

# Summary

## Albania: Trafficking

April 2024





## Summary

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### Acknowledgements

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## Summary – Trafficking in Albania

### Background note

This document sets out a Summary of the country of origin information (COI) presented in Asylos' report [Albania: Trafficking](#) (referred to henceforth as the Full Report), which you can download from Asylos' website.

This Summary aims to present a consolidated overview of the key findings within the full COI report, which is based on a desk review of relevant sources and interviews conducted by Asylos. The Summary mirrors the structure of the Full Report, with each sub-section in the summary, providing an overview of the COI in the Full Report.

Desk research was conducted in accordance with terms of reference developed at the beginning of the project ([see the terms of reference here](#)). Structured interviews were conducted according to the research terms of reference. Interlocutors were presented with a set of questions based on the terms of reference, and encouraged to respond to all questions within their expertise. Interlocutors with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration support in Albania were presented with questions limited to their personal experiences of rehabilitation and reintegration (see Methodology in [Annex 1](#)).

Within this Summary, the term 'interlocutors', refers to experts interviewed by Asylos, and the term 'sources' refers to the sources that were consulted as part of the desk review of published material within the time range of 31 March 2021 – 6 December 2023<sup>1</sup>. In the interests of brevity, interlocutors are abbreviated by a letter and most sources are abbreviated by an acronym. For interlocutor and source abbreviations, see the lists below.

- See [Interlocutors cited in this Summary on page 7](#) and [Sources cited in this Summary on page 9](#). See also [Bibliography on page 43](#).
- For the full list of sources consulted as part of this research project, see the [Full Report](#).

We extend our sincere 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: 1) only the most recent annual reports are cited, so the research includes the most up to date information; 2) the research timeline for most sources consulted was 31 March 2021 - 6 December 2023, however, due to time and resource constraints, the research timeline for Albanian language sources consulted was 31 March 2021 - 15 June 2023.



## Sources

### Interlocutors cited in this Summary

#### Ana Majko – interlocutor A

Ana Majko is the Executive Director of the [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.

#### Dr Anta Brachou – interlocutor B

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.

#### Anxhela Bruci – interlocutor C

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.

#### Different and Equal – interlocutor D

[Different and Equal](#) is a non-profit providing rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse in Albania.

#### Dr Klea Ramaj – interlocutor E

Dr Klea Ramaj is 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.

#### Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers – interlocutor F

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers is a Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth. Further information about Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers' professional background can be found [here](#).

#### Terre des hommes – Albania representative – interlocutor G

[Terre des hommes – Albania](#) describes its operations as follows, "Terres des hommes is the leading Swiss organisation for children's aid founded in 1960. Tdh has operated in Albania since 1993 in the field of child rights, child protection, migration, and juvenile justice.

#### Tjeter Vizion – interlocutor H

[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.



### **UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist – interlocutor I**

**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.”

### **Vatra Psycho-Social Centre (Vatra) – interlocutor J**

“**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. “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.

### **Beneficiaries of Vatra (interlocutor K) and Different and Equal (interlocutor L)**

Individuals with lived experience of trafficking and receiving rehabilitation and reintegration services from Vatra (K) and Different and Equal (L), 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.





## Sources cited in this Summary

### Intergovernmental

#### [Council of Europe \(CoE\)](#)

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

#### [European Commission \(EC\)](#)

#### [European Social Policy Network \(ESPN\)](#)

#### [Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#)

#### [United Nations Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)\\*](#)

#### [United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#)

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

#### [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#)

#### [United Nations Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights \(UOHCHR\)](#)

#### [United Nations Human Rights Council \(UNHRC\)](#)

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

### Governmental

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

#### [Republic of Albania General Prosecution Office \(Albanian GPO\)](#)

#### [Republic of Albania Institute of Statistics \(INSTAT\)](#)

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

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

#### [UK Home Office \(HO\)](#)

### International organisations and NGOs

#### [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.

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

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](#)).

#### [Child Rights Centre Albania \(CRCA\) / ECPAT Albania](#)

According to ECPAT Albania’s website, CRCA/ECPAT Albania “is one of the oldest and largest child rights organisations in the country. They work to improve policies, legislation, and access to free public services for children and youths; end online and offline child and youth sexual abuse and exploitation; and end human trafficking” (see [Members](#)).



## International organisations and NGOs (continued)

### Different and 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. Staff (D) and a beneficiary (L) of Different and Equal also provided written responses for this research.

### Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC)

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](#)).

### International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

### International Organization for Migration (IOM)

### 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](#))

### West Balkans Organised Crime Radar (WB-OCR)

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 \(WB-OCR\)](#))

### United Response Against Trafficking in Persons (URAT)

According to [Talitha Kum](#), the International Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking, URAT is a network comprising non-profit and religious organisations in Albania, “committed to unite efforts, experience and all the means at their disposal in order to give a united response to the phenomenon of human trafficking and exploitation.”

### 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.



## Media

[Albanian Daily News](#)

[EURACTIV](#)

[Gazeta Shqiptare](#)

[Vice News](#)

## Academic

[Journal of Human Trafficking](#)

[Multidisciplinary Research Journal Olcinium](#)

\*Several reports are referenced in this Summary that were conducted and authored on behalf of UNICEF. These reports are referenced by the name of the author, as follows:

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 (referred to as Haarr 2022)

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 (referred to as Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors)

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 (referred to as Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know)



# 1. Trafficking Profiles

## 1.1 Victim / survivor profiles

According to interlocutors and sources consulted, Albanian women (EC 2023, USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, IOM 2022, E, J, I, C), men (URAT 2023, HO FFM 2022, IOM 2022, UNICEF 2022, J, B), children and young Albanians (Arise 2023, EC 2023, USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, IOM 2022, Gazeta Shqiptare 2023, UNICEF 2022, E, H, J, I, C) have been subject to various forms of trafficking. Multiple sources and several interlocutors indicated that Egyptian and Roma communities are particularly affected by human trafficking (EC 2023, USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, GITOC 2021, J, B).

- Refer also to [1.2 Prevalence by profile / type of exploitation on page 12](#).

## 1.2 Prevalence by profile / type of exploitation

Among the sources consulted, no statistics representing the full phenomenon of trafficking in Albania (either internal or external) were found. Information found among the sources (USDOS TiP 2023), and interlocutors consulted (D, H, J) related to numbers of victims and potential victims of trafficking identified through the Albanian National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the numbers assisted by the shelters of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NCATS). An interlocutor representing one of the shelters of the NCATS (J) explained that the data they provided related specifically to cases of trafficking that were formally identified according to standard operating procedures and referred for services within the NCATS ([2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism for more information on the process of identification, recognition and referral for services](#), and [3.1 Assistance from shelters](#)). Another interlocutor explained that there are no statistics on trafficked adults and children but suggested that there is some tracking in relation to those receiving services (A).

The figures set out in the following sections, therefore do not present the totality of trafficked Albanians as not all victims and potential victims are formally identified through the NRM, and neither do all victims and potential victims access assistance.

- See [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 28](#) and [3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations on page 38](#).

### 1.2.1 General – statistics on trafficking

The US Department of State report on Trafficking in Persons (USDOS TiP 2023), covering 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023,<sup>2</sup> stated that the government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims. An interlocutor representing one of the shelters of the NCATS (J) provided statistics for 2022, stating that 118 victims and potential victims of trafficking were identified according to standard operating procedures and referred to the services of the NCATS.

- Refer also to [2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism on page 22](#).

<sup>2</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/>



### 1.2.2 Children – statistics on trafficking

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that 48 girls and 26 boys had been identified among 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking. Interlocutors representing three shelters of the NCATS stated that children comprised 66% of victims and potential victims of trafficking assisted by the NCATS in 2022 (H, J).

### 1.2.3 Boys and men – statistics on trafficking

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that four men and 26 boys were identified among 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking. Interlocutors representing three shelters of the NCATS stated that 27% of assisted cases in 2022 were boys or men (D, H, J). One source consulted suggested that trafficking of men and boys is “very widespread”, but less considered or discussed (URAT 2023), meanwhile in interviews with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission (HO FFM 2022), the General Directorate of State Police indicated that they hadn’t identified any male victims in 2021, and Kukes Mobile Unit had identified boys (although didn’t have the exact statistics), but no adult males.

