impossible. I was lucky being a beneficiary of the D&E organization and profit a lot from their services. D&E staff supported me in many ways, I received all the support I needed at that difficult situation, like psychological counselling, medical support, legal assistance, participation in many activities, trainings, finding a job, enrolling my son in the kindergarten etc. I tried hard to work with myself to change my life for the better. [...]”

Since 2019 I have been part of D&E organization, I received a lot of services. In the beginning D&E supported me with rent of the apartment, food packages for about 1 year, psychosocial counseling for me and my son, legal counselling and support, medical assistance, and provided me with necessary materials to run my tailoring at home, etc. [...]

It has been a great help to me, D&E gave me great support to get out from the difficult situation in which I was. It's due to the work done by the organization, services provided to me and everything they did made me the person I am today. If D&E hadn't given me a hand I wouldn't be where I am now, I wouldn't have had the strength to face things alone - I didn't have that strength... now I feel stronger and empowered.”

Source: Beneficiary of D&E, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

When asked questions about what was helpful about their time in Vatra's shelter, and what had helped their rehabilitation, Beneficiary A.B. commented that:

“During the time I have spent with Vatra, I appreciate a lot the help that I have gotten from the services I have received, mainly the shelter, fulfilling of the basic needs, services regarding my health situation, and everything else. And in this relation and aspect, Vatra has helped me a lot. [...] I'm just grateful for being part of Vatra because I have been assisted with all kinds of reintegration and rehabilitation services.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [written interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“The state run shelter provides rehabilitation services for victims of trafficking. They accommodate the cases with high security problems.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“National Reception Center has provided rehabilitation services in shelter. The final goal of these services is rehabilitation and preparation for an independent life. The quality of services that VoT/PVoT receive at the National Shelter is maximum, always based on the needs and the highest interest of the case.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Based on a jointly produced overview of the rehabilitation and reintegration services provided by the NCATS shelters, Different and Equal and Tjeter Vizion provided the following summary of rehabilitation and reintegration services:

“The reintegration services include: accommodation, security and reintegration plan; medical assistance; psychological assistance; psycho-social assistance; intermediation/facilitation with the family of origin; assistance to education and attending school; legal assistance; vocational training; coaching for employment, counselling and support for employment; social activities, mentoring; services for economic empowerment including grants for microbusiness; assistance to children of victims of trafficking; financial support and long term accommodation; information on available services in the community and respective contact information; monitoring and on-going supervision of the beneficiaries of the program.



The reintegration program is divided into three phases, including emergency services, rehabilitation services and long-term services and monitoring during the process of social inclusion.

#### Phase #1: Crisis intervention and Accommodation

The initial assistance for VoT deal primarily with accommodation of victims of trafficking in the residential center where beneficiaries are provided with basic needs and crisis services - e.g. accommodation, housing, clothing, feeding, medical assistance, psychological assistance, professional trainings, protection and security 24 hours, family mediation, as well as preparation for the next stages of reintegration. In this phase beneficiaries, together with the staff (multidisciplinary team), design and following their individual reintegration plans.

#### Phase #2: Transition phase including semi-independent living

Most of the beneficiaries are unable to go home because of the mentality and social stigma, security reason or they are rejected by the families so they are therefore provided with a full range of in house assistance in preparation for independent living. The three NGOs provide rented apartments for beneficiaries who have begun to make the important transition into 'normal' life. Adults are supported toward their economic independence - e.g. after completing vocational trainings and maintaining a job for some time, they move out of the shelter and into rented apartments, subsidized by the center. For minors, placements into families of origin and alternative care settings are facilitated. Staff of the center monitors beneficiaries' progress in these half-way houses and families, providing regular psycho-social assistance.

#### Phase #3: Re/integration and social inclusion

The support given to cases in this phase is to empower them and gradually leave the program. This support consists in: offering reintegration assistance to the family and community where the beneficiary resides; information on resources and services available in the community, assistance to the beneficiaries in strengthening relationships with the support institutions in the community in which they live; and regular case monitoring and follow-up. The services provided for victims of trafficking are not conditional upon victims' cooperation with law enforcement on prosecution."

Sources: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023; Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article "[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)", published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

"My understanding from the interviews conducted during my 2019 field research [including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters, offering rehabilitation and reintegration services to trafficking victims: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims] was that the 'National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims' (NRCTV) deals more with acute rehabilitation (such as food, shelter, short-term legal support, short-term psycho-social support, short-term medical support), while long-term reintegration (such as help in finding a job) is a task for which other organisations are responsible. The NRCTV would ensure the collaboration with these other organisations so that the victims would then access the reintegration services upon their release from the NRCTV. The victims would spend 6 months to 1 year in this NRCTV. However, there were cases where the victims would spend more time in the NRCTV, particularly when they lacked familial support. During the time in the NRCTV, the interviewees cited that the victims receive all the necessary psycho-social, emotional, medical, and legal support."

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#). 15 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

"[...] the state-run [shelter] [...] [is only] a semi-open shelter and accommodates victims who are either in court processes or at high risk of personal safety. So the reintegration services are provided by the local NGOs, oftentimes, partly [...] funded by the state, partly funded from fundraising programmes first. [...]"

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



In relation to the efficacy of services provided by the state-run and NGO shelters, the UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“[...] they are somewhat effective. [Looking at the three NGO-run shelters] that UNICEF has been supporting, there are reviews that we are doing every six months where we check the relevance, how efficient it has been if they’re accompanied by some market assessments, and also collect feedback from the beneficiaries themselves in order to align them with emerging needs or new trends, or especially when we’re talking about vocational training or internships or job opportunities and coaching and so on.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation reported that:

“Vatra is a nonprofit organization that it is funded started to the work in 1999. And it is so an organization that work on a national basis. So we cover with services the victims that comes from different regions of Albania even victims that come from different countries if they are identified here in Albania. [...] The second program is the direct assistance program. So the long-term reintegration program that we have set up for supporting victims of human trafficking, victims of gender-based violence, mostly women and girls and their children. So that depends if they are accompanied by their children. [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] But also, in terms of the state-run shelter in Albania, this offers only rehabilitation services, the emergency services after a victim has been identified as the victim of human trafficking, which means that no reintegration services are provided. Now, what happens is that, usually, the victims who are placed in the state-run shelter, after they receive the rehabilitation services and the case workers assess and identify that the victim has moved now from the rehabilitation period, which, usually, in Albania, lasts from six months up to a year, but it can depend on the case. There is no specific timeframe. And that’s positive about Albania, that we don’t have a specific number of days that you are entitled to receive the service. After the victim has been assessed as moving from the rehabilitation phase, they can be referred from the state-run shelter to the NGO-run shelters, who are specialized and they can offer reintegration services. But the state-run shelter itself does not offer reintegration services, but at the same time, does not stop the victims after they have been identified by the case workers to be part of the reintegration period and to be referred for reintegration services in the NGOs.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

In relation to the services provided by the NGO shelters, the same interlocutor stated:

“Knowing the services that they provide, NGOs focus on providing a holistic package of services, which is not just health support and rehabilitation support, but also psychological support, group therapy, and creative ways of supporting victims in their rehabilitation periods, such as using image therapy. In terms of reintegration, besides from the support that the local employment offices provide in Albania for unemployed citizens, including also victims of human trafficking, some of the NGOs have also taken the initiative to run social enterprises.

At the moment, we have the case of Different and Equal, who is running a social enterprise in Tirana called Tirana New York Bagels, but also very recently, [...], another NGO has opened a social bakery, that also trains and provides skills to potential victims of human trafficking or victims of human trafficking to increase their chances for employment.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.1.3 Limitations in rehabilitation and reintegration assistance

• Refer also to [3.3 Barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration accessing assistance on page 212](#).

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report noted that:

“Observers reported the shelters in the NCATS had professional staff and quality care despite funding limitations.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

Arise published a statement by the United Response Against Trafficking in Persons network in Albania in April 2023:

“3. The Albanian third sector is overwhelmed and under-resourced

The recent Joint Communiqué between UK & Albania says that “in line with and in order to maximise implementation of the UK-Albanian readmissions agreement, (the UK) will increase returns to Albania including those over the age of 18, who, have been identified by UK competent authorities as victims of modern slavery (as defined in the UK legislation) and as victims of human trafficking (as defined in the Albanian legislation)” (point 3.3). NGOs in Albania would be faced with extreme challenges to provide support to new beneficiaries, while the lack of public social protection remains an ongoing challenge to support long-term reintegration efforts.”

Source: Arise, “[4 things the Albanian anti-slavery sector wants you to know](#)”, 21 April 2023

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the Ministry of Interior noted some success in reintegration efforts, but highlighted that reintegration requires more resources, and more should be done to help men and boys reintegrate:

“Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]

A. If we are to talk about the main challenges we face in terms of HT, I would say there are 2. The first is reintegration, this takes a long time, and a lot of resources and financial resources. I would like to thank the British Embassy, Home Office and UK Government in general for helping in the fight against HT. And particularly mention a UNICEF project in transforming the national response to HT. It has been very productive and yielded positive results and outcomes. [...] Also the 2019 UNICEF project has been a ray of hope to many young women and girls because they have seen and heard that there are a lot of opportunities to continue living in Albania. So this helps with the fight against HT, and the brain drain too, as we giving opportunities here without them having to move somewhere else.

The UNICEF project awarded grants and I saw a lot of women crying tears of joy because of the work and reintegration component of the project. When I saw the girls I thought how much better things would be and a brighter future if more people had the same opportunities, and if the project continued. We are not talking about a few people we are talking about families too, some are single mothers or lone women who face stigma from their families. We need help for the whole community. Some are victims of violence and now they finally have some help.

[...] The hardest challenge is reintegration, which is why we need budgets and more support. The work the project has done is self-explanatory. You will see some marvellous achievements, in addition 70% to 80% of VOT are women and girls, meaning the rest are boys and men. So more needs to be done to help reintegrate them (boys and men) into the community. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.57-58

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, SHKEJ suggested that the short-term nature of services provided by the shelters is a challenge to reintegration:

“SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]

Q. Do you think that it is possible for a VOT to return to Albania and safely reintegrate and obtain the support that they need?

**A.** To be honest no, at the moment it is really difficult. We have only 3 centres for trafficked women, 2 are private (Vatra and Different and Equal) and one is government run. It would not be difficult to find a shelter for one or 3 months but it's difficult to find support for a year. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.83-84

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Mary Ward Loreto posited that services are too basic to allow for recovery from the trauma of being trafficked, and pointed to lack of resources as a challenge:

"Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]"

[...] Services to VOT are so basic they cannot recover from the trauma of being trafficked. They feel abandoned. It's like selling them a dream of reintegration but it's not true.

**Q.** How do you help with reintegration?

**A.** We try to help by providing services and support alongside others, we try to help in the long term but resources are hard. We also try to highlight the fact that existing services are not enough to support long term integration. [...] Then there is network building, because some organisations (NGOs) at the moment are substituting state services, and in some municipalities there is a lack of funds, staff and skills. The NGOs also are in huge need of funds, we rely usually on organisations from abroad, we try to combine activities and have joint approaches for specific cases and this need made us more united in our approach and have more positive impact. Although it doesn't provide long term sustainability for reintegration. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.96, 97

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Valbona Lenja, the following challenges were identified by representatives from the four shelters (one state-run and three NGO-run) that comprise the NCATS, regarding the provision of services by state institutions to victims and potential victims of trafficking:

"1.4.1 Challenges of state institutions in providing services

[...] *Challenges related to accommodation in the shelter:* This challenge was mentioned by 10% of the NCATS participants and was mentioned to be related to insufficient funds and high employee turnover. According to the participants, the lack of funding leads to uncertainties and lack of long-term plans regarding service provision while the high employee turnover results in untimely and poor quality services, which are not extended in the necessary timeframe. [ ... ] *Challenges related to food:* This challenges was mentioned by 7% of the NCATS participants. It was specified that these challenges are related to the following issues: Insufficient funding, lack of vocational qualification, negligence in assessing food needs, lack of reference standards on the provision of food assistance, insufficient content of food packages, delays in transferring food funds to shelters."

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Author: Valbona Lenja, "[Services - To the Survivors or to the System? Access to and quality of services for victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania](#)", pp.27-28, 2021

The same study found the following challenges were identified in the provision of services to victims of trafficking by non-state institutions:

"1.4.2 Challenges of non-state institutions in providing services [...]"

*Challenges related to accommodation in centres:* This challenge was reported by 7% of the NCATS participants. Such challenges include lack of funding and employee turnover – low salaries that do not justify the difficulties of the job, thus resulting in high staff turnover."

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Author: Valbona Lenja, "[Services - To the Survivors or to the System? Access to and quality of services for victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania](#)", 2021, p.28-29



## Interview material

In response to a question about the challenges of rehabilitation, Beneficiary A.B. reported that:

“Well, in the shelter, I have faced some difficulties, mainly in terms of living in the presence of other beneficiaries who have had the very same issues as well. So adapting to this kind of situation has been a little bit difficult for me.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“[...] in terms of recovery and the resocialization, I think, this is the biggest gap. Because although they try to provide support in one or two years, I think the needs for supporting services should be in long term and more specialized ones. The more specialized they are, the more costly they are. So in terms of dedicated budgets for this resocialization and rehabilitation programs in local level are lacking [...]

We have very good models of rehabilitation that are being developed and piloted by NGOs, very good ones. I can share that. Toward employment, toward recovery, toward community integration. So we have very good models. But I will respond with only one sentence. If a child or a woman is in South Albania, they need to come to Tirana or another specific city to get those services. So they have limited access, especially in rural areas, to have dedicated services. They need to change their settlement or their place of living in order to get the right services. There are some services. There are good models, but the accessibility is limited due to long distances; maybe even limitations on these programs.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] In the state-run shelter, I cannot talk much about rehabilitation because the setup itself does not provide much for rehabilitation [or] psychological [support] and, although the [victims] can go out of the shelter, can go to school, can go to work, they always need to be accompanied by the police. And it is not really a rehabilitation when you have to move around under security. So the real rehabilitation happens when they are in the NGO-run shelters. [...] the range of services that the shelters provide is very wide. The three of the NGO shelters. The range of services and the professionalism is there. It's just that they need to be funded, the services, and the NGOs fundraised most of them by themselves. As I mentioned, I mean, their budget is half and half [state and donor funded].”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] In the state-run shelter, there is not a lot of freedom in the victims to meet family members or just be reintegrated in the community [...] I'm not a supporter of this kind of support, but the government has made it in this way because they usually place the victims with very high risk of security-related issues in this shelter in order to be safe.

“[...] victims who have been part of the shelter and now they've been referred to receive reintegration services. And there have been statements, for example, 'Oh, I love this sense of freedom. Oh, I love this activity in the nature, something that was not very often in the first shelter.'”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

Referring to barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration for individuals in the state-run shelter, the same interlocutor stated that:

“Apart from not being able to meet their families often or have this conversation, it's usually also lack of socialisation beyond fellow victims in the [state-run] shelter.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023



The same interlocutor further noted:

“[...] when it comes to state-run shelters in Albania, we have only one state-run shelter, which is based in the outskirts of Tirana and not very inclusive because we have the north and the south left uncovered.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

In relation to reintegration services provided by NGOs, the same interlocutor stated:

“I have noticed, based on my experience working with survivors that economic reintegration is not effective. I haven’t seen a high effectiveness in economic reintegration. And this is not because the willingness lacks from the perspective of NGOs, but it’s the current conditions in the labour market in Albania and the weak social protection support that victims receive from the state, which makes the economic reintegration process of survivors challenging. If compared to other countries where you would have, for example, the rent provided by the government for a long period of time, or other measures, such as social assistance, it would be much easier to step on your feet again after the trafficking experience.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“The only issue according to [interviewees during my 2019 field research, including Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims] was the fact that the victims could not go to school while in the NRCTV [National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims], given that this is a high-security centre (protected by special security forces) and nobody other than the employees could know where the NRCTV was located. The NRCTV was trying to hire a teacher at the time to come and give lessons to the victims in the NRCTV, however the interviewees believed that this was not enough and that they would prefer for the victims to go to a local school instead. The psycho-emotional impact that the isolation and constant monitoring had on the victims while in the NRCTV was also cited as an issue. Another problem cited was the dependency that the victims created on the institution. Limited staff members/ human resources as well as a lack of specialised training and a supervisor for the current psycho-social staff was further cited as an issue.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#). 15 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] what the NGO-run shelters would provide is sometimes, once the people are out of the shelter, they might help and contribute towards rent for, I don’t know, three months, six months, depending on the agreements and the funding available. So it’s not an amazing package. [...]”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated the following in relation to mental health assistance:

“[...] civil society is quite a tight, small society in Albania compared to the anti-trafficking NGO sector in the UK, but they do quite a lot. So there are always projects. [...] I think what they struggled, and I uncovered this with a conversation with Another Vision [Tjeter Vizion], is people who might have drug and alcohol addiction or severe mental health issues. So complex needs like that are perhaps more difficult to address.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

### 3.1.4 Funding

#### Desk review material

The European Commission's report on Albania of November 2023 stated:

"NGO-run shelters remain underfunded. [...]"

Source: European Commission, "[Albania 2023 Report](#)", 8 November 2023, p.46

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report summarised government funding provided to NGO-run shelters in the review period covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023:

"The government allocated 22.7 million leks (\$213,150) to NGO-run shelters to support staff salaries, compared with 22 million leks (\$206,570) in 2021. The government provided an additional 7.2 million leks (\$67,610) for food support to NGO-run shelters, compared with 6.8 million leks (\$63,850) in 2021. [...] The government also transferred 22.08 million leks (\$207,320) from a fund of seized criminal assets to NGOs and the government-run shelter for victim support services, a significant increase compared with 10.2 million leks (\$95,780) in 2021. Although the government increased resources to NGO-run shelters in 2022 and 2021, NGO-run shelters continued to operate under financial constraints and relied on outside sources for operating costs. The government denied the shelters' request for increased funding to enable standard overtime or weekend/holiday pay or to increase staff salaries above minimum wage to assist with retaining and attracting staff. NGO-run shelters reported no funding delays from the government, as in previous years. However, experts reported the bidding process for social programs with municipal governments was not transparent and that no funds were dispersed to shelters due to municipal governments not considering support services for trafficking victims a priority."