- Refer also to [1.6 Stigma affecting trafficked men and boys on page 18](#).

### 1.2.4 Women and girls – statistics on trafficking

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that of 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking identified, 32 were women, and 48 were girls. Interlocutors representing three shelters of the NCATS stated that 73% of those they assisted in 2022 were women and girls (D, H, J).

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

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that of 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking identified, 32 were women, four were men, 48 were girls and 26 were boys. Interlocutors representing three shelters of the NCATS stated that 73% of assisted cases were females and 27% were males in 2022 (D, H, J). One interlocutor representing an organisation providing care and protection to children, including trafficked minors, suggested that there has been a mindset that girls are mostly victims of trafficking, however, indicated that “a lot” of male children in street situations have been identified as victims of trafficking (A).



### 1.2.6 Ethnic minorities – statistics on trafficking

Interlocutors representing three shelters of the NCATS indicated that 37% of cases assisted by the NCATS in 2022 were from Roma / Egyptian backgrounds (D, H, J). A number of sources consulted (EC 2023, D&E 2022), and one interlocutor (B) referred to the vulnerability to trafficking of those from Roma / Egyptian communities. One source consulted (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know) noted that the ethnic composition of male victims of trafficking had changed over time, and in recent years more ethnic Albanians were identified. One interlocutor also noted that children from Roma / Egyptian communities previously constituted the majority of children in street situations, but assessed that in 2023, there is not such a difference in terms of ethnicity among trafficked children in Albania (A).

### 1.2.7 LGBTQI+ persons – statistics on trafficking

Interlocutors representing two shelters of the NCATS indicated that one person from the LGBTQI+ community was referred and assisted by the NCATS in 2022 (D, H). No other information was found among the sources consulted and those cited in this Summary.

- See [Interlocutors cited in this Summary on page 7](#) and [Sources cited in this Summary on page 9](#).
- See the full list of sources consulted for this research in the [Full Report](#).

### 1.2.8 Persons with disabilities – statistics on trafficking

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that experts had identified that children with mental and physical disabilities were increasingly vulnerable to trafficking, however no statistics were provided. One interlocutor (A) affirmed that no data exists in relation to children with disabilities and trafficking. Interlocutors representing three shelters of the NCATS indicated that 16% of individuals assisted by the NCATS in 2022 had mental health issues (D, H, J).

### 1.2.9 Sex trafficking – statistics

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that of 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking identified, 61 were potential sex trafficking victims. An interlocutor representing one of the NCATS shelters (D), indicated that 55% of individuals assisted by the NCATS in 2022 had been exploited for sexual purposes, almost all of whom were female, and just over half of whom were minors. The same interlocutor noted one male and one person from the LGBTQI+ community assisted in relation to sex trafficking. One interlocutor (A) opined that sexual exploitation is more reported for girls and less for boys, and that children in street situations are subject to various kinds of abuses including sexual exploitation, but boys who are victims are less identified. The same interlocutor (A) indicated that amongst trafficked LGBTQI+ persons, sexual exploitation is common. Other interlocutors (G, I, B) observed that it is mainly women who are sexually exploited.



### 1.2.10 Forced labour – statistics

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that of 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking identified, 35 were potential labour trafficking victims, of which 26 related to forced begging, and 9 did not relate to forced begging (refer also to 1.2.12 Forced begging – statistics). An interlocutor representing one of the NCATS shelters (D), indicated that 8% of individuals assisted by the NCATS had been subject to forced labour, of whom 44% were men and boys and 56% were women and girls. One interlocutor indicated that men are exploited mainly abroad for forced labour (G).

- Refer also to [1.2.12 Forced begging – statistics](#) below.

### 1.2.11 Forced criminality – statistics

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that of 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking identified, 14 were potential victims of forced criminality. An interlocutor representing one of the shelters of the NCATS (D), stated that 12.5% of individuals assisted by the NCATS in 2022 had been subjected to forced criminality in Albania, of which 64% were boys, 22% were girls, 7% were women and 7% were men. The same interlocutor pointed to a 2020 GRETA report that observed that children are exploited for criminal purposes, including to work on cannabis farms in Albania (D). Other interlocutors and one source also associated forced criminality with children / young people (USDOS TiP 2023, I, G, J, A).

### 1.2.12 Forced begging – statistics

The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 stated that of 110 victims and potential victims of trafficking identified, 26 were potential forced begging victims. An interlocutor representing one of the shelters of the NCATS (D), indicated that 12.5% of the new cases assisted in 2022 had been subjected to forced begging, all of whom were minors, (69% were boys and 31% were girls). Interlocutors and sources consulted associated forced begging particularly with children (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, B, J, D), including those from Roma / Egyptian communities (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, B) and male children (HO FFM 2022). One interlocutor indicated that men are exploited mainly abroad for forced labour (G).



### 1.3 Risk factors associated with trafficking

Interlocutors and sources consulted cited a wide range of factors associated with the risk of trafficking, including the following, set out in no particular order:

- Poverty (HO FFM, 2022, Vice News 2022, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D, A, E, G, I, J, B)
- Dysfunctional family backgrounds (HO FFM 2022, D, E, G, I, C), or lack of familial support (E)
- Domestic violence and sexual abuse (D, G, I, J, C)
- Harmful gender norms within society (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know)
- Poor economic situation, lack of / poor employment opportunities (URAT 2023, Arise 2023, HO FFM 2022, D, H, J, B, C, B) and the promise of a better life (B, C)
- Lack of human rights (URAT 2023)
- Forced arranged marriages (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know)
- Corruption (Vice News 2022, C), including that which impedes access to protection and social protection services, making someone vulnerable to human trafficking (C)
- Political instability / problems related to the political and social system (URAT 2023, B)
- Limited legal routes to migrate / irregular migration (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, J, B)
- Belonging to the Roma / Egyptian community (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D), including in the case of the Roma community, relating to familial dysfunction, discrimination, exclusion and high unemployment among this group (Different and Equal 2022)
- Being a minor (Arise 2023, Arise 2022, D), including those in street situations (H), children from Roma / Egyptian backgrounds who “often live and work in the streets” (I), children who move from rural areas to Tirana and live in “informal areas” that lack social services (A), and children whose families are involved in forms of criminal / organised criminal activity (G)
- Lack of education (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D, E, I, C), or professional skills (E), and school abandonment (A)
- Mental health issues (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D)
- Involvement with “risky peers” (E)

Interlocutor D assessed that girls were more at risk of trafficking than boys, however, a source consulted indicated that the phenomenon of male victims of trafficking had increased recently (HO FFM 2022). This information should be cross-referenced in particular with information at:

- [1.2.3 Boys and men – statistics on trafficking on page 13](#)
- [1.2.5 Comparison – prevalence of trafficking among women and girls and men and boys on page 13](#),
- [1.2.11 Forced criminality – statistics on page 15](#),
- [1.2.12 Forced begging – statistics on page 15](#), and also
- [1.6 Stigma affecting trafficked men and boys on page 18](#) for further information on how stigma and cultural factors affect the identification of male victims of trafficking.





## 1.4 Trafficker profiles

Multiple sources consulted and interlocutors associated traffickers with organised crime (Arise 2023, HO FFM 2022, WB-OCR 2022, BIRN 2022, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, GITOC 2021, G, I, J). Some sources and an interlocutor noted that traffickers can be involved in other criminal activity, such as drug trafficking (Arise 2023, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, G), meanwhile one of these sources specified that family members who traffic children are unlikely to be connected to organised crime but may collaborate with other perpetrators (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know). Sources mentioned other trafficker profiles including family members, acquaintances, or persons known to victims (Albanian Daily News 2023, HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D, G, J), with examples including boyfriend / fiancé / husband / friends / parents or grandparents / employers / landlords (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know).

Financial gain was noted as a motivating factor for human traffickers (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D). One source, which addresses the relationship between trafficking victims and traffickers in Albania, observed that among 30 interviewed trafficking survivors, traffickers were either described as very wealthy or very poor (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know). The same source presented a typology of trafficker profiles suggesting that traffickers were either aiming to accumulate wealth or pay off debts by perpetrating trafficking (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know). Other traits cited as potentially characteristic of trafficker profiles included low levels of education (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, D), unemployment (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know) and having experienced trafficking themselves (D), including females who become traffickers (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, C).

## 1.5 Methods of exploitation / “recruitment”

False promises and deception related to job opportunities, relationships or promises of marriage were cited by sources and interlocutors as a “recruitment” tactic among traffickers (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, UNICEF 2022, D, H, G, J, C). Interlocutors and one source reported on families facilitating the trafficking of their children as a form of exploitation (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, H, A, G, J). It was noted by one source that the responsibility to financially support the family and threats of being left to live on the streets prevented children from fleeing situations of exploitation (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know). One interlocutor with expertise in the provision of social care and protection services to children, noted that children can be targeted for trafficking when they are on the streets, in online contexts, or by criminal networks for acts of forced criminality to avoid accountability where children are below the age of criminal responsibility (A).

Other methods cited to lure victims into trafficking situations included arranged marriages (G), targeting through peer / social networks (H, A, G, J), and debt bondage or the creation of an artificial debt that needs to be serviced (HO FFM 2022, Vice News 2022, Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know). Victims of debt bondage<sup>3</sup> were cited as being men (HO FFM 2022, C), boys and girls (C). Further methods of “recruitment”, and tactics to keep individuals in trafficking situations included threats, confinement, drugging, confiscation of identity documents and isolating the victim from family (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know) as well as violence (Davy 2022 – Trafficked by Someone I Know, UNICEF 2022) and psychological violence (UNICEF 2022).



Traffickers' increasing use of online methods to target individuals was noted by multiple sources and interlocutors (USDOS TIP 2023, Arise 2023, IOM 2023, OSCE 2022, HO FFM 2022, GITOC 2021, UNICEF undated, D, A, J, B), including through the use of Snapchat, TikTok, online gaming forums (Arise 2023), Instagram and Facebook (HO FFM 2022, Vice News 2022). Information from two interlocutors and one source, highlights that human smuggling can develop into human trafficking situations (HO FFM 2022, B, C).

## 1.6 Stigma affecting trafficked men and boys

Interlocutors and one source noted the difficulty that males face in disclosing their trafficking experiences or identifying themselves as having been trafficked, due to shame and fear of stigma and prejudice (HO FFM 2022, D, F, G, H, J, B, F), particularly where this relates to sexual exploitation (G, B, F). Lack of disclosure of sex trafficking in men was also related to fear of exposure of sexual orientation, or fear of assumptions being made regarding sexual orientation (D, H). A source interviewed for the UK Home Office fact-finding mission in 2022 opined that trafficked men may experience more stigma than boys. Trafficked Albanian men are reportedly reluctant to seek assistance (HO FFM 2022, J), blame themselves for what happened (D), and may not see themselves, or be seen by society, as having been trafficked, particularly where they have been subjected to forced labour (HO FFM 2022, B), which is not well recognised as a form of trafficking in Albanian society (HO FFM 2022, B).

- Refer also [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 28](#) for general information on the limitations of identification.

Cultural factors reportedly contributing to stigma experienced by males include the “patriarchal” / “macho” environment within Albanian society (HO FFM 2022, J, B), the need to preserve “social honour” (F) and be seen as strong (HO FFM 2022, B), and cultural taboos surrounding sexual exploitation (D). One interlocutor opined that stigma experienced by males is related to the loss of agency that is associated with trafficking situations (F). Another noted that stigma experienced by men and boys may be different to that experienced by women and girls, and relates to the perceived failure to be successful and provide for the family and the perceived failure arising from being in a situation of debt bondage or forced labour (C). Another interlocutor observed that trafficked men and boys experience stigma in different spheres, including when encountering professional networks, state authorities and in their communities, noting that stigma is present and needs significant effort to counter it (A).



## 2. Protection

### 2.1 Legal framework

#### 2.1.1 Ratification of international treaties

Albania has ratified the following international treaties that relate to human trafficking:

- UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ratified in 2002) (UNODC 2023)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2008 (Haarr 2022)
- UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (ratified in 2002) (Haarr 2022)
- The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ratified in 2007 according to the Council of Europe, or 2006 according to Haarr 2022)
  - Refer also to [2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 27](#).

#### 2.1.2 Trafficking of adults – domestic legislation

While Albania has no distinct or unified domestic law against trafficking in human beings (Haarr 2022, H, J, B), there are legal provisions relating to trafficking within different existing laws (J, B), and trafficking in adults is penalised within the Criminal Code under article 110(a) (USDOS TiP 2023, D, H, E, C), which prescribes penalties of eight to 15 years' imprisonment (USDOS TiP 2023). Interlocutors representing three of the shelters of the NCATS and an international NGO with a presence in Albania referred to an initiative underway to draft a new anti-trafficking law (D, H, J, G), currently waiting to be taken forward by the government (D).

Albania's current legislation covers all forms of trafficking indicated in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UNODC 2023). The law provided for equal services for potential and officially recognised victims (USDOS TiP 2023). In a submission to the UN Human Rights Council, Albania noted laws oriented toward assistance for victims of trafficking. These include:

- Law no. 121/2016 "On social care services in RSH" guaranteeing specialised services for trafficked women and girls and all categories in need of such care (including victims and potential victims of trafficking) (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2022)
- Law no. 65/2016 "On social enterprises in RSH" aiming to employ disadvantaged people in the labour market including women victims of trafficking (Govt of Albania report to UNHCR 2023)
- Law no. 111/2017 "On legal aid guaranteed by the state", guaranteeing free legal aid for victims of trafficking (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2023, GoA report to CoE 2022) and amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code that aim to improve the rights and position of victims of trafficking participating in criminal prosecution procedures (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2023).



One interlocutor noted that Standard Operating Procedures for protection of victims and possible victims of trafficking were adopted by a Decision of the Council of Ministers in 2018 (D). Sources also noted the existence of a law aimed at confiscating assets derived from those suspected of crimes, including human trafficking (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2023, WB-OCR 2021).

- Refer also to [2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 27](#),
- [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#),
- [3.3.3 Adequacy of services & bureaucracy on page 39](#), and
- [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 40](#).

### 2.1.3 Trafficking of children – domestic legislation

Albania has a domestic law addressing child rights and child protection (Law 18/2017) (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2023, HO FFM 2022, Haarr, UNICEF et al. 2022, IOM 2022, UNICEF 2022, Vatra 2021, D). The Albanian government, in a submission to the UNHRC, quoted law 18/2017 “On the rights and protection of the child”, which 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” (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2023). Article 26 of Law 18/2017 provides for Protection from Trafficking and any Form of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and defines “child” as anyone under the age of 18 (Republic of Albania published by The People’s Advocate 2017). The law acknowledges the obligation of relevant parties to apply the Best Interests of the Child (Vatra 2021, Republic of Albania 2017). The law is monitored by the State Agency for the Protection of Children’s Rights (Govt of Albania report to UNCAT 2023, HO FFM 2022).

Albanian law criminalises the offence of child trafficking in article 128(b) of the Criminal Code (USDOS TiP 2023, D, E, H, C). In two separate reports, USDOS provided varying information regarding the penalties prescribed for the crime of child trafficking in Albania, with reported imprisonment terms ranging from eight to 20 years’ imprisonment (USDOS TiP 2023, USDOS HR 2022).

The 2017 passing of the Code of Criminal Justice for Children aimed to provide for child-friendly justice standards (UNICEF 2022) and sets out the rights and rules that apply during criminal proceedings for a child victim and child witness of a criminal offence (Vatra 2021).

- Refer also to [2.4.1.2 Children – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 27](#) and [2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations on page 29](#).