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from the Ministry of Interior, during which funding for shelters was discussed:

"Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]"

We have the 4 shelters, and a state budget is allocated to the 3 NGO shelters including food for individuals living there as well as salaries for employees. [...]"

Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]"

At regional level we support 3 shelters for VOT, these 3 shelters are managed by civil society. A state funded budget is allocated for operating expenses as well as salaries for those employed there. [...] For over 3 years we have also financed the LGBTI shelter as there have been instances of sex abuse, violence and trafficking against LGBTI persons as well."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 75

A report submitted by the government of Albania to the UNCAT in July 2021, published in April 2022, gave the following information regarding the establishment of a special fund designed to prevent organised crime and rehabilitate victims of trafficking:

"137. Law no. 70/2017 "On some additions and amendments to law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009" On the preventing and striking against organized crime and trafficking through preventive measures against assets, applies to the assets which are owned fully or partially, directly or indirectly by persons who are suspects of having committed crimes defined by the articles of the Criminal Code on "Trafficking in adults" and "Trafficking in minors". This law stipulates the establishment of a special fund to prevent organized crime. The special fund is earmarked for social purposes, including the rehabilitation and integration of victims of trafficking (article 37/2-c). Article 37/3-b provides that also NGOs benefit from this fund, including shelters."

Source: United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Committee against Torture, "[Third periodic report submitted by Albania under article 19 of the Convention, due in 2016 \[Date received: 19 July 2021\]](#)", 5 April 2022, p. 26



The UNICEF report “Albania Child Notice”, published in 2022, stated that:

“Concerns exist over underfunded NGO-run shelters, including through delays in receiving their Government grants.”

Sources: UNICEF, “[Albania-Child-Notice-2021.pdf](#)”, 2022

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – noted the following with regards to NGO funding:

“[...] Assistance and State Social Services

A concern expressed by almost all interviewees working for NGOs was the lack of stability in service provision due to limited funding: “The services provided by our NGO depend on donor funding, which isn’t always consistent ... Sometimes we feel guilty for not being able to pay the victims’ rent ... We haven’t abandoned them; we just truly don’t have enough financial capacities” (SW2). [...] As far as state social services are concerned, most practitioners were unsatisfied with the support provided by the Albanian government to trafficking victims: [...]. Some practitioners stated that since 2014–2015, the Albanian government had taken two positive steps in assisting anti-trafficking NGOs: 1) covering the financial expenses of the sheltered trafficking victims’ food, and 2) paying the salaries of NGO staff. Nevertheless, as one interviewee notes: “This is not enough ... this amount only makes up for 30% of the expenses of our organization” (SW4).”

Source: Klea Ramaj, “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

A 2021 UNDP *mapping of organisations in Albania* providing integrated case management reported on the funding received by Different and Equal and the sustainability and duration of it:

“D&E [Different and Equal] is a nationally licensed service provider that provides residential and community services to victims of trafficking, abuse and domestic violence. [...] Funding from foreign sources (embassies, foreign private foundations, international agencies for development and cooperation) accounts for 81.5% of the total funds of the organization. Funding from the local government accounts for 9.5% of the total funds of the organization. Funding from the European Union (grants or contracts) accounts for 6% of the total funds of the organization. Donations from individuals (e.g. citizens) account for 3% of the total funds of the organization. [...] The sustainability of the provided services, from a financial point of view, is ensured by reliable donors over a relatively long period of time. Annual service financing is 49,120,538 ALL on average. Donors supporting the services provided are: UNICEF, UN Women, Agency for the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets (AASCA), GIZ, J-Tip/Terre Des Homes [sic.], UNOHCR, Ministry of Health and Social Protection. The support duration extends to an average period from 1 year to 3 years from each donor.”

Source: UNDP, Austrian Development Cooperation, and AKPA (Agjencia Kombetare e Punesimit dhe Aftesive), “[PROMOTING INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKET SOLUTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS II: Mapping of national integrated case management practices delivered by NGOs in Albania](#)”, 2021, pp. 21-22, and 59

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated that:

“The organizations funds are mostly international donors based on projects proposal application. They are supported financially also by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to cover the salaries of employees who work with victims of trafficking and the food for shelter on yearly basis. [...] Funding for support services is time-limited based on project proposals applied to different donors with different timeline. [...] The factors [affecting funding interruptions]



are: changes in the donors' agenda, *the constantly shifting priorities*. When funding is interrupted, they impact the service provision in limiting the services, the quality of services decreases, the staff will be reduced."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

"NGO-run shelters are forced to write and submit various project proposals to different donors in order to raise additional funds for the fulfilment of the reintegration programs of the victims."

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, explained the funding situation in the case of NISMA ARSIS and how it differs from other shelters:

"I will start from my NGO. 100% of our services are covered by foreign donors, not Albanian authorities at all. We have applied but never get funds on that. If you want to get public funds, you should apply at the county level, and we have not been supported up to now. [...] I have been the director of NISMA ARSIS organization for seven years now, but before I have been an employee in ARSIS, and for 13 years, I can say that I have never been stopped applying. Up to now, I've been successful on generating incomes for the organizations to be sustainable of service provision. [...] So for me, it's a struggle in itself to find resources and to apply for funds for providing supportive services. If I don't find the funds, I could have to close the center tomorrow. And this is the only emergency shelter in Albania. You can imagine. So this is the only one who opens the door if the police calls or if the state services call or when citizens call. And until the state institution decides to bring the child to the shelter or to a public shelter or to family, or to decide what to do with the child, we provide support. So if I close the centre tomorrow because I have no funding, the child will be on the street until they decide because no one gets decision to provide support until they have all the papers right or follow up the procedures, to be so sincere. And if the funds get reduced, as it happened after COVID especially and the Ukrainian war, we are struggling a lot of generating funds and identifying potential support or donors or partners. [...]"

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

"[...] we, as UNICEF, we work with these three shelters and they also receive some funding from the state. So they are NGOs that receive external funding from donors and international organizations such as UNICEF, but they also receive a small amount or some amount of funding from the state."

The same interlocutor also noted that:

"[The funding that they receive is] very time limited. And I would say that this is one of the big challenges. A big challenge is also, yeah, that there's a lot of interruption of services due to the instability of the funding, I would say there is a very limited number of donors, maybe like one or two donors only who have been really involved in this phenomenon. [...] This is not appealing to many donors who are currently supporting the government of Albania. [...] [When funding ceases or is interrupted, this has] a lot [of impact on service provision]. Because in many cases, the services are completely shut down, interrupted. And it happened during COVID. During COVID [...] whenever everything stopped and funding stopped coming in, the shelters were basically shut down or they were not able to support any persons beyond the people who were already there. And in many cases, most of the services were interrupted and only very minimum services were provided."

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“In total, the state is supporting the three NGOs with the salaries for twenty-nine staff. All in all, the three of them. [...] If I compare, because I did this exercise a bit of time ago, what the Albanian government provides through the shelters [in comparison to] the neighbouring countries - to the region, to the Balkans - it's more than what other governments are supporting, actually, with the funding of the services. The thing is, is that enough? [...] Compared to the other countries in the region, they do provide more financial support to the [NGO] shelters so that they can run long reintegration services because the state-run one [...] is a semi-open shelter and accommodates victims who are either in court processes or at high risk of personal safety. So the reintegration services are provided from the local NGOs, oftentimes, partly funded by the state, partly funded from fundraising programmes first. [...] The part that needs long-term integration and support because it's a process that takes time is [...] the long-term reintegration. [State funding and fundraising] are the two sources.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The same interlocutor also noted that:

“The funding for services, the one provided by the government is permanent. The one that [NGOs] need to fundraise is project-based for the funding. [...] [If funding is interrupted or ceases], they'll be limited only to keep the number of the staff that they can afford through the state funding and, of course, much of the reintegration process will be disrupted very much. It will be just shelter - people staying and receiving [support there]. [And] the biggest success of these NGOs is that they return people back into the community to conduct their own independent lives and to restart living. If you have shortage of funding, then [you] don't have any more services [...] [Just] psychological support for the moment and that's it, which is the bare minimum [...] I mean, somebody that has had such a strong trauma, you cannot rehabilitate only through food and shelter, and that's why the survivors are not staying at the state-run shelter, [which is only] focused on security and immediate assistance, not a reintegration process outside.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation described the situation regarding Vatra's funding:

“So they are donor funded mostly. [...] So Vatra Psychosocial Center is applying to donors. Mostly international donors have securing the funding for 70% of all total budget so organisation funding of services. And then 30% of the funding, it is provided by the state. And this is provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection through a regional council in Vlorë because Vatra is based in Vlorë City. Vlorë is in south of Albania. But even we have a national coverage with services, we are based in Vlorë. So the states sent so the funding through the ministry to the regional of Vlorë and they provide for us funding every year.

And then we have some funding again from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection but through the municipality of Vlorë for the food of the victims that stay in the shelter. And as well for this year, the municipality funding is funding Vatra as well to support the rent of the shelter for six months and six months from another donor. And they provide for the centre. The municipality as well provides Vatra for paying the rent of the counselling offices that we have. So separated by the shelter, we have other counselling offices. They support us with the payment of the rent and for the communication because we have hotlines or telephone line that works 24 hours for all the victims or other sources that make referrals. So the municipality of Vlorë support with this communication costs. So all together, this funding, it is 30% of the budget that Vatra has for all programs.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same interlocutor further stated:

“[...] funding mostly of NGOs and for services, it's very hard to gain and to [gain] wide funding even from international donors because for example, there are [other] emergencies and the conflicts [happening]. And sometimes the funding go to this conflict. For example, the conflict in Ukraine [...] [hasn't] interrupt[ed] our [current] funding, but [it's] decreasing the possibilities for having more funds for the victims. So [...] we as organization, [need to]

apply to more and more donors to have all the necessary funding. So before, so we applied for a quantity of funding to some donors, to three or four, for example. In the year now, we have to apply for smaller [amounts of] funding [to 10 donors] to have all the funding [we need]. So until now, we didn't have any interrupted funding from donors [...] but now, we [need to put] more and more efforts to find this funding opportunities. [...] During the pandemic time, it was very difficult, [but] not for us to getting fund because we had funding before pandemic time. And none of the donors interrupted fund. [...] But because of the vulnerability and the loss of jobs and a medical health issues, etc. [during the pandemic], we have seen that the victims that have been in the process of reintegration into society has been the first one that has been vulnerable again to this emergency situation. And [therefore] we needed more funding to support again the needs of the victims that has passed through all the process of reintegration. So that shows us [...] what an emergency situation [...] or loss of funding can represent for victims of human trafficking."

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

"[...] the NGO-run shelters get minimal support by the state.[...] they get some funding to cover costs for their staff, for example."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

"[...] the shelters and the other NGOs, so they need to constantly also do fundraising or bid writing, which takes a lot of time that can be only dedicated to service delivery. So I mean, the funding that they get from the government, that might have a permanent element because, of course, there is an agreement that needs to contribute towards this, but it's minimal from what I understand. But the rest, so if they want to offer certain services or evaluate certain services, that would always need this additional fundraising, and the funding is often very much time-limited. [...] some of these [NGO-run shelters] had the ability to adapt according to the needs in a sense that, for example, although Vatra is originally set up as a shelter for victims of trafficking, they also accommodate victims of domestic abuse, for example. And this is how they also kind of justify the funding and they accommodate people that might be part of this harmonic continuum, because sometimes if that happens, it might start as domestic abuse or gender-based violence and things pile up. [...] you can argue that they need to adapt according to the available funding needs and what is a hot topic during each year, for example."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

"[...] for the NGO-run shelters, approximately 80% of their funding comes from international organisations and non-public foundations. For example, private foundations, European Union institutions or embassies. In terms of the public support, the government, at the moment, supports the NGO-run shelters. [...]: Different and Equal in Tirana; Vatra psycho-social centre in Vlore; and Tjeter Vizion (Another Vision), in Elbasan. These three NGOs, they receive funding from the government to cover the meal costs for their beneficiaries, which is a very limited support compared to all the other needs that they have. NGO-run shelters also receive government funding to cover the salaries of some of their case workers, but in the rate that the government defines, which is usually near the bottom line of the minimum wage in Albania, which makes it so challenging for the NGOs to keep their staff engaged, to decrease burnout, and to decrease the rates of staff circulation because they would leave the job within the first six months or a year. They'll be burned out very quickly. The salaries are very low. But at the moment, that's the situation of funding. [...] Unfortunately, it's time limited. Usually, also from the government, it's on a yearly basis, after the budget is being approved every year from the government. But also, from the NGOs, it's also time limited, which means, in the best case scenario, it would be two to three years funds. But usually, they are one-year long or two-year long funds that they do receive. And then they will have to apply for another project to keep up their direct services."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinators, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023



The same interlocutor noted the following in relation to factors that affect the interruption of funding:

“Usually, one of the factors is donors withdrawing from Albania or the region. We had recently, in the last three years, international donors not having Albania anymore in their focus. This is mainly also because the government or the EU, they do joint statements saying that Albania is a very safe country, is actually in the process of being part of the European Union, which I think will take quite a few years, but we are in the process. And that makes some of the donors not seeing Albania as a developing country anymore. So they shift their focus to other countries that they might have more evident needs or they are in conflict. Also, the war in Ukraine has shifted some of the funding because of emergency needs, which we understand. And the third reason: usually, it's donors wanting to focus more on projects that they do have direct results or direct impact. And usually, services related to victims of human trafficking, they do not show a direct impact, especially when it comes to reintegration. You will need three to five years to see a case successfully reintegrated, opening a business or being in a stable job. And most of the donors are just not very interested into that because of policy procedures or objectives that they might have.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

## 3.2 General social assistance

### 3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance

· Refer also to [3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations on page 212](#), [3.3.2 Stigma / familial and community issues on page 213](#), [3.3.3 Adequacy of services & bureaucracy on page 217](#) and [3.3.4 Level of financial support on page 222](#).

#### Desk review material

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, UNICEF stated the following in relation to support available to victims of trafficking:

“UNICEF, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q:** You mentioned support and vocational services, please expand.

**A:** Once a person has left the shelter, support is still available.

They have a cycle of support for 3 years, though this can be extended beyond 3 years, with professional support as well. This can continue with payments provided for accommodation, basic living needs, food and clothes. This is especially available to single mothers and for those in rural areas, as well as support beyond those leaving shelters. Social care support for VOT includes cash benefits. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.10-11

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Different and Equal indicated the level of financial support available to victims of trafficking:

Different and Equal, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q:** With regard the level of financial support, is it sufficient to meet basic needs?

**A:** No, until this year 25 euro or 3,000 lek (ALL) per month. It has now changed this summer and is now around 80 euro or 9,000 lek (ALL) per month.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.18

In an interview with the UK Home Office, an official from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) stated:

“Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]

We have provided free text books to children, and subsidies to VOT of trafficking to rent premises for businesses or homes.[...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.57

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection discussed a recent law on social assistance:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

Moreover we have a law on social assistance, law number 59 (2019), and one of the benefits of social assistance is for VOT and PVOT. Also, in December 2021, a Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) was approved, overseeing the necessary paperwork and allowance for victims of DV and PVOT/VOT. The allowance, or economic aid has now tripled, however this is provided on condition that the VOT is not placed in a shelter.

Since the sector that I chair is in charge of drafting and implementing law we are responsible for setting up new social services for all vulnerable categories including VOT. Recently we have taken steps to increase financing to social services, with the establishment of the financing mechanism (Social Fund). The fund has been planned for 3 years, funded by the state budget to help the municipality to improve or set up new social services, to better meet the needs of vulnerable communities, including VOT/PVOT. Over these 3 years we have financed services at municipality level as well as regional level. At regional level we support 3 shelters for VOT, these 3 shelters are managed by civil society. A state funded budget is allocated for operating expenses as well as salaries for those employed there. We have also established 2 national online helplines, for children and adults, both male and female, and we provide assistance to individuals who may have experienced sexual abuse, DV and trafficking. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.75

In an interview with the UK Home Office, an official from Tirana Municipality gave a detailed overview of social assistance provision for victims of trafficking by Tirana Municipality:

“Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]

The rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficking victims requires a multifaceted approach involving different actors. [...] The services offered by the Directorate of Social Services in Tirana Municipality are:  
[...]

c) long-term housing through social housing programs that Tirana Municipality offers

d) support with the package of services offered in community centres [...]

**Q.** Once a VOT of trafficking is referred to you how long do you provide your services?

**A.** We don't have a specific time, it is until the person is ok or they are reintegrated into the community.

**Q.** Do you have any figures on the number of people supported, over the last 2 years?

**A.** Yes, we have 10 women VOT in 2022 that were provided with economic aid. And approximately 25 people receiving support in community centres in the last 3 years.

We have 5 community centres in Tirana for the elderly, children, people with disabilities, women, and Roma and Egyptian people, VOT and PVOT. Most people who use the centres are VOT or potential victims of trafficking (PVOT) or category at risk. [...]

**A.** Yes, we don't have men asking for reintegration services from Tirana Municipality specifically as VOT, although we had one trans person who was a PVOT. During the last year we had one male provided with economic aid as VOT.