## 2.2 Trafficking prevention measures

### 2.2.1 State efforts to prevent trafficking

An Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (ONAC) exists (USDOS TiP 2023, Haarr 2022), as well as a State Committee against Trafficking in Persons, composed of relevant ministry representatives, which was responsible for overseeing anti-trafficking efforts (USDOS TiP 2023). An Anti-Trafficking Task force comprising representatives from relevant government agencies exists (Haarr 2022, HO FFM 2022, D), which is tasked with monitoring the NRM (USDOS TiP 2023) (for more information on the NRM, see [2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism](#)). One source consulted indicated that Regional Anti-Trafficking Committees composed of local officials and civil society were responsible for trafficking prevention activities (Haarr 2022). Other state prevention efforts cited included government training delivered in cooperation with NGOs and international organisations, to police officers, judges, prosecutors, and victim coordinators on anti-trafficking issues (USDOS TiP 2023); a new investigative sector created in the border and migration police aimed at preventing cross-border illegal activity including human trafficking (EC 2023); and international cooperation to combat organised crime (EC 2023, GRETA 2023).

Sources consulted and interlocutors mentioned the existence of a National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2021 – 2023 (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, IOM 2022, D, I, G, C), of which prevention is one of the four main pillars (IOM 2022). In an interview with Asylos, a representative of UNICEF indicated that UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Interior to review progress on the National Action Plan 2021 – 2023 and develop a new NAP 2024 – 2026 (I). According to one source, ONAC produced a report assessing the implementation of the NAP but did not publish or share its findings (USDOS TiP 2023). Awareness raising campaigns, including through the annual marking of anti-trafficking month, was cited by sources and interlocutors as another form of trafficking prevention activity (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, D, A, J, G, C).

- Refer also to [2.2.3 Limitations in prevention efforts on page 22](#).

### 2.2.2 Other measures to prevent trafficking

Sources reported trafficking prevention efforts by NGOs and international organisations, including peer-to-peer human trafficking prevention efforts in high schools (ICRC 2023), education, including digital literacy, and cooperation with ‘village administrators’ to help raise awareness of human trafficking (HO FFM 2022). According to interlocutors, civil society mainly delivers prevention-related activities (A, G, C) including awareness raising efforts with children (A), and activities related to anti-trafficking awareness month (J).

- Refer also to [2.2.3 Limitations in prevention efforts on page 22](#).

\*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.



### 2.2.3 Limitations in prevention efforts

Sources noted a number of limitations in prevention efforts, including: the need for the National Action Plan 2021 – 2023 to be supported by adequate funding and better coordination (EC 2023); the need to improve strategic communication with communities that may be at risk of trafficking (EC 2023); the fact that the State Committee responsible for monitoring and implementation of anti-trafficking efforts did not meet in 2022 or 2021; and limited government coordination efforts to prevent trafficking reported by civil society (USDOS TiP 2023). Lack of capacity for trafficking prevention efforts at local level (D), including due to lack of financial and human resources was also reported (Haarr, UNICEF et al. 2022). Interlocutors noted several limitations in prevention efforts, including the challenge of raising awareness in vulnerable communities, for example, where the internet is less used (I); the need for more structured awareness campaigns that incorporate the role of health and education sectors in prevention efforts (H); and the need for greater financial resources (J, C) and expertise (C) to carry out trafficking prevention initiatives. Several interlocutors also noted systemic issues, particularly the need for economic empowerment or better employment opportunities as a key component of trafficking prevention efforts (J, B, C).

## 2.3 State protection

### 2.3.1 Victim identification

#### 2.3.1.1 National Referral Mechanism

Albania maintains a National Referral Mechanism (G, A) with standard operating procedures for identifying and referring victims and potential victims of trafficking to services (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, D, H, J). One interlocutor noted that the NRM is the competent authority committed to preventing and responding to human trafficking (I). An updated Cooperation Agreement guiding the functioning of the NRM was signed in June 2023 (OSCE 2023), by 15 organisations, including government and civil society (OSCE 2023, D). A formal interview is conducted by police and social services, who categorise cases and are responsible for referral to relevant governmental or non-governmental organisations (H). A source affirmed that law enforcement and state social services conducted joint interviews for potential victims who voluntarily request official victim status (USDOS TiP 2023). Interlocutors indicated that support services are available to both those identified as victims and potential victims of trafficking (D, G). (Refer to [3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance on page 36](#), [3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations on page 38](#), and [3.3.2 Stigma / familial and community issues on page 38](#) for more on the process of accessing state assistance for victims of trafficking). The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, stated that the government and NGOs identified 110 potential victims and two official victims.<sup>3</sup> Mobile Identification Units (MIUs) function in nine regions, operated by social workers, NGOs and police officers, and identified the majority of cases every year (USDOS TiP 2023).

- Refer also to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 28](#).

<sup>3</sup> A detailed review of National Referral Mechanism statistics of other countries, as they relate to Albanian nationals, was out of the scope of this research.



\*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.

### 2.3.1.2 Recognition of returnee victims of trafficking by Albanian NRM

There was no clear consensus among sources and interlocutors regarding whether individuals who had been identified as victims or potential victims of trafficking within the UK NRM would automatically be recognised as such by the Albanian NRM. Interlocutors, including those representing shelters who receive referrals for rehabilitation support (D, J), one academic and one interlocutor working for an international NGO (E, C), suggested that formal recognition and referral to assistance in Albania is automatic following formal recognition as a victim of trafficking by the UK NRM. However, one of the same shelter representatives further observed that they receive very few referrals for individuals who have been identified as victims of human trafficking in other countries and opined that those formally identified as victims of trafficking by foreign authorities either remain in those countries, or do not approach services on their return to Albania (J).

Meanwhile other interlocutors suggested that they were unsure of whether recognition is automatic in Albania following formal recognition as a victim of trafficking in the UK (A, G). Other interlocutors indicated that recognition is not automatic, as they pointed to a distinct process of recognition via the Albanian authorities for returnees who have been recognised as victims of trafficking in the UK (I, B).

The Albanian Ministry of Interior (MoI), interviewed by the UK Home Office as part of its October 2022 fact-finding mission indicated that individuals identified as victims of trafficking in other countries, may receive information through the IOM and its network about the steps to return, and confirmed that assisted voluntary returns are referred into the Albanian NRM. However, the same source confirmed that the MoI does not have contact with trafficking support organisations in the UK (HO FFM 2022). As part of the same fact-finding mission, the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection indicated that if an individual has received victim of trafficking status in the UK, they would automatically receive the same status in Albania. However, when the same fact-finding mission asked OSCE about whether the Albanian government received referrals of suspected victims of trafficking from the UK, their response indicated that this process was not thorough.

An agreement between the UK and Albanian governments was referred to by one source and two interlocutors (GRETA 2022, I, H), but there is a lack of clarity about the details on cooperation between the two countries regarding victim identification (I).

## 2.3.2 Criminal justice

### 2.3.2.1 Justice system and police

Prosecutorial jurisdiction for trafficking cases has changed as part of justice system reform (USDOS TiP 2023). The Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) now has jurisdiction over trafficking cases with an organised crime nexus, meanwhile the General Prosecutor’s Office and District Courts have jurisdiction over cases without an organised crime nexus (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022). The government trains police officers, judges, prosecutors and victim coordinators on various anti-trafficking issues (USDOS TiP 2023). Remote testimony was possible within the SPAK, but not within district courts, and victim interviews and testimony took place in the presence of a psychologist (USDOS TiP 2023). Prosecutors separated victims and defendants during trials (USDOS TiP 2023).



Victim assistance coordinators were assigned to all victims of trafficking assisting in prosecutions (USDOS TiP 2023). The victim coordinator role provided a bridge between the victim, police and prosecutor (HO FFM 2022).

One interlocutor representing an international organisation that has worked with the Albanian police opined that the police is “very active” and stated that a lot of work has been done with the police in terms of training and collaborating (I). An interlocutor who interviewed police officers as part of their PhD research indicated that the police appear “very proactive”, especially in relation to gender-based violence, trafficking and child exploitation (B). However, another interlocutor working for an international NGO with a presence in Albania indicated that the police were effective when called by NGOs, but in general were neither very proactive nor effective, though not passive (C).

- Refer also to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 28](#), [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#), [2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations on page 29](#), and [2.5 Corruption on page 32](#).

### 2.3.2.2 Judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked

Albanian legislation provides for the exemption of trafficking victims from punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked (GoA report to CoE 2022, OHCHR 2021), specifically, in article 52/a paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code (GoA report to CoE 2022, D). In an interview with the UK Home Office, the General Prosecutor's Office indicated that a victim of trafficking could be prosecuted if they had committed a crime, giving the example of having been involved in sex work (which is illegal in Albania<sup>4</sup>), or receiving criminal proceeds, and it was for prosecutors to decide where fault lies (HO FFM 2022).

- Refer also to [2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 27](#) and [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#).

### 2.3.2.3 Witness protection

The existence of a witness protection programme was confirmed by a number of sources consulted and interlocutors (USDOS TiP 2023, Govt of Albania report to CoE 2022, D, H, G, J, B, C), some indicating that none (USDOS TiP 2023, Albanian govt report to CoE 2022), or few (D, J, C) victims of trafficking had participated in the programme in recent years. A 2021 study published by Vatra Psycho-Social Centre – one of the four shelters of the NCATS – regarding the compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the Acquis Communautaire of the European Union relating to trafficking in human beings, noted that in order to guarantee the right of the victim of trafficking for protection and safety, it may be necessary to hold trials behind closed doors (Vatra 2021). The same report recommended, in line with GRETA, that more steps be taken to ensure the protection of witnesses and their families from potential intimidation and retaliation (Vatra 2021).

- Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#).

4 Article 113 of the [Albanian Criminal Code](#), No. 7895, dated 27 January 1995, Amended in 2017, criminalises “exercise of prostitution”.





#### 2.3.2.4 Compensation for victims of trafficking

It is possible for victims to obtain restitution through criminal proceedings or compensation through civil suits, but judges tended to reject restitution claims, and compensation claims required victims to submit new testimonies causing re-traumatisation, according to one source (USDOS TiP 2023). Sources reported that only two cases had been granted compensation, neither of which had been executed (USDOS TiP 2023, GoA report to CoE 2022). Law no.10192, dated 3.12.2009 “On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against wealth”, provides that the funds from the seizure of assets be used for victim compensation, including through a special fund for social purposes (GoA report to CoE 2022, D, H), however, interlocutors indicated that this was not yet effective (D, H).

- Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#).

#### 2.3.2.5 Treatment of minors and young people within the criminal justice system

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, according to one source (USDOS TiP 2023). In a report to the Council of Europe, the Albanian government noted “good work” in relation to access to justice for minors, citing special rooms for interviewing children and consistently ensuring the presence of a psychologist from the NCAT shelters (GoA report to CoE 2022). In an interview with Asylos, the Executive Director of NISMA ARSIS, an Albanian-based organisation specialising in the provision of social care and protection services to children, affirmed that NISMA ARSIS is present when a child is interviewed at the police station. In a response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child the Albanian government noted that children are interviewed by a 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 (GoA report to CRC 2023).

- Refer also to [2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations on page 29](#).

\*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.

#### 2.3.2.6 Investigations, prosecutions and convictions for trafficking

The European Commission reported 11 new criminal proceedings for trafficking in human beings and seven final convictions in Albania in 2022 (EC 2023), meanwhile the Albanian General Prosecutor’s Office also reported 11 criminal proceedings initiated (seven relating to adult trafficking, and four relating to child trafficking) and one conviction in 2022 (Albanian GPO 2023). The USDOS TiP 2023 covering government efforts between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, reported that the Albanian State Police investigated 85 new cases, and the General Prosecutor’s Office prosecuted 54 cases with eight defendants (USDOS TiP 2023). The same report indicated that SPAK initiated two new investigations, and courts did not convict any traffickers (USDOS TiP 2023). One interlocutor remarked on the extremely low conviction rates for trafficking and the need for institutions to either be restructured or have more proactive policies in place in this regard (C).

- Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#).



### 2.3.3 Child protection

#### 2.3.3.1 Child protection system and anti-trafficking efforts

A child protection system is in place (A, I, J, C), with structures in each municipality to respond to child protection needs (HO FFM 2022, J, C). The State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child (SARPCH) is the authority responsible for guaranteeing the functioning of the integrated protection system for unaccompanied children, inside and outside the territory of Albania, according to one interlocutor (D). In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, SARPCH indicated that it provides advice and technical support to municipal child protection units in the case management of child victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and economically exploited children (HO FFM 2022). Child protection workers manage and monitor cases of children in need of protection including victims and potential victims of trafficking (HO FFM 2022). One interlocutor representing an international NGO with a presence in Albania noted that there are clear protocols for the repatriation of unaccompanied minors (G), meanwhile another representing a shelter of the NCATS opined that the system of referrals and support in regard to child protection works well (J). Another interlocutor with expertise in child protection observed that the child protection system is only 13 years old, and while there have been improvements, it is still fragile and in need of professional and financial resources (A).

- Refer also to [2.4.5 Child protection system & anti-trafficking efforts – limitations on page 29](#).

#### 2.3.3.2 Alternative care for children without parental care

Child protection workers decide whether the child will stay with the family or will be placed in alternative care according to one source (HO FFM 2022). One interlocutor explained that in the case of child victims of trafficking, they are initially placed in a shelter for children where emergency support would be provided and the possibility of returning to the family would be explored, and children without the possibility of parental care would be placed in a house for children until the age of 18 (C). An interlocutor with expertise in child protection reported that if a child's family has been involved in their trafficking, the child would be immediately placed in a residential care institution and then placed in a foster family, although the same interlocutor noted challenges in identifying potential foster families at the local level (A), despite government efforts to move away from institutionalised forms of alternative care for children (CRCA/ECPAT Albania 2022, A). One source indicated that there were about 250 children in public residential centres, and 400 children in private residential centres run by NGOs, of which about 5% were reported to be repatriated trafficked children / child workers (CRCA/ECPAT Albania 2022). One interlocutor, who runs a shelter for child victims of trafficking, opined that there are adequate local provisions, including accommodation and social care, for children who do not have parental care (H). The same interlocutor referred Asylos to UNICEF's webpage on the Albanian child protection system for more information.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, another interlocutor indicated that children without parental care could be accommodated in the shelters or orphanages (J).

- For more on the limitations of alternative care for children without parental care, refer to [2.4.6 Alternative care for children without parental care – limitations on page 30](#).

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, "Child Protection System", undated



## 2.4 Barriers to protection

### 2.4.1 Legislation and implementation – limitations

#### 2.4.1.1 Adults – limitations in legislation and implementation

Sources and interlocutors suggested that the legislative framework related to victims of trafficking is yet to be implemented effectively (EC 2023, HO FFM 2022, D, I, J, B, C). They highlighted the gap between the law and its implementation, including increasing numbers of victims of human trafficking (despite lack of improvement in victim identification) (C); a lack of capacity to prosecute trafficking cases successfully at district courts and lack of capacity to investigate trafficking through virtual means (USDOS TiP 2023); lack of availability and access to free legal aid that is guaranteed to victims of trafficking by law (D, H); lack of professionalism and funding as challenges to accessing legal aid (Vatra 2021); and issues related to judicial punishment of victims (G, B, E). Interlocutors also highlighted the need for strengthened legal provisions relating to the social assistance available to victims of trafficking (A, C) and regulating the provision of compensation (C). Lack of implementation of the legal framework was associated with high turnover of law enforcement (USDOS TiP 2023); lack of resources to implement the legal framework (HO FFM 2022, D, J, B); lack of resource sustainability and heavy reliance on donor funding (I); and lack of prioritisation of trafficking in Albania in recent years (D).

- Refer also to [2.4.3 Justice system – limitations on page 28](#).