I will give you some information on reintegration and rehabilitation. In cooperation with other organisations we provide free legal aid and psychological counselling. We have provided employment opportunities alongside the employment directorate, and long term housing through housing programmes. The housing services include rent subsidies, loan interest subsidies. For example, for a person in the middle economic level they can take a loan from a bank and we ensure that the interest is low. So if the interest rises we pay that for them. They pay a fixed amount of interest for 30-35 years.[...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp. 107, 108

A July 2022 UNICEF report on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania, authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF, and based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with trafficking survivors, frontline professionals employed within government agencies and NGOs and private sector representatives, noted the following with regards to financial support available to victims of trafficking:

“Survivors can only access economic assistance of ALL9,000 per month if they have exited shelter accommodation, are unemployed and have a declaration from the shelter that supports their claim that they are a survivor of human trafficking who has been receiving support from the shelter.”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022, p. 47

A flash report in April 2022 by the European Social Policy Network (ESPN), part of the European Commission, stated that:

“On 29 December 2021, the Government of Albania adopted a decision (Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 868/2021) to increase the level of benefit as per the following details: [...]

- Triple the benefit level for women and girls, survivors of trafficking and domestic violence to ALL 9,000 (€74). This group represented 1% of all the beneficiaries in 2021.”

Source: European Social Policy Network, “[ESPN Flash Report 2022/12 – Albania – Recent developments in the social assistance programme](#)”, April 2022, pp. 1-2

The National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania noted that Roma families who lack documents cannot benefit from economic aid:

“Trafficking [...]

Families with no income or insufficient income may benefit economic aid from the state [...] and local government. Those eligible, among others, are also potential victims of trafficking when leaving the shelters till their placement to employment. However, not everyone needing assistance may benefit support. Roma families lacking documents or that are not registered with their LGUs, can not benefit. Local organizations often try to fill in these gaps by providing such support as food, clothing, education or training. Family support is generally scarce and does not meet the family needs.”

Source: Albanian Government by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Council of Europe, “[The National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania \(2021-2025\)](#)”, November 2021, p.26

## Interview material

When asked about what kinds of social assistance they had received, a Beneficiary of Different and Equal noted that:

“I received financial support from government for my son through the orphan status, I received economic aid from municipality as a victim of trafficking and also I benefited from the social housing in the Municipality through receiving financial bonus for the rent of my apartment.”

Source: Beneficiary of D&E, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

When asked what kinds of assistance would be helpful for their long-term reintegration into society, Beneficiary A.B. further commented that:

“ I think that maybe having the cost for a rented apartment covered will maybe help me in the future.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In response to a question about what accommodation related assistance they had received, either from the shelter or the government, Beneficiary A.B. commented that:

“Vatra has offered me shelter and 24 hours protection during the day, and after, maybe when I leave the shelter, Vatra is going to support me with a rented apartment. Until now, from the state, I haven’t been offered any sheltering services or housing services besides the services I am receiving from Vatra.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“In Albania, there is the National Program for Recuperation and Reintegration of Trafficked Persons. Albania has a separate service that deals with children with special needs. Assistance is provided to all women whose children are under the age of five. There is a state social fund that finances the activities of various centres to help vulnerable people, including funding for shelters. The State Social Service has its own social workers. They identify and assess the needs of victims of trafficking and work in partnership with non-profit NGOs. [...] A trafficked person may receive the whole range/list of services that he/she needs. The social service participates in all stages of identification. After a trafficked person leaves the shelter, he/she receives a 100\$ per month during one year.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In relation to housing, Different and Equal further stated:

“Through municipalities, state cover the rent (rent bonus procedures) for the residence for one year for victims of crimes, including victims of trafficking. In 2018, the law “On Social Housing” was approved (law 22/2018), which provides for several forms of housing for victims of trafficking and other vulnerable groups. The law provides these mechanisms for solving the problem of housing for victims of trafficking:

- **Rent subsidy** (article 34-35 of the law) – As a rule, it is carried out from the income of the local self-government unit. Rent subsidy can also be done by the central government, according to the provisions of point 3, of article 35, of this law, where victims of trafficking are also beneficiaries;
- **Program for the improvement of housing conditions** (Article 43) – Families/individuals who lack suitable housing, including victims of trafficking, benefit from the program for the improvement of housing conditions, as well as from improvement to new construction;
- **Specialized apartments for victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and victims of domestic violence** (Article 60) - Specialized apartments for victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and victims of domestic violence are equipped with the service of employees of social specialists and are protected (under supervision) by State Police employees in cases of danger to life and health. These categories benefit from the specialized housing program until they are provided with the benefit from one of the other social housing programs.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, stated that:

“There are no specific facilities for Victims of Trafficking or Potential Victims of Trafficking, they apply for social housing as all the other vulnerable groups are in need of housing.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 26 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Housing is emphasised somehow as one of the most important support services for survivors’ economic reintegration. Without adequate and stable housing, survivors feel very unsettled and find it difficult to access and maintain employment.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023



The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained:

“[Eligibility for housing assistance] was very similar [to eligibility for social assistance]. [...] housing is one of the social services, social assistance, so it’s pretty much the same.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated with reference to housing that:

“[...] there are legal provisions in different documents which stipulate the assistance provided to the victims of trafficking [...] being categorized [...], for shelter [...] provided by the state, not shelter into a classical home) [...] and many other things [...] But I know that in big cities like Tirana, which is a bigger municipality with more means, the NGOs have managed, for example, to get the accommodation bonus [...], but the subsidy of the rent for the victims of trafficking. The rent is paid by the municipality. [...] In smaller cities, it is more difficult to get the services. So the legal basis is there. NGOs are starting to make use of what is available, let’s say, from the state services. And in big cities, it works. In smaller [cities], then it’s very difficult to say.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The same interlocutor also reported that:

“[In order to access financial support from the state] [t]he thing is that you have to [...] have the status of the victim assigned to you [...]”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[...] for example, from the social law to provide social housing for vulnerable groups, for example, for groups of women and girls that are victims of domestic violence or not victims of domestic violence but live in a vulnerable situation. And then it is very difficult to benefit by this housing scheme because there are a lot of administrative issues that victims needs, victims or vulnerable women and girls must complete and support. We give our support to this vulnerable groups in order to inform them and to support them directly with provision of documentation and application for the social housing. [...] Social assistance, so victims of human trafficking that are formally identified as victims of human trafficking can be supported by financial assistance monthly. It is up to-- I think it is \$90, I think.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“Victims of human trafficking, after they have gathered all the necessary documentation, they’re entitled to 9000 lek per month, which is £70 per month, as a social assistance provided by the government. In terms of housing, they are entitled if they provide all the necessary documentation, which is a long list of documents to get it. And it also costs to get most of the documents notarized and ready to submit. But when they get accommodation support, they can get up to a year support for rents for apartments. This support is being provided by the municipality, not the central government.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

In further written clarifications following the interview, the same interlocutor provided the following information in response to a number of questions (set out in *italics*) about what is required for victims of trafficking to be able to access housing:

*1. Are you able to specify what documentation a victim of trafficking is required to provide in order to access housing?*

“List of required documents (these might vary from year to year, according to Municipality decisions):

- Applicant’s birth certificate and marital status certificate.
- Proof of residence in the municipality where housing or residence permit is requested, for families who have moved from other areas of the country.
- Verification of net and gross income (verification of employment from the employer) accompanied by verification from the Regional Tax Directorate for the payment of social and health insurance contributions.
- Certification from the office of assistance and care at local government units for family members, included in the program of economic assistance and payment for persons with disabilities.
- Certification from the employment office of the relevant local unit for persons included in the unemployment payment program.
- Certification from the real estate registration office that the family or any of its members do not own an apartment or any environment that can be used as such.
- Certification from the real estate registration office for the area of the property owned by the family or any of its members, when the area of the apartment is below the current housing standards.
- Certification from the real estate registration office of the country of origin that there is no registered property, which can also be used for housing, for families that have changed residence for the purpose of employment, for all family members.
- The court decision, which leaves the child or children in custody for divorced couples, accompanied by the certification from the enforcement office for the amount of the pension they benefit for the children.
- If you live in a dwelling with poor conditions or at risk of collapse, the original copy of the certificate issued by the Technical Services of the Municipality.
- The document issued by the relevant state institutions for persons who have the status of “immigrant”, “immigrant worker” and “asylum seeker”.”

*2. Is a victim of trafficking required to complete civil registration with the municipality in order to access housing?*

“Yes, because the fund derives from the Municipality, not the central government.”

*3. Is the individual required to provide information about their family and their family’s financial means in order to access housing assistance?*

“Yes, if they live in the same house or they are part of the same family under civil registration.”

*4. Does a victim of trafficking require a guarantor in order to access housing assistance?*

“No.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [written clarifications](#), 16 November 2023

### 3.2.2 Employment

- Refer also to [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 224](#).

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report noted:

“NCATS and the government provided [...] employment services, [...] vocational training, and post-reintegration follow-up [...] The government and NGOs provided vocational training for 50 victims and National Employment Services offices prioritized jobseekers from vulnerable groups, including trafficking victims; 73 victims registered with the employment office for employment opportunities, 46 of which obtained work. The government also supported

25 victims that participated in an internship program to start small businesses [...]. Foreign victims had access to the same services as domestic victims [...]"

Source: US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 15 June 2023

As part of the third evaluation round by GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), the Albanian Government commented, in reply to a Recommendation of the Committee of Parties regarding facilitating and strengthening effective access to the labour market, that:

"The support of the beneficiaries for the opening of small businesses has been the focus of the state structures and organizations that provide services to the victims/potential victims of trafficking. 25 beneficiaries of NCAT have been supported for the preparation of business plans and the opening of 25 small businesses: shop for selling clothes, tailoring, aesthetics, sale of used shoes, shop for production and sale of canneries, shop for baking, grinding and coffee sale etc. For 2022, 7 new VoT/PVoT start-ups have been supported. 10 beneficiaries are involved in organizations and work as mentors."

Source: Council of Europe, "[Report submitted by the authorities of Albania on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec\(2020\)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Third Round Evaluation](#)", 19 December 2022

In an interview with the UK Home Office, an official from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) stated that the MoI had provided rent premises, healthcare and other types of assistance:

"Ministry of Interior, 7 October 2022 [...]"

We have worked with labour offices around the country to carry out different programmes to aid people.[...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.57, 58

In an interview with the UK Home Office, Vatra described in detail initiatives to support victims of trafficking to find employment:

"Vatra Psycho-Social Center, 10 October 2022 [...]"

Vocational training is provided in different districts in Albania in collaboration with Vocational Trainings Directorates, not only for cases in shelters but also for those that don't need shelter. We provide for these cases the tool kit for vocational training and the state provides the training free of charge but not the tool kits. We also provide coaching for employment, on the job training /internship, and we pay salaries for 3 to 6 months in the business sector, working with employers to secure contracts after the internship. Another important service we provide is that we establish micro businesses and business plans, and how to manage a business. [...]"

VOT go out for training and education accompanied by the social worker, and the shelter is not closed. [...] For employment, we make a risk assessment and the victims can go to the job placement by themselves. [...] We have a lot of success and, through projects with UNICEF and other donors such as CIES Onlus and so on, we support projects with setting up micro businesses, There is a consortium of funding by UNICEF along with British Embassy funds, and the women manage their income through this and also for cases where they have children. [...]"

**Q.** Do you have any numbers for those helped into business and employment?

**A.** From 2020 until September 2022 we supported 10 cases into micro businesses, 4 were supported by UNICEF with British Embassy funding. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.64, 65, 67

In an interview with the UK Home Office, officials from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection referred to a law on social enterprises:

"Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]"

When I was talking about legal framework I should have mentioned the law on social enterprises, which stipulates that 30% of staff must come from a disadvantaged group, such as single mothers, VOT and so on. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.76

In an interview with the UK Home Office, SHKEJ described their work to support vulnerable people with employment opportunities:

“SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** You say supporting families into work, what about women who come back with children but no husband?

**A.** It depends on the children, how many and how old they are. We always help the mother find a job, but we have also tried to support children with schooling so the mother can work. This issue is the mothers don't have training. As an NGO we are careful to find work. We don't want them to work as just seamstresses or in the textile industry where they are not paid well and have to work 12 hours a day. We try to be respectful in terms of finding suitable work. We have helped employ men and women in Tirana for cleaning the city, it is a private corporation and it is related to the city council. We have a good collaboration with Tirana municipality. We know that they have a job with pay and who to contact. The work in Albania is not related to equality. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.80

In an interview with the UK Home Office, Terre Des Hommes described the support they provide regarding employment opportunities:

“Terre des Hommes, 11 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Do you support returnees?

**A.** Not specifically. [...] we do provide support to families. We have a wide package of services for vocational training, education, employment and small business start-ups. The service is open to all returning migrants. [...]”

In an interview with the UK Home Office Mary Ward Loreto described their work on economic empowerment of victims of trafficking:

“Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]

We work initially at grass root level and we start to build networks. The needs were so huge that we invited other organisations to support us. Cases are referred to us – identification, rescue and reintegration – the approach is holistic. Economic empowerment starts with vocational training, employment support and targeting those who want to stay in Albania. [...] We found working on prevention is important. So we implemented last year a programme called Empowerful and invited 10 VOT to attend a course on economic empowerment and at the end of the session we noticed a great improvement. When given basic programmes there is always a risk of revictimization. [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.96-97

In an interview with the UK Home Office, Key Adviser, a private employment agency, described their work on economic empowerment of victims of trafficking:

“Key Adviser, 12 October 2022 [...]

Key Adviser is licensed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance as a private employment agency. They are part of a project led by UNICEF Albania and financed by the British Embassy Tirana, ‘Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania’, working in 6 Regions all over Albania to contribute in the skills development and employability for victims of trafficking (VOT) and potential victims of trafficking (PVOT). [...]

**Q.** How do you support VOT?

**A.** For 5 years Key Adviser Albania has been supporting vulnerable groups, including ones that receive economic aid, have suffered domestic violence (DV) or are VOT [...]

In regard to the project implemented with UNICEF, it has been 2 very intensive years and implementing the full cycle of reintegration for VOT, PVOT as well as individuals at risk of trafficking. [...] we cooperated with local public offices to design a simple programme that was both entertaining and didn't last for many hours a day. So it wasn't tedious to the beneficiaries. This programme is basic, quick and effective as it meets the requirements of employers in the area. There were 3 main objectives of the programme: soft skills (indispensable for labour and social integration), ICT skills, and vocational and professional skills.

In addition to employment, another important area is self-employment, so people who have a certain skills, such as hosting or tailoring, we helped them start a small business, maybe as tailor or for those with spare rooms in their home to open a guest house. So something small that is beneficial and helps them to provide for their families.

**Q.** How many have you supported through your programme?

**A.** 240 first year (2020 – the first phase) and 210 in the second year (2021). For these people involved in the project, 80% of them successfully completed the programme and they showed enhanced skills. In 2020 we financed 28 business ideas and 36 people were employed. In 2021 we financed 12 business ideas and 46 people were employed. In 2020 COVID 19 hampered activities. With regard to 2021/2022, we will continue with the project until December and so this information will be updated. [...]

When we talk to VOT we find that they fear they won't be employed because they think the employers will judge them for being a VOT. However the opposite has happened. Businesses and employers were welcoming and didn't have a problem and treated them equally, a great achievement. [...]

This year we have trained 120 social administrators in cooperation with the MoI. We trained on SOPs, and how they can refer and follow up cases. However the state should provide more support to the social administrators as they are a key focal point and link to communities. They are the ones who sign the papers so the family can get economic aid and they know the families as well as problems in the community very well. They are familiar with the family situation, for example, if they know that a man wants to travel to the UK and work in a drug house, the social administrator can take them to the labour office and help them find a job and stay in Albania instead of them being trafficked somewhere. Social administrators are respected by the whole community and seen as community leaders. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp. 98, 99, 100, 101

In an interview with the UK Home Office, an official from Tirana Municipality noted its employment programmes:

"Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]"

[...] We have provided employment opportunities alongside the employment directorate [...] We use employment encouragement programmes as well as empowerment and entrepreneur fostering. We have this for all of the community in Tirana, but it is based on a scoring system, so we prioritise certain groups, including women and men VOT. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.108

In an interview with the UK Home Office, the National Agency for Employment and Skills described in detail how they assist victims of trafficking with finding employment:

"National Agency for Employment and Skills, 12 October 2022 [...]"

We are working with victims of trafficking (VOT) who are one of the 15 special groups that we support, including youth, returning migrants and people with disabilities. One of these groups that we provide support to is VOT. It is proscribed [sic] in law that VOT are part of this special group and we supply all the support through our work, financial support schemes and programmes. We don't have many VOT that are declared in labour offices and of the total number of those currently registered, they are all women. Sometimes unemployed jobseekers (men and women) come to our labour offices and even if they refuse to declare they are VOT, we still support and provide a counselling service.

**Q.** You mention employment programmes and counselling, can you explain more?

**A.** [...] Sometimes an individual may be a combination of disadvantaged groups, such as VOT, returning migrants, require economic aid, from Roma/Egyptian communities, youth, and those with disabilities, so they are given higher priority if there is a combination of factors. For example, a Roma person who has been trafficked will belong to 2 groups and so they are more likely to receive assistance from employment programmes.

**Q.** So the more groups they fit into, the more priority they receive?

**A.** Yes

Active measures in the labour office are in 3 types: employment, employment promotion (encouragement) programmes, and vocational education and training. Vulnerable groups usually participate in the third level of employability, so they are a good fit for vocational and training as well as employment promotion programmes.

Our services are free to job seekers. First, the job seeker comes to the labour office, second, they have an interview and a file is completed on their skills, education and so on. Based on this, the electronic system does some kind of

selection and categorises into tiers:

Tier 1: employability is considered easier, and we try and match them to a job

Tier 2: employability level is not as high, but with vocational training they can possibly get jobs, or employment promotion programmes, like internships.

Tier 3: employability is much lower, so we cooperate with and incentivise employers to employ this group by subsidising/paying salaries and/or social/health contribution and other expenses according to the costs determined in each employment promotion programme (EPP).

These incentives (EPP) can be used at any tier, but mostly with tier 3.

Every time we have a job seeker in our labour offices, we design an individual employment plan and we have different schemes that we use for different individuals. For example, newly graduated students might be on tier 2 so they might need support with internships, so they get an individual employment plan and maybe 6 months internship in a business.