#### 2.4.1.2 Children – limitations in legislation and implementation

Significant improvement of coordination mechanisms related to child trafficking is needed to ensure full implementation of the relevant legal framework, according to one source (EC 2023). The same source reported that there is a need to establish a comprehensive legal framework on the status and responsibilities of social workers (EC 2023). Effective implementation of the law relating to the protection of child rights and the Juvenile Justice Code was mentioned as a challenge by one interlocutor (D). Another interlocutor referred to the state's inability to provide services for children as the key gap in implementing the law (G). A number of gaps in the law concerning child trafficking were reported by sources, including that internal trafficking of children within the Albanian territory is not addressed in law (HO FFM 2022, Vatra 2021); the fact that “child sexual abuse material” is not defined in the law and therefore, cases of online sexual abuse may not be prosecuted adequately (UNODC 2022, CRCA / ECPAT Albania 2021); and the fact that offences including grooming and sexual extortion are not criminalised (CRCA / ECPAT Albania 2021). Furthermore, Albania lacks legislation criminalising travel companies that explicitly or implicitly facilitate opportunities for engaging in sexual exploitation of children (UNICEF 2022). Sources noted that child trafficking crimes can be prosecuted under other violations, rather than trafficking (USDOS TiP 2023, Vatra 2021).

- Refer also to [2.4.5 Child protection system & anti-trafficking efforts – limitations on page 29](#).



### 2.4.2 Identification – limitations

Inadequacies in the identification of victims and potential victims of trafficking were cited in sources and by interlocutors (EC 2023, USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, IOM 2022, UNICEF 2022, A, H, J, C). The USDOS TiP 2023 found that the NRM experienced limited coordination, and that screening efforts among vulnerable populations including migrants, asylum-seekers, Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, and children were inconsistent. Mobile identification units (MIUs) identified most victims each year (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, G, J), despite being underfunded and lacking permanent resources (USDOS TiP 2023). Furthermore, the police reportedly did not participate in the MIUs consistently, despite signing an MoU that formalised their participation (USDOS TiP 2023). Interlocutors mentioned that a minority of trafficked individuals are identified by police (G), and that the police have not been proactive in identifying victims and potential victims of trafficking (C). One interlocutor suggested that there was a greater need for cooperation between different institutions, including child protection, police, health and education, in order to improve identification of, and responses to, instances of child trafficking (A). Sources pointed to challenges in law enforcement identifying victims when they were encountered in commercial sex situations (USDOS TiP 2023, Vatra 2021). As part of the UK Home Office's fact-finding mission, several interviewees confirmed that the police receive training to identify victims of trafficking, however one questioned the quality of the training, another indicated that there was an issue around engagement. One reported that the training on identification has happened but that it is not a priority for the government (HO FFM 2022). Another indicated that they are not trained to identify victims in the community (HO FFM 2022).

\*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.

### 2.4.3 Justice system – limitations

Interlocutors and sources cited various limitations of the Albanian justice system and its ability to protect victims of trafficking. These included:

- A lack of focus on victims within investigations (EC 2023, USDOS TiP 2023) and by justice institutions (D)
- Police and prosecutors not being equipped to prosecute cases of child sexual abuse online (GITOC 2021)
- Low awareness of commercial sexual exploitation of Roma children within the prosecutor's offices (GITOC 2021)
- Lack of specialised experience and capacity among district prosecutors to prosecute cases of trafficking, and failure to apply correct charges in cases of adult and child trafficking (USDOS TiP 2023, J)
- Authorities failing to convict all those accountable for trafficking (B);
- Lenient sentences being handed to traffickers, leading to negative consequences including lack of accountability and deterrence and potential security and safety issues for victims (USDOS TiP 2023);
- Lengthy legal proceedings (HO FFM 2022, Ramaj 2021, A, J)
- Threats / intimidation by the trafficker (Different and Equal 2022, A), or the risk of this (Ramaj 2021)
- Lack of effective victim compensation (USDOS TiP 2023, Albanian govt report to CoE 2022, HO FFM 2022, I, G)
- Lack of knowledge among lawyers of victims' rights (USDOS TiP 2023)
- Authorities not providing victims with necessary legal documents (USDOS TiP 2023)
- Victims having to confront traffickers in the courtroom due to lack of technical capacities, despite the legal provision in Article 361.7 of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code (2017) that witnesses of grave crimes can be questioned at a distance using audio-visual equipment (Ramaj 2021).



#### 2.4.4 Treatment of minors and young people in the criminal justice system – limitations

Despite the introduction in 2017 of the Code of Criminal Justice for Children, independent analysis showed ongoing significant gaps in achieving child-friendly justice, according to one source (UNICEF 2022). Other sources noted that police lack the capacity to do child-focused interrogations / interviews (USDOS HR report 2022, HO FFM 2022), and that a police cybercrime unit set up to investigate cases of online child sexual exploitation lacked procedures to involve child protection specialists in their investigations (GITOC 2021). A study conducted by six researchers with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system and victim responses in Albania explored the perspective of 18 girls and young women with lived experience of trafficking or sexual violence (aged 15 – 26) on seeking support and justice in relation to trafficking and sexual violence in Albania. The report discussed participants' views on why it might be difficult for victims of trafficking to approach the police. A range of reasons were cited, including victims' fear of judgement, fear of threats, intimidation and harm by the trafficker, lack of support from the family, fear of attracting media attention and losing anonymity, lack of understanding of what will happen next if they speak to the police, the perception that criminal justice professionals lack trust in the statements of young victims, intimidating behaviours by the police and racism affecting how police treat victims (Different and Equal and Safer Young Lives Research Centre 2023). Long delays and procrastination in progressing cases by criminal justice professionals was also noted by respondents in the same report (Different and Equal and Safer Young Lives Research Centre 2023).

\*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.

#### 2.4.5 Child protection system & anti-trafficking efforts – limitations

Sources and interlocutors cited insufficient financial resources as a barrier to the efficacy of the child protection system (HO FFM 2022, Haarr 2022, UNICEF 2021, A, J), including lack of budget for the case management of child protection cases (HO FFM 2022, Haarr, UNICEF et al. 2022, GITOC 2021). Lack of human resources was also highlighted (I), including a significant deficiency in the number of child protection workers compared to the number required in law (UNICEF 2022) and the number needed (EC 2023, A). One source observed that many child protection units at district level do not function (UNICEF 2022). The same source reported that insufficient human and financial resources, and frequent organisational change, partly due to decentralisation reforms, have impacted implementation of laws and policies (UNICEF 2022). Sources highlight other areas of concern including a lack of effective implementation of child labour prohibition (EC 2023); a lack of implementation of initiatives to protect children from sexual exploitation in tourism (GITOC 2021); and a lack of expertise among child protection workers in relation to online safety for children (GITOC 2021).

One interlocutor said that the state cannot provide all the services that children in need of protection require (G), while another observed that there is an absence of social services particularly in some rural areas (I). The need for improved coordination, including between child protection and anti-trafficking departments was observed (EC 2023, A).



An interlocutor with expertise in child protection opined that the Albanian child protection system is young, and despite improvements it is still fragile and needs a lot of strengthening (A), meanwhile a source consulted assessed that strengthening the child protection system would assist anti-trafficking efforts, and that further efforts are needed to ensure an adequate and systematic response to all types of violence against children (EC 2023).

- Refer also to [2.4.1.2 Children – limitations in legislation and implementation on page 27](#).

## 2.4.6 Alternative care for children without parental care – limitations

The government's 2021 plan for the placement in foster care of all children currently living in public care institutions was criticised by civil society due to insufficient supervision of the foster families and financial support to guarantee child welfare, according to one source (CRCA/ECPAT Albania 2022). The same source noted that despite numerous improvements in the social care system, sufficient consideration had not been given to the process of deinstitutionalisation (CRCA/ECPAT Albania 2022). The present lack of alternative care options, particularly foster care, for children without parental care was noted by multiple interlocutors and one source (CRCA/ECPAT Albania 2022, D, A, C). Interlocutors noted that the lack of alternative care options posed challenges for the reintegration of child victims of trafficking (D, C), with one remarking that the lack of foster care creates vulnerabilities in the child protection system and its ability to prevent re-trafficking (C). The same interlocutor noted the lack of support services available for young people leaving institutional care, and the need for greater support (C). One interlocutor with expertise on the child protection system observed that the use of residential care is ongoing in Albania, which does not support the best interest of the child and child well-being (A). They expressed concern that child victims of trafficking or sexual abuse in residential care institutions does not allow for sufficient treatment of their trauma (A). One source reported that care programs were designed for orphaned children rather than survivors of abuse or neglect victims (USDOS HR report 2022). Another source reported that children placed in institutions were particularly vulnerable to trafficking (EC 2023).

## 2.4.7 Internal relocation, re-trafficking, reprisals

### 2.4.7.1 Internal relocation

Interlocutors and one source highlighted a range of problems that victims of trafficking could face when relocating within Albania. This included the risk of former traffickers locating them due to Albania's small size and everyone knowing everyone (HO FFM 2022, D, I, B, F); security issues (D, J); stigma (J); the challenge of adapting (H, J) or integrating in a new place and finding work (A); lack of social network, making the victim conspicuous in a new locations (F); lack of acceptance by their family of origin (H), and difficulties associated with relocating with children, accessing accommodation and registering in a new city (C).

An interlocutor that represents a shelter of the NCATS referred to the "information flow" in Albania, which can make it hard for people to avoid their traffickers, (H). While one interlocutor said that victims of trafficking may be able to live anonymously in Tirana (G), another highlighted that lone women who have been exploited may face particular difficulties in a new location, due to the patriarchal context (F). Interlocutors noted that traffickers can try to threaten victims through their family members (J), and can easily track down victims who they fear may try to seek judicial redress (F). Another interlocutor said that if there were an "open trafficking case" it would be very difficult for someone to find safety even if relocated (B).

- Refer also to [2.4.7.2 Re-trafficking and reprisals on page 31](#).



### 2.4.7.2 Re-trafficking and reprisals

A wide range of factors associated with the risk of a victim of trafficking being re-trafficked were cited, including not being referred to a reintegration programme or only being in it a short time (D), or services being inadequate (HO FFM 2022), or unwillingness on the victim's part to engage in the rehabilitation and reintegration process (E); poor economic opportunities and employment prospects (HO FFM 2022, H, E, I, J, B, C) (refer also to [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 40](#)); difficulties in becoming reintegrated (C), including in a new place (A), and the victim not feeling fully empowered to lead an independent life (G); lack of social support (C), lack of support after leaving a shelter and scarcity of state social services (Ramaj 2021); lack of familial support (HO FFM 2022, E, J, C); lack of accommodation (E); traffickers being close to victims (such as family members) (I), who put them in further risky situations (J); experiencing stigma (E, F) and negative societal attitudes (HO FFM 2022); experiencing ongoing untreated mental health issues (J), failure to arrest the trafficker or extortion threats against the family (HO FFM 2022), and more broadly, a lack of access to justice (E). In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, Tirana Municipality indicated that the risk of re-trafficking among children is "very high" (HO FFM 2022).

Fear of trafficker reprisals was cited as a reason why victims of trafficking fear denouncing their traffickers (Different and Equal and Safer Young Lives Research Centre 2023, J, A). Two sources referred to individual cases in which family members had been threatened or harmed for the purposes of intimidation, in one case that involved trafficking (HO FFM 2022) and another case that involved the threat of trafficking (Vice News 2022). In a 2021 study 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, reprisals including against professionals and family members were reported to be a recurrent theme (Ramaj 2021). One interlocutor representing an emergency shelter for children noted that individuals are not willing to follow up in court as they are threatened, or they fear for their children (A). Another interlocutor assessed that a victim seeking judicial redress or support heightens the risk of reprisals (F).



## 2.5 Corruption

A number of interlocutors interviewed for this research suggested that corruption (D, F, B, C), or at least a level of complicity in illegal activity (G) persists within justice institutions, including the police (F, C, G), the judiciary (F, B) and other state institutions (F) including at local municipal level (G), with one interlocutor reporting that despite improvements in recent years, “corruption prevails as a problem” (F). Another interlocutor noted that according to the South East European Development Initiative [SELDI], Albania was “the country with the highest administrative corruption in the region” over the last year (2022-2023) (C). With regard to the complicity of politicians or public officials in human trafficking, some interlocutors indicated that they did not have personal awareness (A), or recent awareness of such cases (J). Others observed that there is a lack of official reporting on the complicity of politicians and public officials in human trafficking (C, D), and that it would be the police and prosecutors themselves who would be responsible for reporting data on such links (C).

The most recent USDOS TiP report 2023 stated that the government did not report any investigations, prosecutions or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. However, the same report pointed to a case in 2021 in which a police officer was permanently dismissed for “prostitution and maintaining a brothel”, and a 2020 case in which five police officials were suspended for alleged complicity in human trafficking (USDOS TiP 2023). In this case, the Tirana Regional Court dismissed charges, but disciplinary procedures were ongoing against three of the officers at the end of the reporting period (USDOS TiP 2023). According to sources cited in a CGRS-CEDOCA report published in 2022, though there are regular police operations to dismantle criminal organisations and counter trafficking, Albanian crime groups “remain among the most powerful in all of Europe”. The same source stated that there is a “criminal ecosystem”, in which criminals are well connected with officials in the police and judiciary and often enter government to ensure the development of their activities and close ties to politicians. In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network detailed cases in which political figures were found to have links with human trafficking (HO FFM 2022). Other sources suggested that cooperation exists between the police and traffickers (Leka & Ndoj 2022, Vice News 2022, GITOC 2021). One of these, an academic source, proposed that corruption is “probably the most important factor in explaining human trafficking”, and one of the main obstacles in the fight against human trafficking, and suggested that the impact of corruption is side-lined in the development and implementation of anti-trafficking measures (Leka & Ndoj 2022).

Several interlocutors and one source pointed to various impacts of corruption on the ability to protect victims of trafficking (Ramaj 2021, D, C, A, E, B, F), though one indicated that there was a lack of evidence in this area (I). Specific impacts cited included:

- The feeling or perception that there is a lot of corruption (B, C, F) and low trust in the police (C)
- Fear of disclosing the experience of trafficking due to the potential involvement of the authorities in corruptive affairs (Ramaj 2021) or police involvement with traffickers (C)
- Traffickers seeking to prevent the identification of cases (A)
- Corruption affecting access to justice (B, C), including lenient sentences being handed down reportedly due to corruption (Ramaj 2021). For example, one interlocutor (B) referred to interviews with alleged traffickers in Albania that were conducted as part of P.h.D field research (between 2018 – 2020), in which they pointed to corruption within law enforcement resulting in the exoneration of those who should be on trial for trafficking
- Bureaucratic “weaknesses” (E) or administrative corruption meaning that a victim of trafficking may not be able to access services, such as free healthcare to which they are entitled (J).





## 3. Assistance for victims of trafficking

### 3.1 Assistance from shelters

#### 3.1.1 Shelters – capacity and accessibility

##### 3.1.1.1 Capacity

According to sources and interlocutors, there is one specialised state-run shelter (Haarr, 2022, GoA report to UNCAT 2022, I, H, D, J), and three specialised NGO-run shelters for victims of trafficking in Albania (HO FFM 2022, Haarr, 2022, GoA report to UNCAT 2022, H, D, J), providing services to victims and potential victims of trafficking (GoA report to UNCAT 2022). Collectively, these shelters form the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NCATS) (J). Varying information was found regarding the capacity of the shelters. One source consulted indicated that the NCATS has a total capacity to accommodate 71 victims or potential victims of trafficking including 10 children (USDOS TiP 2023). Interlocutors provided varying information regarding the capacity of the state-run shelter, ranging from capacity for 12 (H) to 20 (I), to 100 (D). Figures provided by the NGO shelters of the NCATS to the UK Home Office as part of its 2022 fact-finding mission suggest that the NGO shelters each have somewhere between 15 – 25 beds.