Generally speaking, 4 Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCMs) stipulate the different programmes and support we can provide. For example, self-employment employment, employment with job training, community and public work, and internships.

DCM number 608 was designed during COVID due to circumstances at that time and lots of job losses, so it provided for 4, 8 and 12 month employment periods for job seekers.

The formula that the electronic system uses is based on several indicators, for example, level of education, how long the person is out of the labour market and so on. VOT job seekers usually score quite low because they usually have a low level of education and have been out of the labour market for some time. But by law they are considered disadvantaged whether or not they are categorised as tier 3.

Since it is difficult for VOT to find jobs or, when they do find jobs, to go to their workplace, we have found vocational training courses have been quite effective. They are tailored courses through training centres and there have been quite a few success stories between shelters and training centres, including Mobile vocational training centre as well.

**Q.** Are you always able to find VOT work or vocational training?

**A.** Our counsellors provide options to these individuals: finding them a job, employment promotion programmes or vocational training. The most success is in vocational training where the VOT finds it easier to integrate.

Tirana has 2 training centres that are subordinate to us, one of the most successful centre is called centre number 4. It has a very good cooperation with Linza, the state-run shelter, they were training VOT in nail art, manicure, pedicure and so on, as well as tailoring. During 2021, VTC Tirana 4, in collaboration with the Center for the Rehabilitation of Trafficked Women in Linza, developed a tailoring course and a manicure and pedicure course with VOT. The trainees attend the course at the Vocational Training Center accompanied by their social worker. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, pp.110-112

A July 2022 UNICEF report on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania, authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF, and based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with trafficking survivors, frontline professionals employed within government agencies and NGOs and private sector representatives, presented the following information with regards to employment support available to trafficked persons:

"Vocational training [...]"

Key informants further emphasised that the pathway from vocational training to employment or starting a business is not necessarily linear, and economic reintegration support should not finish at the employment stage. Key informants reported that it is important that frontline professionals follow the advisory cycle, which provides a framework for the survivor to explore a range of vocational training opportunities, while all the time being guided by advice. [...]"

The study found that appropriate training and internships can lead to decent employment for survivors in Albania. Seven interviewed survivors (50%) were, at the time of interview, employed in the same field in which they had trained: as a tailor, hairdresser, cook, car mechanic or other profession. [...]"

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)", July 2022, p. 10



The same report stated in relation to internships and support to start a business:

“Internships and employment support [...]

The study further identified that companies that will employ survivors as interns must be vetted in order to ensure the safety and security of survivors.

Key informants highlighted that it is important for internships to be remunerated. For survivors who have not previously worked, remuneration helps them become accustomed to receiving regular paycheques from their employer, and increases their budget management skills and overall confidence to enter the labour market.

The study found that appropriate training and internships can lead to decent employment for survivors in Albania. Seven interviewed survivors (50%) were, at the time of interview, employed in the same field in which they had trained: as a tailor, hairdresser, cook, car mechanic or other profession. [...]

Support to start a new business

The study found that starting a business may be a very empowering experience for survivors. Through the processes of planning and managing, survivors can experience significant increases in business and financial management nous, and confidence.[...]”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022, p. 10

A UNDP report on long-term unemployed job seekers described a wage subsidy programme for vulnerable categories, including victims of trafficking:

“Although the group of long-term unemployed adults with low education is not fully captured in any of the ALMPs, different segments of this group are mostly captured in the wage subsidy programme (DCM no. 17), which is designed to provide employment for unemployed job seekers who face issues in accessing the job market. Among the eligible beneficiaries into which long-term unemployed adults with low education may fall include long-term unemployed job seekers, job seekers over the age of 45 years, unqualified unemployed job seekers, and job seekers who receive economic assistance, prioritising the beneficiaries of economic assistance, who are expected to leave the economic assistance scheme in the respective year and subsequent year, and job seekers from the Roma and Egyptian communities, among others. The programme lasts for one year and covers the social and health contributions (part of the employer’s contribution), calculated on the basis of the national minimum wage, and salary financing to the amount of 100 percent of the minimum wage for three months for all participants in the programme, and six months for victims of trafficking, domestic violence or victims of gender-based violence, Roma and Egyptians, and twelve months for persons with disabilities.”

Source: UNDP, European Union, Agjensia Kombetare E Punesimit Dhe Aftesive (AKPA), “[A detailed analysis. Registered long-term unemployed jobseekers in Albania](#)”, 10 May 2022, pp. 17-18

## Interview material

In response to questions about assistance to gain employment and future hopes and job prospects, a Beneficiary of Different and Equal stated that:

“I have been involved in several trainings that were conducted by the job coordinator like: counseling for employment, how to write a CV, how to apply for a job, how to introduce myself in any working place and how to use a computer. I attended one-month training for hotelier – tourism, and also I am certified as a pizza maker. I also practised and worked as a tailor, D&E supported me with supplies for tailoring: sewing machine, clothes – meter, iron. I worked at home. I also was connected with companies that worked in our area that supported me. It was a good opportunity for me at that time. I grew up economically and professionally with my job as a tailor. At the beginning I wasn’t good enough with sewing, but with practice and my desire to do my best I became professional. From this work I could cover a lot of my expenses; I paid water and electricity bills and other expenses. It also affected me very positively both personally and emotionally. [...]



I have applied for some job placement in state institutions, but it is very difficult. Some years ago I very much liked to work in the elderly house to support them for their daily activities, they need our care. Recently I worked for 6 months in the kindergarten with kids. I really felt very good with them, maybe because I am a new mother myself. I really like this kind of job.”

Source: Beneficiary of D&E, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

In response to questions about support to find employment, and future hopes and prospects for employment Beneficiary A.B. commented that:

“[...] [D]uring the period I have been in the shelter, I have followed a course of professional training in hairdressing. And that is all that I have done regarding education. [...] I like hairdressing very much. And I wish to practice it maybe in the future. And I think that I have the right skills to do that.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated:

“Economic empowerment is in the focus of D&E’s daily work with trafficking and gender based violence survivors. D&E supports the beneficiaries of the program in their efforts to enter into the labor market, through guidance and support through employment counseling and career development.

Beneficiaries are trained individually and in groups by supporting, advising and providing information on how to prepare to enter into the labor market.

In these meetings girls and women learn practical skills on how to write a CV, a letter of interest and how to prepare for a job interview.

Through training, D&E staff work to provide them with professional career and educational advice, as well as to help them organize their thoughts, interests and skills. They are supported to be registered as jobseeker at Office of Employments and the support continues until:

- To start a vocational course/training
- To conduct an internship
- To start a small business
- To purchase the necessary materials to start income generation activities
- To find an appropriate employment

D&E has a strong collaboration with Offices of Employment and private companies/businesses in order to:

- Register the program beneficiaries as unemployed jobseekers
- Counsel for employment
- Involve in employment promotion program as an employment for program beneficiaries
- Find safe and appropriate jobs
- Generate new employment opportunities [...]

They can find jobs according their level of education and professional skills. They can be employed as cook assistant, tailoring, pizza delivery, advertisement delivery, supermarket workers, sales in small shops, operators in call centre, waiters, bartenders, babysitter, painter, working in shoes factory, workers in trade centres, workers in carwash, car parking, pizza splitter, hairdressers and cleaners etc.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“The four shelters operating in Albania do offer a reintegration programme based on the donations from the international donors through project proposals they submit to them. They offer enrolment to VET [Vocational Education Training] centres or paid internships directly to the business in order to learn the profession and find a possibility for employment in these businesses. TVO NGO offers for free five typology of VET courses as it is licensed from the ministry of health and welfare. These five VET courses include tailoring, cooking, training to become a coffee



machine repair technician, babysitter or caring for older people, and training to become waiters. These courses are offered for free for marginalised target groups, including the VoTs. We also cooperate closely with the regional employment office. More than 300 VoTs have been trained in two years by TVO NGO.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

The same interlocutor noted:

“The minors of age 16- to 18 and above that we are assisting and monitoring after they leave the program usually are employed in the industry of services such big factories, restaurants working as cooking assistant, bakeries , assistant hairdressers, baby sitters, shop managers, assistants in big supermarkets, tailors, or boys working as assistants in mechanic workshops or waiters.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, explained that:

“The package of employment services is provided by the labour offices including also VET [Vocational Education Training] in the Center for Professional Training. In the majority of the cases, the on-job training is provided by the programs of NGOs, even though in the last two years the National Agency for Employment and Skills has implemented employment in the community for the provision of support to job seekers with a limited amount of money (As a salary) for pushing them to learn a profession and to be paid. [...] Most of cases employment opportunities are identified based on their knowledge, interest, and skills for this reason before employment a lot of effort is put to push them toward learning some skills. The professions can be listed: hairdresser, cooking, cleaning, reception, etc”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [written communication with Asylos](#), 26 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Based on the evidence from my 2019 study [including interviews with individuals who were professionals working at one of four institutions offering rehabilitation and reintegration services to trafficking, including Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], the NGOs offer professional training courses that can help trafficking victims develop professional skills.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist commented that:

“[...] that it is very difficult to generalize [about the kind of employment that VoTs are able to find]. I think you need to go case by case. What we know from the report that we did is that at the time, around 55% of the people who received training [...] was working in that area where they were trained or received training on. But again, I think it depends on the case.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained the kinds of employment available:

“[...] [B]efore mediating victims for working, so we support them through a cycle of training for work for employment. And we see the possibilities, the capacities, and desires that the victims have for work. And so we try to support them through a cycle of training and vocational training for specific work. And after that, to mediate them through private or state institutions for finding the job. Most of the victims, for example, that want to have more sustained work



through, for example, some vocational trainings, for example, kitchen or hairdressing because it is common here in Albania or aesthetics, so nail aesthetics or have some skills for tailoring as well. And then the possibilities to find job, mostly for women and girls here, are these tailoring factories. So the factories that there are people that tailor and as well to work initially as an assistant or being so hair dresser or working in a kitchen in a restaurant and bars because here in Albania, we are mostly touristic cities. We have a lot of touristic cities. So this is most of the work that the victims are looking for. And we are looking for them and mediated for them.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“[...] most of the NGOs are opting [to assist people with] self-employment rather than employment. And this self-employment is a better option because it is where the victim themselves explores their potential and they can start doing something and be independent and run an economic activity. And that’s the preferred option. The other option is to seek employment. It is based on the very long relationships that these NGOs have established with specific businesses, and in this case, the NGO knows the business and the business knows the NGO, they know beforehand that this is the case, that the person that they are hiring is a former victim of trafficking [...]. There are legal provisions in different documents which stipulate the assistance provided to the victims of trafficking - free schooling for children, being categorised as an advantaged group for employment, shelter (provided by the state, not shelter in a classical home) - provided by the state and many other things. [...] the employment office has collaborated in finding employment for the victims of trafficking. In smaller cities, it is more difficult to get the services. So the legal basis is there. NGOs are starting to make use of what is available, let’s say, from the state services. And in big cities, it works. In smaller [cities], then it’s very difficult to say.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“At the moment, support is available. Survivors of human trafficking, they can access either vocational training provided by public agencies [...] I know that Tjeter Vizion in Elbasan (Another Vision) in Elbasan, they do have a specific vocational training centre where they provide their services. But I also know cases where NGO and shelters, they have paid for private vocational training courses which are advanced, for survivors to access such training. Also, NGOs have also ties with businesses so they can provide further employment in order to make it more smoother, this integration.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

In relation to the employment assistance provided by the NGO shelters, the same interlocutor stated:

“In terms of reintegration, besides from the support that the local employment offices provide in Albania for unemployed citizens, including also victims of human trafficking, some of the NGOs have also taken the initiative to run social enterprises.

At the moment, we have the case of Different and Equal, who is running a social enterprise in Tirana called Tirana New York Bagels, but also very recently, [...] another NGO has opened a social bakery, that also trains and provides skills to potential victims of human trafficking or victims of human trafficking to increase their chances for employment.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.2.3 Healthcare

• Refer also to [3.3.6 Healthcare – limitations on page 233](#).

#### Desk review material

During an interview as part of a UK Home Office fact-finding mission, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection described healthcare provision of victims of trafficking:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

[...] Regarding protection of VOT, the 2014 law on compulsory health care insurance was enacted in 2014 and health insurance for VOT is covered by the state. This enables these individuals to become part of the public health system and reduce the burden to those who provide care. So this assistance is provided from primary health care and also includes referral and provision of secondary and tertiary care including mental health (MH) services. This is provided free and covered by the state budget to VOT, so could include medicines and intermediary diagnostic or treatment services, as well as other free of charge healthcare packages, provide by both public and non-public hospitals (as in nephrology, cardio-surgery, hearing problems, etc.). These packages are 100% financed by the Compulsory Health Care Insurance Fund and are implemented based on protocols approved by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

**Q.** Does this cover their dependents?

**A.** If by dependents you mean children, then yes. Children, whether they come from parents of VOT or not, are provided free health care services in any case.

**Q.** Is this health support long term?

**A.** Yes, as far as they are part of this category, as foreseen in the above mentioned domestic legal framework. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 77

#### Interview material

In response to a question about the physical and mental health assistance they had received, a Beneficiary of Different and Equal commented that:

“D&E supported me with medical assistance, medicines for me and my son. I also have been registered and equipped with a health card from the government health care centre. I did several for me and my son – and for a 6 month period I received support for a specific treatment of my son.”

Source: Beneficiary of D&E, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, reported that:

“The public healthcare service is organized at the primary, secondary, and tertiary service levels. Approximately 413 public healthcare clinics offer primary and secondary healthcare services and 42 public hospitals offer tertiary healthcare services. Pharmaceutical and dental services are almost entirely private. [...] With the support of the Ministry of Health and social protection every beneficiaries VoT and potential VoT are equipped with health card / Free medical assistance (family doctor/ specialist doctors). [...] Most frequent health problems encountered by the beneficiaries were mainly infectious (viral, bacterial and fungal), dermatological, ocular, dental and gynaecological, etc. For some cases medication are reimbursed from the state and for some others medication are provided from organization.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:



“The minors as Victims of trafficking benefit from the free public health care system and at the moment they are categorised as VoTs / Potential VoTs they entered into the reintegration program. They are registered to the primary health care system (Family doctors), entering the system as well. So far the public health system has supported us with minors’ cases but for specific needs, such as tests or analysis, we are forced to contact the private health care system.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist outlined:

“This is part of the full and the basic service packages. So either they receive these services through the state services in the shelter run by the state, but also in the other three shelters this full package is included in the whole response. Healthcare response is very much covered.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“In terms of health assistance, [victims of trafficking] benefit as everybody else. So because we have free healthcare for everyone employed, unemployed, insured, uninsured, the government has been providing free healthcare for everyone. [...]

So as soon as you are of age you have your ID card which has your social insurance number, and with that social insurance number [...] of course, if you live in the country, you might have any kind of residency - and at the location that you have the residency, you’d go and register and have the family doctor, which is just the health card, and with that health card and according to the referral system, then you need to follow the steps and go and receive the service. So it might take a little bit of time. [...] There are attendance times [...]. So, the thing is, I had the persistence and the insurance [...] [but] a victim of trafficking doesn’t have it. I mean, the main job that the NGOs do is to [help them get] their legal identity papers so that they can benefit from the health card and enter the system, and then accompany them to receive the services.

That’s where the assistance has been- it’s part of the reintegration process when you also socially reinforce their ability. It might make them stronger to know how to go, where to go, and what to ask for themselves. [...].”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[...] regarding the health as well, there is enacted law for providing free medical support for victims and victims of human trafficking. This is not as well always granted because there are some medicines that are not free. And we try through our projects, have funded by donors to find some money for the medical needs of the victims. And as well, the dental care. It is not always free. It is most of the time private, and this is another thing that we cover with our programs. [...] All the services that are for physical healthcare are available for the victims as well and free of charge and most. There are lots of services for reproductive healthcare and as well all the tests and exams, health tests are free for them even for so infections and everything else. The only thing it is only for dental care that most part it is private. This is one of the things that our projects and programs of our centers try to cover for the victims.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] In terms of the general healthcare. I mean, the kind of unwritten rule or the written rule is that access to healthcare is free. However, a lot of people are not happy with the healthcare system, so whoever has the means chooses to go private because that’s where you solve your problems. [...] if you kind of have your contacts or you know someone and you can pay £5 in the pocket of the nurse, you can get a lot more done. It’s the reality.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023



Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“In terms of physical healthcare services, usually, it would work in this way: the victim or survivor would go to there -- would have to register to their local GP doctor, and their local GP would be according to the place where they reside or the municipality where they live. And the local GP will do the initial assessment and would refer them to a specialist for specialist health support, which would take up to three weeks or two months, based on the problem and to which specialist doctor they would be referred. But for physical healthcare, they are available and accessible. A challenge within the healthcare system is, usually, some of the survivors might have severe physical health issues, either from their trafficking experience, forced labor experience, and they would not be entitled to be reimbursed of their medical expenses in terms of the medicine that they would need to take. And that would be a huge burden for them because, usually, this kind of medicine is very expensive. It would go around £150 per month. And here, we have a challenge because the medical support provided by the state would not cover it. But we have cases where NGO-run support, they have covered the bills of this kind of medicine. But that’s also short-term, up to a year. After a year, then it’s based on how much funding they have.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.2.4 Mental healthcare provision

• Refer also to [3.3.7 Mental healthcare provision – limitations on page 235](#).

#### Desk review material

During an interview with the UK Home Office, officials from Kukes Municipality indicated that they provide financial and psychological support for the duration needed to ensure an individual has fully reintegrated:

“Kukes Municipality, 7 October 2022 [...]

[...] **Q.** How long do you continue to monitor those returned to families?

**A.** There is no standard duration, it is on a case by case basis. We don’t stop providing [...] psychological support until we are sure the individual has fully reintegrated into society, like going back to school, working or living independently, personally or psychologically. So support continues until we are sure we have filled all the gaps. We don’t leave them behind. [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.62

In an interview with the UK Home Office, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection described healthcare provision of victims of trafficking:

“Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]

[...] Regarding protection of VOT, the 2014 law on compulsory health care insurance was enacted in 2014 and health insurance for VOT is covered by the state. This enables these individuals to become part of the public health system and reduce the burden to those who provide care. So this assistance is provided from primary health care and also includes referral and provision of secondary and tertiary care including mental health (MH) services. This is provided free and covered by the state budget to VOT, so could include medicines and intermediary diagnostic or treatment services, as well as other free of charge healthcare packages, provide by both public and non-public hospitals (as in nephrology, cardio-surgery, hearing problems, etc.). These packages are 100% financed by the Compulsory Health Care Insurance Fund and are implemented based on protocols approved by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p. 77

In its 2021 Annual Report, Different and Equal reported on programmes implemented between January and December 2021, and noted the following mental healthcare services provided to trafficked persons:

“Project: “Providing comprehensive reintegration services and improving the protection framework for victims of trafficking in Albania” [...]

Mental health problems

10 beneficiaries with mental health problems have been regularly followed by psychiatrists receiving appropriate treatment on an ongoing basis.

[...] D&E has cooperated with several health institutions such as: Polyclinic No. 9, ISHP, Institute of Hygiene, Polyvalent Emergency of QSUT and Psychiatric hospital. All beneficiaries of the program have been provided with a Health Card, near Pol. no. 9.

Psycho-social counseling

Psychological and psycho-social counseling, art therapy, occupational therapy, are the activities organized within the framework of psycho-social assistance. All these activities aim at the psychological well-being of the beneficiaries.

Psychological counseling

A psycho-social assessment was made for the cases that entered the program. 514 individual counseling sessions were provided by the psychologist. During this period, the issues addressed in the counseling sessions were: Depression, anxiety and sleep disturbances, mood disorders, post-traumatic stress, etc. Part of the process has been the education and integration of knowledge/techniques by the beneficiaries to alleviate symptoms and improve quality of life.

Psycho-social counseling

2708 individual sessions of psycho-social counseling were provided by case managers. Issues brought up in counseling are primarily related to employment, interpersonal relationships, family mediation, empowerment, time and income management, decision- making and choices, parenting, education, self-care and independent living.”

Source: Different and Equal, “**2021 Annual Report**”, undated (2022), pp. 9; 11-13

A 2021 UNDP mapping report on NGOs in Albania delivering integrated case management summarised the mental health services provided by the Mary Ward Loreto Foundation for trafficked persons:

“MWL [Mary Ward Loreto Foundation] aims and provides:

1. Counselling, referral, and accompaniment to services for people in need by empowering them to access relevant services as needed;
2. Direct services and reintegration programs for women and girls victims of domestic violence, victims/potential victims of trafficking, women head of households, people with health problems or family calamities;
3. Free psychological service for categories in need who do not have the financial means to access this service and pay the fee; [...]

Source: UNDP, Austrian Development Cooperation, and AKPA (Agjencia Kombetare e Punesimit dhe Aftesive), “**PROMOTING INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKET SOLUTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS II’: Mapping of national integrated case management practices delivered by NGOs in Albania**”, 2021, pp. 59-60

## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated that:

“After evaluating the case, if there is mental health or other problems, it is referred to the relevant specialists. In the field of mental health, the psychiatrist makes the diagnosis and gives the medication. The case can also be treated with psychotherapy and pills.

Some of the other forms of support for people suffering from mental health are community centers and supportive homes.

The network of mental health services consists of:

- a. Primary health care services;
- b. Specialized outpatient services;
- c. Community-based mental health services, such as: Community mental health centres; Multidisciplinary mobile teams; Day care centres; Supported houses for 8 former chronic patients of psychiatric hospitals; Supported houses for psychotic patients; Recreational centre; etc;
- d. Mental health services with beds;



e. Special Medical Institutions. [...]

Treatment and referral of beneficiaries with mental health problems is still an issue that creates lots of difficulties. The challenge is the lack of alternatives for long term accommodation and care for the VoT with serious mental health problems due to the gaps in the system”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Psycho-social support for VoTs is usually provided from the shelters psychologist and in specific cases it is supported from clinics experts through funds provided from the projects. [...]”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained that:

“And all of the four shelters and the state social services, they all are equipped with psychologists and mental health specialists and this is part of the case management response. [...] So I would say that, yeah, everybody who has been identified and approached by any of the service providers, it [...] is one of the basic core services provided by all the shelters and organizations providing any support to victims and survivors of human trafficking. And then, we as UNICEF, are supporting online platform. [...] of this organization that provides online support. So currently, they have their website where anyone can go and schedule an appointment with a professional and they will have online sessions regarding mental health and related to cases at personal risk or survivors of human trafficking. And now, we are currently supporting this organization to develop a mobile application where you don’t need [...] a laptop to access these services, but you can also do it from your phone. And we also have a lot of data that not only people living in Albania are using this service, but also Albanians living especially in the UK or in Germany or in other countries [...] So, yeah, we know that people abroad also use this service.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“For the girls, the only [...] support that girls victims of human trafficking have, it is the specialized staff of our centers. So the centers of National Coalition Centers. And for all, I think, for trafficked boys, women, and men. [...] For the girls and the women, that stay in the shelter, the support is given in the shelter. And after that, in the community where they live. And for men and boys, it is given to our legal clinic where there is as well a department of psychological support for this category. And in the health system, there are some community day center as well as some psychiatric hospitals for adults, men and women, only for them in Albania that we can refer for emergency cases or acute so mental health patients.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

### 3.3 Barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration accessing assistance

#### 3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations

\*The original research terms of reference did not include research questions seeking information about identification as a potential barrier to accessing reintegration and rehabilitation services, however, this section has been included as it corresponds to a theme that emerged from the research findings.

• Refer also to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 130](#).

#### Desk review material

In an interview with the UK Home Office, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection indicated that victims of trafficking who are not assisted by shelters don't necessarily access available municipal support as they would have to prove their status as a victim of trafficking:

"Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 10 October 2022 [...]"

**Q.** Are there any societal barriers that prevent long term reintegration of VOT in Albania?

**A.** [...] We have received information from different municipalities that VOT fail to show up for planned social programmes – not just for social care and benefits but also housing rent bonuses, education, employment opportunities and vocational training. The main reason why VOT don't show up to the municipality to benefit is that they need to prove they are a VOT or a victim of DV and so on. This is in respect of VOT who are not placed in shelters. Those in shelters work with the case manager and have an individual reintegration plan and are provided with all the necessary assistance. Case workers follow up with the victim even 6 months after they have been reintegrated and live on their own."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.78

#### Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

"The difficulties in accessing the package of services for victims of trafficking are firstly based on the fact that only a small number of victims manage to be identified and receive services."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

"The difficulties in accessing the package of services for victims of trafficking [...] comes from the fear that the victims have to be identified as such because of the prejudice and stigmatization that society does to them."

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated in relation to barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services, that:

"I mentioned 100 cases – maybe only 20 are identified as victims of trafficking because you might have all of the signs [or] indicators that you are a victim of trafficking, but then it is up to the individual themselves to declare him or herself a victim of trafficking. Because of the status, only 20% or less than 20% of that are willing to be recognized as a victim of trafficking. Most of the cases are identified as potential victims of trafficking, which is another status, let's say, given. There is no difference between the one and the other because in both cases, you display the indicators [and so] [...] you are entitled to the same benefits and support. The only difference is if you are a victim of trafficking, you will



receive an allowance of £20 a month,<sup>12</sup> which is practically nothing [...] but in order to receive this, you need to go to the state offices. [...] there are legal provisions in different documents which stipulate the assistance provided to the victims of trafficking -, free schooling for children, [...] being categorized as an advantaged group for employment, for shelter [...] provided by the state, not shelter into a classical home) [...] and many other things. The thing is that you have to [...] have the status of the victim assigned to you [...]"

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Based on my 2019 study [including interviews with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], the main barriers to accessing services cited by the employees of the ‘National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims’ were the procedures related to victim identification. There were also cases where the victims were not even part of the civil register (they had not been registered as citizens when they were born), and thus were not eligible to access state services – this was particularly the case among children of the Roma community who had been trafficked for begging purposes.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist pointed to the identification of victims as a barrier:

“I would say that the identification of cases themselves is a big barrier. It’s not very easy. It’s very difficult actually to identify cases in the first place. So [...] it’s very difficult to rehabilitate and reintegrate people who have been affected by this phenomenon.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, explained that not being identified as a victim of trafficking would be one of the main barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services:

“[...] in terms of accessing [services from shelters], there are no barriers as long as the victims they have been referred in the NRM or they’ve been identified by the structures as victims of human trafficking. When they’re identified, then they can access. And also, the NGOs, they do work very well with each other. So in cases where one of the NGOs is not able to provide a service because they are short on funds, they can refer the victim to get this service from another NGO. So there is a very well cooperation in order to meet their needs. But the barrier is when the victims are not identified. When the victims are not identified as victims of human trafficking, then it’s very hard to access the services.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.3.2 Stigma / familial and community issues

\*The original research terms of reference did not include research questions seeking information about stigma / familial or community issues as a potential barrier to reintegration and rehabilitation, however, this section has been included as it corresponds to a theme that emerged from the research findings.

• Refer also to [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 224](#).

<sup>12</sup> Note that the monthly financial assistance available to victims of trafficking increased from 3000 Lek to 9000 Lek in 2022. See [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 193](#).



## Desk review material

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Tjeter Vizion indicated people from the LGBTI community experience extra difficulty in reintegrating in society due to discrimination:

“Tjeter Vizion, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Are men willing to access support services?

**A.** [...] The LGBTI community finds it extra difficult to be reintegrated into society due to other types of discrimination.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.28

In an interview with the UK Home Office, the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives indicated that lack of information about entitlements and the documentation required can present barriers to accessing state benefits:

“Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, 6 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Can you tell us about single women and their ability to live in Albania, and their ability to relocate, how can they live alone or with children?

**A.** It is very difficult. [...]

Speaking of VOT and those who apply for social housing, we have good law on social housing and legal aid and all these laws that I mentioned foresee VOT as beneficiaries. In practice the number of cases applying for these benefits is low. It is not because we don't have laws, but there is hesitation to apply due to prejudice, which makes VOT reluctant to apply for economic help, legal aid and social housing.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.42-43

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of a fact-finding mission, Key Advisor suggested that families are sometimes unprepared to support victims of trafficking, and that this is associated with trauma and stigmatisation:

“Key Adviser, 12 October 2022 [...]

[...] Despite economic empowerment of VOT through the programme, their families are sometimes unwelcoming and not prepared to support them or help them out in any way.

**Q.** Why is this?

**A.** In my opinion there are several reasons. First the family has also gone through trauma and this is unhealed trauma. Also stigmatisation is a huge issue in local communities, and early marriages are a phenomena which are not viewed as human trafficking (HT) in these families. Not only talking about early marriages but people who go and work in drug houses, the local community considered them as illegal migrants instead of VOT.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.99

A July 2022 UNICEF report on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania, authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF, and based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with trafficking survivors, frontline professionals employed within government agencies and NGOs and private sector representatives, noted the following with regards to financial support available to victims of trafficking:

“The interviews identified that not all survivors are aware of this state economic assistance. **Only four survivors (29%) reported that they have received any assistance from either the central government or the municipality. This suggests that either the survivors are unaware of the state economic assistance, or do not wish to apply for it.** There has reportedly also been a downward trend in recent years in the number of unemployed survivors accessing the economic assistance payment. [...] Most importantly, survivors may experience discrimination when attempting to access economic assistance, and the entire **process of applying for government economic assistance can re-victimise trafficking survivors.** The survivors essentially must present themselves at the relevant government office and make a declaration to the staff that they are an unemployed human trafficking survivor. Then they may then experience stigma.”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022, p. 47



In a 2022 guide for practitioners on the stages of reintegration of survivors of trafficking, Different and Equal noted common issues that stall reintegration:

“Many trafficking victims face crises and set-backs at various stages during their reintegration that may stall their progress or even cause them to regress to previous stages of reintegration. Common crises and setbacks in reintegration include, but are not limited to:

[...] Conflict, tension and disagreement in the family

Violence and abuse in the family (domestic violence, child abuse, incest)

Tension and conflict with community members”

Source: Different and Equal, “[Stages of Recovery and Reintegration of Trafficking Survivors: A reintegration guide for practitioners](#)”, 1 March 2022

In a guide for practitioners on support for children victims of trafficking published by Different and Equal, it was noted that:

“[...] children, adolescents and young people may be more exposed to set-backs and crises, in light of their evolving capacities, their still developing identities and their heightened dependence on family and other adults caring for them.

[...] Whether these set-backs temporarily or permanently derail a beneficiary’s reintegration process is a function both of their personal circumstances (their individual, family or social coping mechanisms) and the support available through reintegration programs. Being able to lean on someone in one’s family or social network is integral to navigating and overcoming problems and set-backs that arise.”

Source: Different and Equal, “[Supporting Children Victims of Trafficking: A reintegration Guide for Practitioners](#)”, 1 March 2022

### Interview material

In response to a question about the challenges of rehabilitation and reintegration, a Beneficiary of Different and Equal stated that:

“There were many challenges and I don’t know where to start. The first challenge was when I returned to Albania, my family didn’t accept me, they prioritized the mentality of community and did not see the pain of their child – this was the biggest challenge. Then the second challenge was the place where I lived, there were no job opportunities, the stigmatization... I don’t want to remember anything from that time because at this moment we are talking, I am very well, I have passed that phase – I made it...imagine how difficult it was to be in the same city with your family and you see them in the market they did not speak to you. We saw each other almost every day. Now things are different, I talk with them. I’m not far from them, they’re not present in everything I do, they feel comfortable with the people around them - telling them that I got married, live with my husband, and all this is for them to have a good image in the community. They can come and visit me but without interfering in my life.”

Source: D&E Beneficiary, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

Regarding the challenges of long-term reintegration, Beneficiary A.B. commented that:

“Well, I find it difficult because at first I will be alone. I won’t have the support of my family.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“The difficulties in accessing the package of services for victims of trafficking [...] comes from the fear that the victims have to be identified as such because of the prejudice and stigmatization that society does to them. Unfortunately, there are cases when the victims are also prejudiced by the employees of different institutions. For this purpose,



more work should be done with the awareness raising activities for the society as well as for the improvement of the system so that it enables services for the victims of trafficking even while hiding their profile as victims.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

“[...] when the victims tell their history of trafficking, they feel that employers are very prejudiced.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“We have a national agenda that we call - it’s a strategic document. A very important one – National Agenda on Child Rights and Protection 2021-2026, which specifies measures dedicated to trafficking in line with the national strategy on anti-trafficking. So we have very good nice policies, and we have a lot of activities there to change social norms, to provide support and to identify victims of trafficking, to integrate them in the community. We have a lot of problems of integrating them into community. We have too many prejudices, stereotypes toward them, and it’s not easy their recovery [...]”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, listed barriers to finding employment:

“Based on my 2019 study [including interviews with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], these include stigma, lack of professional skills, lack of education.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained:

“There is a range of services [...] included in the National Action Plan and the National Referral Mechanism, including health, education, and employment, and so on. But beyond what is available, [...] there are many challenges in order to access these services [...] you have the issue of stigma and confidentiality in a small country like Albania, and so on.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated in relation to barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services, that:

“I mentioned 100 cases - maybe only 20 are identified as victims of trafficking because you might have all of the signs [or] indicators that you are a victim of trafficking, but then it is up to the individual themselves to declare him or herself a victim of trafficking. Because of the status, only 20% or less than 20% of that are willing to be recognized as a victim of trafficking. Most of the cases are identified as potential victims of trafficking, which is another status, let’s say, given. There is no difference between the one and the other because in both cases, you display the indicators [and so] [...] you are entitled to the same benefits and support. The only difference is if you are a victim of trafficking, you will receive an allowance of £20 a month,<sup>13</sup> which is practically nothing [...] but in order to receive this, you need to go to

<sup>13</sup> Note that the monthly financial assistance available to victims of trafficking increased from 3000 Lek to 9000 Lek in 2022. See [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 193](#).



the state offices. If you go to the state offices and say, “I have the status,” then everybody knows that you have been trafficked and the stigma is extremely strong. So yes, victims can access the services only through the NGOs because, otherwise, they need to go and scream it out and nobody wants this. [...] as I said, if you are a victim of trafficking and you say that you are a victim of trafficking, in the eyes of the public, “Oh, you are a prostitute.” It’s very difficult to make this distinction between a prostitute and somebody exploited, so [...] people don’t say it.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[...] one of these victims, for example, too many years ago has been from LGBTQI so group. And stigma has been very high [...] this was a problem and the young guy has been very supported for a long time, psychological support, during this period of time. And we have seen shame in the family members of this guy as well and don’t acceptance over being LGBTQI and being sex trafficking has been so very hard.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same interlocutor also noted that:

“[...] victims of human trafficking that live in rural remote areas [...] suffer from this stigma and patriarchalism, for example, [...] they are discriminated from the large family, from the community members.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

### 3.3.3 Adequacy of services & bureaucracy

#### Desk review material

A European Commission report of November 2023 stated that:

“Successful reintegration [for victims of trafficking] remains difficult because the state’s core protection, care and social services are insufficient.”

Source: European Commission, “[Albania 2023 Report](#)”, 8 November 2023, p. 46

“UNICEF, 5 October 2022 [...]”

**Q:** You mentioned support and vocational services, please expand.

**A:** [...] Legislation exists, but there are resource and capacity constraints and for people on the ground the support is not happening. This is one of the gaps we are trying to fill.

So VOT can access state benefits but system issues mean that the implementation is not working in all places. This requires continued investment and strength.

**Q:** Are there specific areas where this doesn’t work?

**A:** The government has provided support, but they also report that 10 municipalities are not providing services to vulnerable groups, even though legislation applies. [...]

**Q:** Is this the only support they are entitled to?

**A:** There is housing support in some municipalities, but it has stagnated and in some cases support is not being implemented. It is a great law on paper, but it is not being implemented at all levels.

**Q:** Are ethnic Roma and Egyptian able to access services?

**A:** Roma/Egyptian have difficulty accessing services due to difficulties in civil registration. [...]

**Q:** Can they (Roma/Egyptian) access state benefits?

**A:** It is very difficult to access state benefits and other social services, including education and healthcare, unless there are targeted interventions based on individual assessments. They are the most vulnerable and less targeted. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.10-11



As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with an official from the OSCE, during which the interviewee pointed inadequacies in government support for victims of trafficking:

“OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** What support do the shelters provide to VOT?

**A.** [...] However, government support is very low. The government has policies in place but they are not always implemented. There is a burden on VOT to fill out the necessary paperwork to obtain support, however it is not worth it for the assistance they receive. Shelters fill this gap.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.22

In an interview with the Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, SHKEJ noted practical barriers to navigating the bureaucracy involved in accessing state support:

“SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** Can the people you support access state benefits?

**A.** Yes with our support, but we need to make a big effort to help them. Now the documents are all online so we try to work with the families to help them access. E-government is not working at the moment due to the cyber-attacks. We are talking about families who don’t know how to read or write so we try to help them a lot with this process. And families in difficult economic situations do not even have a phone. With our help they can access state support. Everything is online. So it’s difficult for those without internet access.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.83

Citing the UNDP, a November 2022 evaluation on the UNICEF programme in Albania on responses to trafficking stated that:

“Fifty-three out of the 61 municipalities have no services for excluded young people, victims of trafficking and young people in conflict with the law, with Dibër region offering the fewest types of services.”<sup>70</sup> [...]

<sup>70</sup> UNDP (2021). Social care services in Albania: distribution and beneficiaries in figures – May 2021.”

Source: Robin N. Haarr, UNICEF, UK Government, and Stop Human Trafficking, “[Evaluation of the Programme on Transforming the National Response to Human Trafficking in and from Albania, 2019–2022](#)”, November 2022, p. 14

A July 2022 UNICEF report on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania noted the following with regards to financial support available to victims of trafficking:

“The interviews identified that not all survivors are aware of this state economic assistance. **Only four survivors (29%) reported that they have received any assistance from either the central government or the municipality. This suggests that either the survivors are unaware of the state economic assistance, or do not wish to apply for it.** There has reportedly also been a downward trend in recent years in the number of unemployed survivors accessing the economic assistance payment. Interview and FGD participants reported that **state bureaucracy makes accessing economic assistance challenging.**”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022, p. 47

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews - including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – noted the following regarding state social services and housing assistance:

“According to the law on social housing (Ligji nr, 22-2018), Albanian trafficking victims are among the prioritized categories of vulnerable individuals in the application for government rent subsidy following their stay in a shelter.

However, more than half of the practitioners argued that applying for affordable housing schemes was a tedious process, requiring numerous documents that victims were unable to secure due to their vulnerability and to matters that went beyond their control: ‘One of the required documents is a notarized rental contract. However, most landlords don’t provide this contract ... the real estate system in Albania tends to be informal’ (SW3). The difficulties experienced by trafficking victims in gaining social housing endured even after submitting the application: ‘The waiting list is too long. Victims have to wait for years, without any guarantee that their application will be successful. It largely depends on the will of the Mayor’ (SW7).”

Source: Klea Ramaj, “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

The same report noted the following in relation to bureaucracy:

“[...] Albania’s laws look aesthetically pleasing written down, but the truth is that the system doesn’t work. You are constantly referred from one institution to the other and no one seems to be responsible about anything. Now think about trafficking victims being faced with this weak bureaucratic system. Victims get intimidated by assertive bureaucrats questioning their applications and are reluctant to ask for clarifications. Endlessly chasing that minimal assistance that rightfully belongs to them kills their motivation, their will to move forward ... it’s very sad (PSY2).”

Source: Klea Ramaj, “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Valbona Lenja, the following gaps in service provision for victims of trafficking, were identified by study participants, including representatives of the NCATS:

#### “1.4.4 Missing services

The NCATS participants in the study and police officers were asked regarding the missing services.

According to one NCATS participant, the “inventory” of services would be better performed if there was in place an integral law to guarantee the rights of victims.

36% of the NCATS participants reported that in Albania survivors receive all necessary services, but such services are insufficient, they have a poor quality and are not properly extended in time.

Such services include:

- [...] The taking of statements and reports in compliance with the law, including by an officer of the same gender as the survivor;
- Entertaining activities outside the shelters premises. According to one participant some activities are not implemented due to “*safety concerns*”.
- *Cases follow-up and monitoring after leaving the centres*: According to one of the participants, the responsible local structures do not fulfil their responsibilities related to monitoring cases of victims living at communities of origin. As a result, the follow up and monitoring remain responsibilities of NCATS shelters, which do not always have the sufficient financial resources.

36% of the NCATS participants believe that there are some services which are not provided neither by NPOs nor by state institutions.

Such services include:

- Long-term housing and care for victims suffering from mental health issues, who do not have a home or family members to take care of them;
- Specialized psychiatric service;
- Free shelter for survivors;
- Provision of certified academic education in shelters;

Compensation for the damage incurred;

Even the police specialists stated that housing is a completely missing service.

According to one of the specialists, due to the lack of funding, there is no ‘*housing accommodation for a period of at least 2 years*’. In addition, he stated that ‘*victims of trafficking should benefit rent-free housing*’. ‘*At least until they recover, victims should be accommodated in a dwelling, should be independent and eventually should be able to buy such dwelling at a reduced price*”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Author: Valbona Lenja, “[Services – To the Survivors or to the System? Access to and quality of services for victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania](#)”, 2021, p. 30



The same report stated the following:

**“1.4.1 Challenges of state institutions in providing services**

[...] *Challenges related to social housing/rent bonus*: This challenge was mentioned by 39% of the NCATS participants. The following issues were mentioned in relation to this challenge: prolonged procedures as well as requirements for unnecessary documentation/ complicated bureaucratic procedures; inadequate social housing programs; lack of funding by municipalities to cover the needs of survivors. According to one of the participants, such issues cause survivors to withdraw their application for social housing.”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Author: Valbona Lenja, [“Services – To the Survivors or to the System? Access to and quality of services for victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania”](#), 2021, p.27

### Interview material

The Beneficiary of D&E further noted the following challenges in relation to their housing situation:

“During this time, regarding the bonus for the rent I receive from the municipality, they are not correct with the payments, sometimes they do not transfer money in time, and sometimes they do not transfer the exact amount. This is a big challenge because you don’t feel economically secure and you will have problems with the owner of the property. [...] Another difficulty is finding someone that agrees to make an official contract for the rent of the apartment. You must have someone you know to help you with this part.”

Source: Beneficiary of D&E, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

When asked about what they thought would happen in terms of accommodation after they left the shelter and any challenges they might face, Beneficiary A.B. further commented:

“I wish to stay a little longer in the shelter with my sister as well. But after I leave the shelter, I think that I will rent an apartment and live there on my own. Of course, after I find a job. [...] It is difficult and challenging to find accommodation now because I don’t have a permanent job, a stable job. And besides that, the prices of a rented apartment here now are quite high. So that makes it more difficult and challenging.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, noted that:

“In practice, for the cases of victims of trafficking followed by D&E, it is possible to benefit only from the rent subsidy program and this only for some of the big municipalities, because there are not enough funds in other municipalities. While other programs have not yet been implemented”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, commented that:

“If you are a victim, you should be supported where you are with the needed service. [...] for sure, but needs more money, more engagement, professionals on that field. And we have this situation now that we have a lot of migration, especially from small municipalities to bigger municipalities. And this movement of people makes the small municipalities lack dedicated professionals. They don’t have doctors. They don’t have social workers, psychologists. Individuals who have been trafficked need to move to other cities in order to get these professional service.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023



The same interviewee also underscored the need for resources to facilitate long-term support of children.

“A victim needs services that are long-term. You cannot provide support to a child for two or three months and you can see that they are now recovered. I think that the services should be long-term, and what we are missing is that we do not have resources – and this is financial resources – on dedicated case management program and services to the victims [...] long-term, for three, for four, for five years. Because you need to follow up the case and the child’s well-being in the long term. We provide immediate support. We try to find different program services, but dedicated services to victims of trafficking budgeted from the local municipality are still lacking.

What does it mean? This means that, for example, if a municipality, for example, in 2022 had 10 victims of trafficking in their municipality, they should foresee dedicated budget for at least 10 people for the next year in order to monitor their well-being, to provide dedicated service, to integrate in the community, and to make some prevention work because it’s not an issue that stops there. This is an issue that is all time there, and the identification and prevention, support should be all the time. And I think we need more support on financial resources on the local municipalities’ mindset, planning, budgeting, and professionals on how to better response to the cases.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist explained:

“There is a range of services [...] included in the National Action Plan and the National Referral Mechanism, including health, education, and employment, and so on. But beyond what is available, [...] there are many challenges in order to access these services. There is a lot of bureaucracy, [...] And I mean, the feedback we got is that [...] a lot of people who tried to access that assistance, didn’t go until the end of the process because it was very long, complicated, and costly. So, yeah, they needed a lot of papers, a lot of certificates, come here, get to a place. So, yeah, it’s very complicated. Very lengthy process.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated with reference to housing that:

“[...] there are legal provisions in different documents which stipulate the assistance provided to the victims of trafficking -, free schooling for children, [...] being categorized as an advantaged group for employment, for shelter [...] provided by the state, not shelter into a classical home) [...] and many other things. The thing is [...] first, if the services are available. [...] the moment from when you apply to when you [actually] receive the service is very long usually. [...] In smaller cities, it is more difficult to get the services. [...]”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[T]here are a lack of financial resources and services for the reintegration of victims. [...] The program that we have supported victims with the-- supporting for rented apartment for six months or one year, that depends on the vulnerability victims have. But many times, the victims should be employed [...] to have some money to pay and to have a sustained payment for the rented apartments. But the victims as well can benefit from the social housing provided by each municipality in Albania. So if we have former victims that are living in the community, they can apply to [...] the social program in the municipality. This is not always [...] granted by the municipality because there is a lot of criteria to have it and a lot of administrative documents. We try and we make all our efforts to support victims during this process, but it is not always granted. And the sustained house, it is a problem. It’s still being a problem for victims of human trafficking [...] It’s still a problem.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In relation to housing assistance, the same interviewee noted observed that:

“[...] it is very difficult to benefit by this housing scheme because there are a lot of administrative issues that victims needs, victims or vulnerable women and girls must complete and support. We give our support to this vulnerable groups in order to inform them and to support them directly with provision of documentation and application for the social housing. And this is one. It is a limitation.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“Usually, it’s this support for rented apartments when they are out of their services from the NGOs, when the reintegration services have ended. And that would be one of the supports, but that’s not even for all the victims of human trafficking. That’s for victims of human trafficking living in the cities where support is available, because accommodation support depends on the funding that each municipality has. Big municipalities, such as Tirana, have this funding available. But we know municipalities who are in smaller cities outside of Tirana, they do not provide it, which gives to the victims only two options, either moving to Tirana, which is extremely expensive for them, or not being able to benefit from the social support.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.3.4 Level of financial support

#### Desk review material

As part of a fact-finding mission on human trafficking in Albania, the UK Home Office conducted interviews with representatives from UNICEF and Different and Equal in Albania in October 2022, during which the interviewees commented on the sufficiency of economic assistance provided to VoTs:

“UNICEF, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** For those who can access state benefits, are they at a sufficient level to cover accommodation and basic living costs?

**A.** There is an example of economic aid in the report ‘Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania’, which comments on the benefits that VOT are entitled to in legislation. VOT need a certificate (to prove their status), which they can easily access with help from shelters. However, this is only \$90 USD a month and does not even cover basic living costs. [...]

Different and Equal, 5 October 2022 [...]

**Q.** With regard the level of financial support, is it sufficient to meet basic needs?

**A.** No, until this year 25 euro or 3,000 lek (ALL) per month. It has now changed this summer and is now around 80 euro or 9,000 lek (ALL) per month.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.10, 18

#### Interview material

Regarding the challenges of long-term reintegration, Beneficiary A.B. commented that:

“Well, I find it difficult because at first I will be alone. [...] And besides that, it is the financial aspect because everything now, the prices, I mean, are high. And the salaries are quite low, so. But I think I will afford it.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“[...] the economic aid for the victims of trafficking is only €90 per month, and this is legally written. So you can imagine [...] what victims with €90 per month can do. Nothing. It's nothing. Even to have a normal life, a regular life, it's quite impossible to live with €90 per month. Adding the vulnerability of trafficking and the risks and all the necessities of today, it's totally not possible to recover from that situation.  
[...] So in Albania it is the law that if the mother, for example, had three children, she will get the money for each of their child, €90, and for her also. That still is not enough.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Based on unpublished interview excerpts from my study conducted back in 2019 [including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims], all professionals claimed that this amount is insignificant and does not allow one to live a dignified life: “No human being can survive with 3,000 Lek per month<sup>14</sup>.... So, what does the Albanian state offer to trafficking victims following their stay in our shelter? Let us say...nothing!” (SW6).”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The same interviewee noted that:

“Evidence from the interviews conducted for my 2019 study suggests that assistance for victims of trafficking is not helpful in all cases, particularly when victims lack other sources of support such as from their family.”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation commented that:

“[V]ictims of human trafficking are at risk of homelessness, yes. And the provision on preventing this risk, the municipalities offer social programs for social housing and payment of rented apartments, but it is not always granted, as I explained before, because there are a lot of administrative criteria to have it. So this is the risk. And we as a civil society organization, we try through our projects to fill some gaps regarding this and to provide victims being without house or being alone with homelessness and without services so in institutions. So we provide support for them during the time that the victims apply for the process of having social house or social rents for their apartment. So there is a risk always.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated with regards to the level of monthly financial assistance available that:

“It is very low. It is not enough for them for living or for just for living. But most of the victims, they don't go to get these assistance as victims because they say that for this money, better I can work [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

<sup>14</sup> Note that the monthly financial assistance available to victims of trafficking increased from 3000 Lek to 9000 Lek in 2022. See [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 193](#).



Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] everyone who is recognised as a VoT is eligible for the financial support [from the government], not only those in the state run shelter. Recently this amount has been increased to 9000 ALL (equivalent to £85 per month), which is still very little. And sometimes going through that process alone makes it not worth exposing yourself to the bureaucracies to only get that minimal amount.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“[...] [U]sually, a victim of human trafficking is entitled to 9000 lek per month, which is, I think, £70 pounds per month, where the cost of surviving in Albania at the moment would be around £350. And we do see that the support being available from these social protection systems is not very effective to protect actual victims of human trafficking.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

The same interlocutor stated that:

“I [...] don’t have statistics [...] on how many survivors of human trafficking are currently homeless in Albania. But we do have statistics of how many families that are in situation of homelessness versus how much support is provided. But I can not distinguish which of them were victims of human trafficking. But for my personal experience, knowing the available services and assistance, victims of human trafficking in Albania are extremely vulnerable to being homeless and either go back and seek for support to the NGOs again or, when they’re lucky enough, to go back to their families and seek support to their families.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.3.5 Barriers to employment

#### Desk review material

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report noted:

“[...] experts reported a lack of resources for [...] employment, and other reintegration efforts, particularly for child victims and victims with children.”

Source: US Department of State, “[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)”, 15 June 2023

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Caritas pointed to poverty as a factor preventing effective rehabilitation and reintegration:

“Caritas, 6 October 2022 [...] For women victims of violence and VOT it seems impossible to integrate as they don’t have the psychological ability to stay in employment. [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, 51

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, officials from Kukes Municipality referred to an anecdote to illustrate the low pay associated with jobs available for victims of trafficking:

“Kukes Municipality, 7 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** Can you confirm if anyone has been fully reintegrated after being a VOT?



A. Yes. We are unable to give numbers – that is confidential. According to legislation and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), public institutions are in charge of helping VOT in helping them get jobs that last 6 months to one year, renting houses until they can afford their own home and rent, and psychological support as needed. [...] At the round table, one member said that a VOT came back from Italy and she had been sexually exploited. When she came back here the state provided her with the necessary support. When they told her they would find her a job she asked what was the salary and they told her 200 euro minimum wage, and she said, ‘I earn 300 euro in one night in Italy so this is nothing’, so she refused support. So this is something that you should bear in mind. But the situation is similar now. We are a small country so this is all we can help them with. [...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.62

During an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, officials from Tirana Municipality suggested that victims of trafficking may face prejudice from employers:

“Tirana Municipality, 12 October 2022 [...]

Q. Could you tell us about societal attitudes towards VOT?

A. It’s not easy for VOT in that regard because the society is not very accepting or welcoming. We provide full confidentiality in community centres and do not share that they are VOT. Family is often the route of the problem, and employment is also a problem. When we try to find employment we make sure not to share that information as the VOT could be judged and discriminated against, as people still don’t accept. [...]

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.108

In an interview with the UK Home Office, the National Agency for Employment and Skills described in detail how they assist victims of trafficking with finding employment:

“National Agency for Employment and Skills, 12 October 2022 [...]

We are working with victims of trafficking (VOT) who are one of the 15 special groups that we support, including youth, returning migrants and people with disabilities. One of these groups that we provide support to is VOT. It is proscribed [sic] in law that VOT are part of this special group and we supply all the support through our work, financial support schemes and programmes. We don’t have many VOT that are declared in labour offices and of the total number of those currently registered, they are all women. Sometimes unemployed jobseekers (men and women) come to our labour offices and even if they refuse to declare they are VOT, we still support and provide a counselling service. [...]

Q. In absence of support from the labour office, what would be the barriers to VOT/returning migrants finding work themselves?

A. Our support programmes are provided to all vulnerable groups, it is not something we have especially for VOT. Nevertheless VOT would find it difficult to find a job if we were not here, for psychological reasons and due to the mentality of society and prejudgement.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, pp.109-112

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Albanian Women Empowerment Network, noted the difficulty women experience living independently, the lack of long-term support and job opportunities that will help meet the cost of living:

“Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN), 6 October 2022 [...]

Q. Are women VOT able to live independently, with or without children?

A. It is difficult, almost impossible for women to live independently without the support of civil societies. You should not refer to state reports regarding the present situation. VOT need long-term reintegration. There are only 2 centres providing this kind of support. There are few job opportunities, poor salaries unable to meet the cost of living.[...]”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.37



As part of its fact-finding mission, the UK Home Office conducted an interview with representatives from Mary Ward Loreto in October 2022, during which the interviewees provided information on the economic and employment situation in Albania, and indicated the difficulty of recovery and reintegration:

“Mary Ward Loreto, 11 October 2022 [...]

The basic minimum wage in Albania is 33,000 lek a month (about 300 euro), and cheapest rent is 200 to 250 euro a month, leaving only a 100 euro to live on and with rising cost of living, it is almost impossible to live, it is moving into starvation level really. And that is for people in good jobs working in call centres. Call centres are the biggest employers for the youth. Wages in factories are even less – in sweat shops you earn 150 euro a month. But there is no alternative. And in the south they are not even declaring employees so they are not protected and recruited on the black market.

I see many families in the north that are on a debt register to market owners because they have no money. So the debt can go up to 300 to 400 euro. The mindset of the people who live here is that they have to go somewhere else. There is a lot of apathy and learned hopelessness which is relevant to the situation. Some have jobs, but some don't see any opportunities and so have to go somewhere else and they don't have enough to pay for legal migration. [...] Victims of domestic violence receive services but they are so minimal that the victims are now victims of system as well as being vulnerable to human trafficking. Services to VOT are so basic they cannot recover from the trauma of being trafficked. They feel abandoned. It's like selling them a dream of reintegration but it's not true.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.96

Based on ‘national sources’, the European Commission provided the following statistics for unemployment in Albania, updated to 2021:

“Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%), total: 12.1 (2021)

female: 12.4 [2021]

male: 11.8 [2021]”

Source: European Commission-Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), “[Albania Report 2022](#)”, 12 October 2022, p. 51

A July 2022 UNICEF report on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania reported on the following findings with regards to challenges in accessing vocational training, and sustaining employment:

“Survivors face a number of challenges in accessing quality vocational training, including lack of access to free childcare, difficulties accessing vocational training in rural areas of the country and the short duration and low quality of some trainings provided in vocational training centres. [...]

The study identified some key challenges for survivors in entering and sustaining new employment, including lack of decent job opportunities in Albania, lack of interest in the jobs, lack of education, lack of affordable childcare, ongoing trauma and stigma. The study further identified that few survivors are successful in finding employment quickly after registering with the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES).”

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022, p. 10

The same report provided further detail on the barriers to employment based on interviews with trafficking survivors and key informants working in support services:

“Support to start a new business

The study found that starting a business may be a very empowering experience for survivors. Through the processes of planning and managing, survivors can experience significant increases in business and financial management nous, and confidence. However, they face challenges in starting and maintaining their own business, including lack of business know-how, insufficient start-up capital, and the presence of business competition and stigma. The study further identified that some of the challenges associated with starting and maintaining a business are unique to trafficking survivors. For example, they cannot borrow to take on financial loans as easily as other individuals, for fear

of debt making them vulnerable to exploitation, and they cannot run a business from home for security reasons. [...] Other services that support economic reintegration [...]

Education support is critical to economic reintegration. The study found that young survivors who are supported to complete high school have a better chance of finding decent employment than those who have not completed high school, and survivors who complete higher (university) education have an even greater chance of finding decent professional work. However, there are barriers to survivors returning to high school or considering enrolment in higher education. One barrier is their age: those who are in their twenties or thirties may feel that it is too late for them to (re-)enrol in high school. Another barrier is their financial situation. Survivors who are living in the community have to pay for rent and other essentials, and thus may prioritise employment over education.

Healthcare was also identified as an important service that supports economic reintegration. Interviewed survivors reported that overcoming or managing medical issues was paramount to their overall recovery and reintegration. When survivors are ill, they will struggle to access and maintain employment. Mental health support is also critical to economic reintegration. The study found that such support should precede vocational training and other economic reintegration activities. It further identified that this support should continue to be provided while survivors are engaged in new employment or a new business. [...]

Relationship-level factors focus on the survivor's family support. The study identified that survivors who have a supportive family are better positioned to (re-)enter study, employment, or start a business.

Community-level factors are also important in any discussion of the economic reintegration of survivors. A key community-level factor identified in the study is stigma, which may reduce survivors' ability to maintain employment or a new business, and access state services.

At the society level, there exists a range of factors that may inhibit or, conversely, facilitate the economic reintegration of survivors in Albania. Relevant factors at this level include state bureaucratic processes that impede access to state support, lack of funding for social services, lack of decent employment opportunities, and inadequate coordination for the referral and reintegration of survivors."

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)", July 2022, pp. 10-12

In a 2022 guide for practitioners on the stages of reintegration of survivors of trafficking, Different and Equal noted common issues that stall reintegration:

"Many trafficking victims face crises and set-backs at various stages during their reintegration that may stall their progress or even cause them to regress to previous stages of reintegration. Common crises and setbacks in reintegration include, but are not limited to:

Economic difficulties and financial crisis including lack of job opportunities or loss of a job [...]

Illness or injuries that interfere with well-being or the ability to work"

Source: Different and Equal, "[Stages of Recovery and Reintegration of Trafficking Survivors: A reintegration guide for practitioners](#)", 1 March 2022

A Master's thesis published in 2022 on labour market reintegration of trafficked women in Albania noted the following with regard to barriers to employment:

"An additional unpredictable individual factor which plays an important role in integrating women victims of sex trafficking into the labor market in Albania, mentioned by three social workers, is their lack of life skills. [...] Most of the time, these women have never functioned as self-standing members of society, nor have they handled common matters such as managing their own finances."

Source: Iliana Bekogianni, "[Labor market Integration of sex-trafficked women returnees in Albania: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms: Master thesis in the Master Track 'Management of Cultural Diversity', School of Humanities, Tilburg University](#)", 2022, p. 33

An article in Euractiv, a European news website specialised in EU policies, on poverty in Albania gave the following data with regards to unemployment, taken from the European Commission's statistics agency, EUROSTAT:



“The unemployment rate is approximately 12% as of March 2021.”

Source: Euractiv, “[Albanians most at risk of poverty in Europe](#)”, 2 November 2021

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims – noted the following barriers related to finding employment:

#### “Challenges to Reintegration I: Socio-economic Factors [...]

Data from the interviews suggest that the greatest difficulties for trafficking victims were encountered during the reintegration phase.

For victims trafficked internationally for numerous years, reintegrating back in the Albanian society was particularly challenging. [...] Moreover, after leaving the shelter, victims had to face the same socio-economic challenges that pushed them into trafficking in the first instance. [...] most interviewees suggested that reintegration challenges were tied to the victims’ life before trafficking, which was mainly characterized by poor economic conditions and parental negligence. [...] Six practitioners claimed that sex trafficking victims faced rejection in the job market due to discrimination: “In many cases, employers have refused to recruit victims after finding out about their sex trafficking experiences” (PSY4). [...]

All practitioners claimed that economic difficulties were the biggest challenge experienced by Albanian trafficking victims following their release from the shelter: [...]. Securing employment was impeded by Albania’s adverse economic situation and scarce job opportunities as much as by the victims’ lack of professional qualifications. The interviewees maintained that most victims had interrupted education before entering high school and lacked a professional background. [...] To prepare victims for the job market, all four organizations offered professional training courses as part of the reintegration services. Vocational training helped victims develop skills in cooking, tailoring, babysitting, hairdressing, or coffee machine repairing. Nevertheless, the income generated in these sectors is equal to Albania’s minimum wage, which, as argued by most interviewees, is insufficient to cover basic living costs without external support. Ergo, the economic situation for trafficking victims not accommodated or financially supported by their families after leaving the shelter was particularly challenging. Five practitioners stated that internationally trafficked victims experienced the poverty in Albania more negatively than internally trafficked victims. Victims in the former category had been exposed to a higher standard of living and could discern the wage disparity between Albania and more developed destination countries: [...]

Besides limited financial resources and pragmatic obstacles, long-term reintegration was negatively influenced by a lack of economic sustainability and exploitative working conditions. [...] employment was often unstable due to factors related to the employers’ unwillingness to support victims’ professional development or to the sporadic nature of the private businesses in which victims would find employment. According to the interviewees, trafficking victims were mainly employed as manual workers in sweatshops with poor working conditions: [...].

[...] most professionals stated that escaping miserable economic conditions was the primary reason for re-trafficking: “Accommodation and employment are crucial. If victims don’t have enough financial resources, if they don’t have a place where to sleep, in a short time they will re-fall prey to traffickers” (SW7). [...] evidence from the present study shows that victims began to suffer psychologically precisely when their financial needs were met: [...].

#### Challenges to Reintegration II: Legal and Institutional Barriers [...]

The interviews revealed that unemployed trafficking victims had the right to register as job seekers at the Albanian National Employment Service, a government agency responsible for assisting Albanian citizens seeking employment. Nevertheless, 10 professionals claimed that accessing such service was a time-consuming and demotivating process for trafficking victims: “Victims need to wait three months until their documents are processed and then normally another five months until they find a job. This gap causes financial instability, destroys their spirit, and makes them depressed” (SW1).”

Source: Klea Ramaj, “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), provided the following unemployment figures for 2021:

“The Albanian unemployed rate was 11.5% in 2021. About 163,000 persons were unemployed. The unemployment rate was 11.3% for men and 11.8% for women [...] During 2021, the youth unemployment rate was 27.1% [...]”

Source: INSTAT, “[Unemployment in Albania](#)”, undated

### Interview material

In response to a question about the challenges of finding employment, a Beneficiary of Different and Equal stated that:

“There are a lot. The moment you apply and they call you - when you tell them that you have a child, they change their attitude, they don't like it when you have other commitments. It should be the opposite in fact, for us as single mothers. As such it is very difficult to find an apartment and a job. In fact they should offer us more opportunities, support, and not having a child it's an obstacle in the process of our reintegration. There are also situations when one job is presented to you, and when you go to work, in reality it's a completely different job - this part disappointed me.”

Source: Beneficiary of Different and Equal, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

In response to a question about employment-related challenges, Beneficiary A.B. commented that:

“... [E]mployment is a challenge because of the shortage of opportunities for work for this category, let's say [in further written clarifications by email following the interview, a representative of Vatra confirmed on behalf of the beneficiary that they 'this category' referred to victims of trafficking]. Regarding the work challenge, let's say, it is going to be difficult for me because I don't have any actual skills besides that of hairdressing. And the market here is not very wide. And besides that, I also have this health issue with my kidneys, and I can't stay up for too long. I can't lift heavy things, and that makes me-- I tire very, very soon. And this makes it difficult for me to find a stable job. Earlier, I have worked as a cleaner and also in different factories here [...] And I actually liked a shoe factory here. I liked to work there. But I got fired in that factory. And I wish to go back but don't have high hopes about that.”

Source: Beneficiary A.B., [interview record](#), 3 July 2023

In further written clarifications, a representative of Vatra provided a response on behalf of Beneficiary A.B. in response to a follow up question posed by Asylos:

*Would the beneficiary be able to clarify why she was fired?*

“She replied that the reason for leaving her job was that due to some health problems she was unable to cope with the type of work process she had to perform and the employer had not given her an easier process or alternative, so she did not continued work.”

Source: Vatra representative on behalf of the beneficiary, [written clarifications](#), 19 December 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, stated that:

“Most [VoTs] receive only the minimum wage and have difficulty in making ends meet. [...] The state provides assistance in employment and training in the skills needed for employment.

Economic empowerment remains the biggest challenge in the process of reintegration of victims of trafficking into society. According to the reintegration program, victims are assisted by various initiatives to enable a kind of economic empowerment and financial independence that will guarantee their full reintegration into society. D&E in collaboration with public institutions, such as Vocational Training Centers and Employment Offices, including business, work to enable victims to be able to find and maintain a job. The forms of employment are different, through employment offices, businesses or even through the support of the start-ups of the victims themselves.



The biggest difficulties for the employment of victims of trafficking lie into their vulnerability, with a low level of education and without work experience. Although it is possible to find a job in one of the ways mentioned above, it is very difficult to have persistence in carrying out the work position. In addition to the lack of skills for work, the premises where the victims work are difficult to accept, and when the victims tell their history of trafficking, they feel that employers are very prejudiced.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

The same interlocutor also noted the unemployment rate in Albania:

“The unemployment rate in Albania, in 2021, is 11.5%. This means that around 163,000 people are unemployed. The unemployment rate is 11.3% for men and 11.8% for women.<sup>1</sup>”

<sup>1</sup> See INSTAT, “[Unemployment in Albania](#)”, undated

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Usually the VoTs, except the ones that are assisted in the shelters, do not possess information on vocational training options and are [not] able to make decisions regarding the training that they wish to undertake. When they are registered as jobseekers at the employment office they are treated like the rest of the job seekers without revealing their information as survivors of trafficking, except the cases when they are accompanied by the staff of the shelters. VoTs who are minors are usually accompanied to the employment office by shelter staff. [...]”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

The same interlocutor commented that:

“Usually the options presented to survivors of trafficking are not those that will lead to decent employment and business opportunities. Sometimes these options do not match as far as possible the survivors’ level of education and the employment and business opportunities. They are employed wherever the needs of the businesses are such as “Fasonery – factories [...] human resources are used to mass produce products” [the interlocutor indicated that “Fasonery factors” refers to factories where brands rely on cheap labour to produce their goods, including fashion]. Sometimes they lose their jobs as they are not able to find decent employment following completion of vocational training. [...] The minimum wage of the salary in Albania is about 350 euro per month, but usually they are paid less money, which makes difficult their economic survival.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, stated that:

“I think that unemployment rate in Albania is high, and this is officially [...] And if it’s high, this is high not only for all the citizens who are job seekers, but also for victims of trafficking. So I don’t think they make an exception on that. I think that the organisations who are working with the victims of trafficking are making more efforts to identify from their own potential companies, businesses, employment opportunities for them, and this makes the process more [...] difficult. But it’s difficult because, as I mentioned, especially the victims of trafficking usually do not come back to their country of origin or to their city of origin. They especially want to change the place where they have lived before, and this makes it more difficult to be potentially integrated in a new area and a new community with a new job. It’s done, but it needs a lot of effort, and there are cases when they are turning back in the situation where they were because they can’t afford all these changes. This is where I say this is a process that needs a lot of support in long term because this is the reason the victims become victims again.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023



Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article “[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)”, published in May 2021, stated in written communication with Asylos, that:

“Data from the International Labour Organisation (2019) indicate that the unemployment rate in Albania is relatively high (14%), with youth unemployment reaching 26%. Furthermore, these data suggest that 42% of the workforce is employed in low-skilled jobs, which are likely to generate a low monthly income. According to Eurostat (2019), Albania has the lowest minimum wage in Europe (US\$230 per month).”

Source: Dr Klea Ramaj, [written communication with Asylos](#), 15 June 2023

The UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist stated that:

“[...] in some cases, especially regarding support provided by the state, we believe that some of these opportunities were not very relevant to the market. Especially at the beginning, a few years ago, this was an issue like, “How to keep these services updated and relevant to the current needs of the market?” And so on.”

Source: UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“I mentioned 100 cases – maybe only 20 are identified as victims of trafficking because you might have all of the signs [or] indicators that you are a victim of trafficking, but then it is up to the individual themselves to declare him or herself a victim of trafficking. Because of the status, only 20% or less than 20% of that are willing to be recognized as a victim of trafficking. Most of the cases are identified as potential victims of trafficking, which is another status, let’s say, given. There is no difference between the one and the other because in both cases, you display the indicators [and so] [...] you are entitled to the same benefits and support. The only difference is if you are a victim of trafficking, you will receive an allowance of £20 a month,<sup>15</sup> which is practically nothing [...] but in order to receive this, you need to go to the state offices. [...] there are legal provisions in different documents which stipulate the assistance provided to the victims of trafficking -, free schooling for children, [...] being categorized as an advantaged group for employment, for shelter [...] provided by the state, not shelter into a classical home) [...] and many other things. The thing is that you have to [...] have the status of the victim assigned to you [...]”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

The same interlocutor further commented that:

“The business [must be] open to welcoming somebody who has trafficking experience, that’s the most difficult thing for no other reason than security reasons. The businesses would not like to have to deal with somebody that might bring trouble to them [...] It’s not stigma against the person themselves [...], rather security reasons.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

Regarding levels of unemployment in Albania, the same interlocutor stated:

“I know for the youth, unemployment – I mean, youth that are neither in the education nor in the employment system – it is 26% while the European average is 13%. So it’s double. [...] We haven’t had a census in Albania since 2011 [so we have to] rely on the data from the Institute of Statistics. [...] So there it says 10%, 8%, 9%, which in my view should be at least double. [...] They’re underestimating because we don’t have a census of how many Albanians are living today in Albania. The census was due three years ago. It didn’t happen, [so] we don’t know exactly how many Albanians are living in Albania in order to know how many of them are employed.”

<sup>15</sup> Note that the monthly financial assistance available to victims of trafficking increased from 3000 Lek to 9000 Lek in 2022. See [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 193](#).



Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023

A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explains that:

“Yeah, so finding employment is related [to] the level of education, the level of vocational training and professionalism as well [...] victims of human trafficking are less educated [...]. Because of the trafficking, [their schooling was interrupted] and so on. And so [most of them] have no [...] profession. So employment for them, it is very difficult. [...] when they are [...] involved and supported by our program to increase the level of education and vocational training, so they can gain something and possibilities for [...] finding employment. But it’s still [...] very difficult even when they have necessary skills because there is a high rate of unemployment. So we don’t have so many so places [to find] employment in Albania and industry, for example [...] agriculture, etc. So for that reason, this is very difficult, and victims of human trafficking suffer from finding a sustained place of work so to stay there and to have these possibilities.

Another factor that impacts, it is their psychological situation. For example, they must be supported [for] a long period with psychological therapy because sometimes it is very difficult for them to have [...] psychological limitations. It is not easy for them to maintain a [job] [...]. And this is so another factor. [...] And [...] the payment is very low [...] it’s very difficult for them to afford life, to afford all the expenses they must have for living. [...] [the level of unemployment in Albania] is very high compared to other countries.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth, with a recent research focus on young people at risk of criminal exploitation in Albania stated that:

“I mean, at the moment, the home office is running an, I don’t know, multi-million program in Kukes there in northern Albania to skills training and whatnot. And our earlier project included huge component on skills training. So there’s opportunities around, but it’s not necessarily getting to everybody. There is a huge unemployment rate. There’s high youth unemployment. And the barriers are again social. If you are at the bottom end, you will have least opportunities to get employment. And then it relies very much on family connections. This is just the way the society is knit. So if you are shamed by your family, expelled, or if you have lost this contact, or you’re on your own, you have the least opportunities to end up in proper employment. Yeah, it’s absolutely dismal to even survive in such a situation. Yeah. You need people around you. So that’s why returnees are the most vulnerable people, particularly if they have been in situations that stigmatize them.”

Source: Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, [interview record](#), 25 May 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“[...] the reintegration process cannot be solely linked on the services that are available because it’s about what is outside those services that’s also very much important. And I think this is the struggle with Albania. Whatever services are there, very small organization with very little resources, they are doing great work; but what happens once they leave those services is the problem because we don’t have a welfare system as in the UK. Not that here is perfect, but we don’t have anything like that, really. So this is what people are missing. That space where they can create a sustainable future, and it’s not just living to survive and barely survive sometime.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“There was a study being done by Different and Equal, I think, in 2018 [the study referred to by the interlocutor is entitled [Research on local job market skills and opportunities to support the economic empowerment of survivors of trafficking and domestic violence in Tirana, Kukës, Dibra and Saranda](#), and was funded by the European Union and implemented by Different and Equal] [...] based on that study, some of the main findings for survivors being integrated in the labor market were, firstly, the unstable labor market that exists in Albania and a lot of nepotism in

the hiring process, which would make it so unfair for victims of human trafficking with no contacts, with no references, to just break into this unstable labor market. Secondly are the working conditions. Usually, in Albania, according to the law, you usually work no more than 8 hours per day, according to specific provisions. But private businesses, they would ask for their employees to work for 10 hours per day, 11 hours per day, and not pay them for the additional hours or not giving prior notice for these hours being required. And when it comes to survivors of human trafficking, usually most of them, they experience severe mental health conditions. And that makes it even more challenging to work in long periods of time.

“And the third barrier was the lack of policies within those companies or businesses or people providing jobs to be considerate towards survivor needs, because they are a vulnerable group and they have specific requirements. Some of them, they are single mothers. They need to leave the job, let’s say, at 3:00 PM instead of 5:00 PM to pick up their children from the kindergarten or school. And such provisions were lacking. This is why social enterprises are seen at the moment as the most suitable way to provide sustainable employment for survivors or for vulnerable groups in Albania, because they can be more considerate towards those needs. [...] Survivors of human trafficking, they can access either vocational training provided by public agencies. The challenge is that this course is provided by the public authorities. Usually, they have limited options. For example, they’re not updated based on what the labour market needs now, for example, social media managers or different coding languages, creating websites. They are not very up to date with the current labour market [...] Usually, in the types of employment, there is a tendency to have more low-skill jobs available in Albania, which means, for example, in the cleaning industry or a waitress job, or usually supporting in the kitchen, preparation of the main meals, but not other types of jobs that they would provide better salary or a more sustainable way of life.

“[...] we also lack a lot of data in Albania. Usually, they [victims of trafficking] are among the poorest groups in the society in Albania. And that’s not just because of experiencing human trafficking, but it’s also because of, when they experienced human trafficking, they were quite young, and they lost a lot of years of education or work experience that they cannot replace when the trafficking experience happens, which places them quite back in the process. [...] the youth unemployment rate was 27.1%, about twice as high as the overall unemployment rate for the whole population in Albania. And what is even more concerning is that among these 27% of unemployed youth, 24% of them, are neither in training, not in education, and not in any other type of support, which makes them so vulnerable to be victims of human trafficking because they haven’t been trained, they haven’t been involved in anything, and they are the most vulnerable targets for the traffickers to be used in the county lines or for other forms of exploitation [...] the available jobs are usually low skilled and with extremely low salaries that wouldn’t be enough to even sustain survivors with their children [...]”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

### 3.3.6 Healthcare – limitations

#### Desk review material

In a 2022 guide for practitioners on the stages of reintegration of survivors of trafficking, Different and Equal noted common issues that stall reintegration:

“Many trafficking victims face crises and set-backs at various stages during their reintegration that may stall their progress or even cause them to regress to previous stages of reintegration. Common crises and setbacks in reintegration include, but are not limited to:  
[...] Health problems affecting the victim or their family (including the impact of health care costs)”

Source: Different and Equal, “[Stages of Recovery and Reintegration of Trafficking Survivors: A reintegration guide for practitioners](#)”, 1 March 2022

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims - noted the following with regard to medical care:



“Another service not addressed by the Albanian government is related to medical costs. Similar to every Albanian citizen, trafficking victims had the right to be issued a health card, which covers the expenses of basic medical services, such as blood tests or doctors’ visits. As previously stated, victims suffered from a host of health complications following their trafficking experience, most of which required medical treatment. Nevertheless, five interviewees suggested that the costs of such medication were not covered by the health card: “The Albanian government needs to invest on drug funds, particularly for vulnerable individuals such as trafficking victims. Medicaments are expensive, while victims’ salaries are quite low ... this situation causes discontent among victims” (MD).”

Source: Klea Ramaj, [“The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims’ Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges”](#), *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

In a 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, and authored by Valbona Lenja, the following challenges were identified by study participants, including representatives from the NCATS:

*“Challenges related to medical assistance:* This challenges was mentioned by 18% of the NCATS participants. It was categorized and specified as follows: Total lack of funding; Lack of professionalism of healthcare centres medical staff; Unclear legal provisions.”

Source: Publisher: Vatra Psycho-Social Centre, Author: Valbona Lenja, [“Services – To the Survivors or to the System? Access to and quality of services for victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania”](#), 2021, p.27

### Interview material

In response to a question about challenges related to accessing physical and mental healthcare, the Beneficiary of D&E further commented that:

“Medical services and buying medicines are really a challenge in itself as not all medicines can be received through the health card. Without the support of D&E, I could not afford to buy the medicines, they are very expensive.”

Source: Beneficiary of D&E, [interview record](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“So far the public health system has supported us with minors’ cases but for specific needs, such as tests or analysis, we are forced to contact the private health care system.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

[With healthcare], the difficulty is to get to really receive the service because of the many steps that you need to take on the way [...] And then even if you get diagnosed and you get your prescription, then you [still] have to go to the pharmacy [...] it’s a health system problem, actually, in Albania. It’s not particularly problematic for victims of trafficking [...] It’s about the same hassle to get the proper medicine that is reimbursed by the state, which is very low quality, while something that could do better for you [...] is very expensive if you want to buy it for yourself, so you’d rather go for what is offered by the health system, which is not very effective and might have side effects. So if you can afford to buy them from your own pocket, they are a better quality; you can do it and you’ll get better sooner.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“[...] regarding the health as well, there is enacted law for providing free medical support for victims and victims of human trafficking. This is not as well always granted because there are some medicines that are not free. [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

The same interlocutor stated:

“So the health support system in Albania [...] must be free but if we can add and hold for corruption, we can say that here in this program, there are a lot of-- the victims that are unprotected and don't have incomes, it is very difficult for them to access health [...]”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the Vatra representative the following clarifying question:

*Does this mean that victims who are not in the rehabilitation and reintegration program and who don't have incomes would find it difficult to access healthcare for physical and mental health needs? Does this mean that healthcare should be free, but due to corruption, victims who are not in a rehabilitation program and don't have an income would need to pay?*

The interlocutor responded as follows:

“Yes I mean for the population in general, and especially for the victims of human trafficking the public health services are free, but as for the population in general, even for the victims, if they [are not] in the protection system, there is a lot of corruption and their access to health services it is not granted always for free. When victims are in the system (protected by service providers, including Vatra and NCATS shelters) the access to health support is granted. There are some health services not free, for example stomatologic one (dental health), or some medicaments that even victims can't access by being reimbursement and we as service providers pay for these, in the framework of the projects.”

Source: Vatra, [written clarifications](#), 19 December 2023

### 3.3.7 Mental healthcare provision – limitations

#### Desk review material

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the OSCE noted that:

“OSCE, 5 October 2022 [...]”

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection are involved in the NRM. They need specialised support, for example for drug abuse. Members of the NRM have been asking for dedicated mental health support, however there are no dedicated services, not even in the shelters. The NRM refers cases to state providers of mental health services however I doubt it is sufficient or is tailored to VOT. There are no standard operating procedures (SOPs) around the provision of mental health support.”

Source: UK Home Office, “[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)”, December 2022, p.22

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, SHKEJ stated that:

“SHKEJ, 10 October 2022 [...]”

**Q.** What mental health (MH) support is available?

**A.** Only psychiatric support is available from the state, but not psychological support. There is one psychologist for every 2 or 3 schools, but they are only there twice a week for 600 children. Psychological support has to be paid for.

Psychologists are not free for anyone, only free psychiatric help. [...]"

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p.83

In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Key Advisor stated that:

"Key Adviser, 12 October 2022 [...]"

[...] **Q.** Is there enough support?

**A.** As regard to the psychological support we provide I would say not enough. First we don't have enough time and second, people were not accepting. Most beneficiaries did not accept psychological support but it was provided through soft skill training.

As regards social services I would say this has changed for the better over the last 5 years, however there is still a lot of work to be done especially in small local communities. In Tirana it's easier, you can find private psychologists."

Source: UK Home Office, "[Report of a fact-finding mission: Albania: Human trafficking](#)", December 2022, p. 100

A July 2022 UNICEF report on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania, authored by Deanna Davy on behalf of UNICEF, and based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with trafficking survivors, frontline professionals employed within government agencies and NGOs and private sector representatives, noted the following with regards to mental health support:

"[...] Mental health support is also critical to economic reintegration. [...]. The key challenge that survivors face in Albania in accessing mental health support is the lack of specialised mental healthcare, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, specialised healthcare for survivors who suffer from substance abuse and addictions is lacking in the country."

Source: Deanna Davy, UNICEF, UK Government, Stop Human Trafficking, and IDRA Research & Consulting, "[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)", July 2022, p. 11

A May 2021 academic paper authored by Dr Klea Ramaj, and published in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* on the return and rehabilitation of Albanian victims of trafficking, based on interviews – including with individuals who were professionals working at the four institutions of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters: Different and Equal, Another Vision, Vatra Psycho-Social Center and the National Reception Center for Trafficking Victims - noted the following regarding mental health provision:

"In addition to a lack of medications, trafficking victims were also faced with scarce psychological assistance after leaving the shelter. Even though most organizations continued the provision of counseling services after victims had been reintegrated in the community, such services were not offered by the Albanian state. Psychotherapy sessions following the victims' exit from the shelter were infrequent. For example, one interviewee claimed that the staff of her organization would meet with the victims once in every six months after they started to live independently (SW5)."

Source: Klea Ramaj, "[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)", *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7 May 2021

A 2021 UNDP mapping report on NGOs in Albania delivering integrated case management noted that there was a lack of shelters for victims of trafficking suffering from mental health problems:

"4. Lack of shelters for victims of violence and trafficking suffering from mental health problems; [...]"

Source: UNDP, Austrian Development Cooperation, and AKPA (Agjencia Kombetare e Punesimit dhe Aftesive), "[PROMOTING INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKET SOLUTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS II: Mapping of national integrated case management practices delivered by NGOs in Albania](#)", 2021, pp. 59-60



## Interview material

In written communication with Asylos, Different and Equal, a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania, pointed to a number of challenges:

“Treatment and referral of beneficiaries with mental health problems it is still an issue that creates lots of difficulties. The challenge is the lack of alternatives for long term accommodation and care for the VoT with serious mental health problems due to the gaps in the system.”

Source: Different and Equal, [written communication with Asylos](#), 29 June 2023

In written communication with Asylos, Tjeter Vizion, an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation that assists women and minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, commented that:

“Regarding the mental health care services for children despite the lack of the proper experts, TVO NGO are facing difficulty in representing minors to mental health care without the parent present. Sometimes parents are involved in the minor’s exploitation and are not present in their assistance.”

Source: Tjeter Vizion, [written communication with Asylos](#), 20 June 2023

Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, youth and families, including victims of trafficking, noted that:

“[...] there is a lack of specialised mental health services in Albania [for trafficked men, women and children [...]] There are only a few mental health centers public ones in Albania and access to these services is limited due to long distances from the center and limited capacities in professionals.”

Source: NISMA ARSIS, [interview record](#), 19 June 2023

A representative of Terre des hommes – Albania, an organisation which is involved in anti-trafficking efforts from the transnational level to the local level in Albania, including work to prevent trafficking and raise awareness, stated that:

“Mental healthcare is not covered from what I know, either a free health system or something that needs to be paid by the individuals. As for mental healthcare, it’s something that NGOs are highlighting all the time, that they have difficulties in managing the cases [with] mental health problems, and the difficult thing is that it’s not that they cannot access the service - there are psychiatrists, there are hospitals - but for the foreign NGO, which has only social workers inside as case managers, it’s very difficult to manage a person with mental health issues. So it’s more [an issue with] case management rather than lack of services.

And of course, the fact that they all stay in one shelter, people with mental health problems. All of them have had very strong traumas, [...] so the environment they stay in is not very healthy. [...] But the system itself has addressed this - the health system has psychiatrists included as a specialty in the health clinics and hospitals. [...]

And [the difficulty is] also manag[ing] the person with the mental health [problems] because there are no separate locations to host them. Do you host the person with the mental health case in the same shelter with the other person? So managing the person is difficult because in the hospitals, they admit only very, very, very extreme severe cases or stages of mental disability. The rest need to be treated in the community, and how do you manage someone having mental health problems with someone who has very strong trauma in the same environment, in the same kitchen, in the same living room? That’s the problem.

If they are accompanied by the social workers of the shelters, of the NGOs, they will receive the assistance because they have somebody to speak for them. If they are not accompanied, if they go by themselves, it depends on what reintegration stage they are at. If they are very vulnerable or they are timid, they might be neglected by the service providers. If they are in an advanced stage of reintegration where they empower themselves, then they can go and access the services.”

Source: Terre des hommes – Albania representative, [interview record](#), 6 June 2023



A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Center, an Albanian non-profit organisation explained that:

“So victims with mental health issues [...] there are no specialized [...] mental healthcare institution to support victims of human trafficking. What they do? For example, one victim have mental health problems, and we identify the problems, for example, in the shelter or a victim. And we refer them to a mental health institution. They don’t have place or programs to support them in the crisis phase and during the, for example, three months for supporting them. At least for three months but we know it is longer. So they have no place. And sometimes people call us and say that people-- it’s the institution people call us and say, “We have probably she’s a victim, but she has a mental problem. But because of this mental health problem, she probably is a victim.” So they don’t identify correctly and say that, “Probably it’s a victim. Can you get in your shelter?” So they don’t have places to put or to support girls, women, boys, and men [who are victims of trafficking] that have mental health problems in Albania. I think it’s one of the most difficult parts that we have. [...] There is as well only one center for children and [...] adolescents only in Tirana, in the capital of Albania, where it is very, very difficult to access it. And to where the permission of the family members must be taken. And sometimes the victims don’t have parental care or don’t have a parent or the parents abandoned them or the parents are risk to them. So even in this case, there is very difficult to refer for further support to the center. And in the municipalities all around the Albania, there is a lack of specialists that support boys and girls that are younger, so minors, with mental health services. For example, some therapies, psychotherapy, and some psychiatrists support, medical support, etc. It is very difficult.”

Source: Vatra, [interview record](#), 5 June 2023

Dr Anta Brachou, a postdoctoral researcher at the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse, who previously provided support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking through her work at a UK-based NGO, commented that:

“In terms of healthcare. So the rehabilitation, as I said, there is very limited support for people with complex mental health needs and also alcohol and addiction. There aren’t many places where you can go to get that help.”

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, [interview record](#), 2 June 2023

Anxhela Bruci, Coordinator of Arise Albania, part of an international anti-trafficking organisation, commented that:

“In terms of public available mental health services for women and men victims of human trafficking, usually, they are very limited. And they are more into the institutionalized way of providing mental health services, which would be in hospitals, but not in very innovative ways or different techniques, for example, not behavioural therapy or other ways. [...] But in terms of the NGO provision of those mental health services, the NGOs, they do have dedicated teams within their services who provide mental health support and also licensed psychologists who provide those mental health services. But on a national or government level, this lacks. They’re not easily accessible.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [interview record](#), 24 May 2023

In further written clarifications following the interview, the same interlocutor responded to a follow up question from Asylos (in italics) regarding the cost of psychiatric medications:

*Are victims of trafficking able to access psychiatric medications free of charge (i.e. covered by the state health system), when they are outpatients (i.e. when they are not in a hospital or other institution as a psychiatric patient)?*

“It depends on the medications they are prescribed to. If they are categorised under the “chronic illness” category of patients, they can get reimbursed prescriptions. But for severe mental health cases, I have heard that most of the victims are not able to access for free the medications they need, which puts a huge financial cost for the shelters/ organisations who support them.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, [written clarifications](#), 16 November 2023

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