The UNICEF Child Protection Specialist told Asylos that support from shelters ranges from three to nine months (I), meanwhile a representative of Vatra, a shelter of the NCATS, indicated that individuals might stay in the shelter one month to six months, with the duration depending on the case (J). A representative of Different and Equal indicated that support within the reintegration programme can last between two and five years (D). Interlocutors representing Different and Equal and Vatra indicated that support is needed for a longer duration in certain cases, including children, or where a victim of trafficking has denounced their trafficker (D, J).

Aside from the shelters of the NCATS, information on two emergency shelters accommodating victims of trafficking was found, including the NISMA ARSIS emergency shelter for children, which has a capacity for up to 20 individuals per night (A), and the Rozalba Home, a 72-hour emergency shelter mentioned to the UK Home Office by Caritas (HO FFM 2022).

##### 3.1.1.2 Women – access to shelters

The National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking provides rehabilitation for women and girls (The People's Advocate 2021, H). Interlocutors indicated that two of the NGO shelters of the NCATS accommodate only women and girls (D, J, B, H), with one interlocutor clarifying that these shelters are Different and Equal and Vatra (B).

- Refer also to [3.1.1.3 Men – access to shelters on page 34](#).



### 3.1.1.3 Men – access to shelters

Interlocutors affirmed that there is no shelter specifically for males (D, G). While one interlocutor indicated that the state-run shelter could accommodate men, they further specified that the general approach taken is to support men in rented accommodation, rather than hosting them inside a shelter (I). Other interlocutors and one source corroborated the fact that men are supported outside of shelters in rented accommodation (USDOS TiP 2023, H, D, G) or in the family of origin or in other arrangements (D). One interlocutor added that some males may need 24-hour assistance, and shelters of the NCATS have raised the issue and sought support in relation to the lack of shelter to accommodate male victims (G).

### 3.1.1.4 Children (boys and girls) – access to shelters

One source suggested that all shelters are able to shelter child victims (Haarr 2022), however some specified that the state-run shelter accommodates girls specifically and did not mention boys (Govt of Albania report to UNHRC 2023, The People's Advocate 2021). Sources and interlocutors consulted indicated that there is one NGO shelter that provides specialised services to victims under the age of 18, including boys and girls (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, D, H, G, B), which is Tjeter Vizion (H, G, B), meanwhile the other two NGO shelters accommodate only female victims (including adults and minors) (D) (refer to [3.1.1.2 Women – access to shelters on page 33](#)).

## 3.1.2 Rehabilitation and reintegration assistance – shelters

The four shelters of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters offer a range of services according to sources and interlocutors. Several interlocutors made a distinction between the services provided by the state-run shelter and the three NGO shelters of the NCATS, indicating that the state-run shelter provides 'acute' (E) or more immediate assistance after identification (C), or for victims who are in a court process or who have personal security risks (D, G). Two interlocutors who are representatives of the NCATS provided a detailed overview of the services they provide through three phases of rehabilitation and reintegration (D, H). The range of provisions and services provided by the shelters that were cited among the sources and interlocutors included: food (USDOS TiP 2023, L), mental health counselling / psychological assistance (USDOS TiP 2023, Haarr 2022, L, D, H, E, C), legal assistance, (USDOS TiP 2023, Haarr 2022, L, D, H, E), mediation / facilitation in relation to the family of origin (D, H), health care, (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, Haarr 2022, L, K, D, H), educational services, (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, Haarr 2022, D, H), employment services, (USDOS TiP 2023, L, D, H, C), assistance to victims' children, (USDOS TiP 2023, D, H), financial support, (USDOS TiP 2023, Haarr 2022, L, D, H), immediate accommodation (D, H), long-term accommodation (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, L, D, H), social activities, (USDOS TiP 2023, D, H), vocational training, (USDOS TiP 2023, Haarr 2022, L, D, H), follow-up; (USDOS TiP 2023, D, H), and grants for microbusinesses (L, D, H), or opportunities in social enterprises (E). According to sources interviewed as part of the HO FFM 2022, individuals from Roma and Egyptian backgrounds can be supported.

- Refer also to [3.1.3 Limitations in rehabilitation and reintegration assistance on page 35](#) and [reintegration assistance](#) and [3.3 Barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration on page 38](#).



### 3.1.3 Limitations in rehabilitation and reintegration assistance

A range of limitations in assistance from shelters was mentioned by sources and interlocutors, including: resource constraints (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022, Vatra 2021, A); delays in transferring funds for foods to shelters (Vatra 2021); high staff turnover in the state-run shelter reportedly resulting in untimely and poor quality services (Vatra 2021); low salaries and high employee turnover in the in the non-state run accommodation (Vatra 2021); lack of reintegration assistance for boys and men (HO FFM 2022) (see also [3.1.1.3 Men – access to shelters on page 34](#)); the relatively short duration of shelter assistance (HO FFM 2022, A), and the inadequacy of post-shelter financial support for rented accommodation (B).

Three interlocutors also noted that the level of security required for victims of trafficking in the state-run shelter can be difficult for the victims themselves (C) and present a challenge to rehabilitation (G), in particular not being able to go out of the centre to school (E) and the emotional impact of isolation and constant monitoring (E). One interlocutor also noted, based on their field research, limited human resources and a lack of specialised training for psycho-social staff (E). Another interlocutor reported that the geographical distribution of shelters can be a limiting factor, especially for those in rural areas, and that victims may need to travel to other cities to access shelter services (A). Similarly, another interlocutor indicated that there is only one state-run shelter on the outskirts of Tirana, leaving the north and south of the country without such services (C). The same interlocutor also assessed that economic reintegration services were not very effective and attributed this to labour market conditions and weak social protections provided by the state (C) (see also [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 40](#)). An interlocutor with lived experience of rehabilitation in a shelter in Albania indicated that they found living in the presence of other beneficiaries experiencing the same issues challenging (K). Lack of capacity to provide assistance to those with complex needs such as alcohol addiction was observed by another interlocutor (B) (see also [3.3.7 Mental healthcare provision – limitations on page 42](#)).

- Refer also to [3.3 Barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration on page 38](#).

### 3.1.4 Funding

The government provides some funding for the three NGO shelters of the NCATS, Different and Equal, Vatra psycho-social centre, and Tjeter Vizion (Another Vision) (C). NISMA ARSIS, an emergency shelter for children including victims of trafficking (which is not part of the NCATS) is 100% funded by foreign donors (A). While the NGO shelters of the NCATS receive some funds from the state, they need to seek donor funds to cover the rest of their operating costs (D, H, J, B, I, G, C). One interlocutor who represented a shelter of the NCATS indicated that they received 30% of funds from the state and sought donors to cover the remaining 70% (J), meanwhile another interlocutor estimated that around 80% of funds are covered by non-public institutions, such as international organisations (C). Several sources and interlocutors indicated that the government specifically funds the cost of food (HO FFM 2022, Ramaj 2021, D, C) and the salaries of staff (HO FFM 2022, Ramaj 2021, D, G, B, C) in NGO shelters. Several sources observed that there are concerns over the underfunding / funding constraints of the shelters (EC 2023, USDOS TiP 2023, UNICEF 2022, Ramaj 2021). One source noted that a request from the shelters for improved pay conditions, including increasing salaries from minimum wage was denied by the government (USDOS TiP 2023), while one interlocutor observed that the low salaries made it difficult to keep staff engaged and prevent burnout (C). Interlocutors and a source noted that funding from donors is time-limited (Ramaj 2021, D, B, C), which can lead to lack of stability in service provision (Ramaj 2021, I, D, G). Cited challenges in fundraising for the shelters included shifting priorities of donors (D, A, J, C), the small number of donors interested in funding this issue (I), and the length of time it takes to show impact through reintegration (C).



## 3.2 General social assistance

### 3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance

Victims of trafficking can benefit from financial support for up to a year after they leave the shelter (D, C), including victims and potential victims of trafficking (HO FFM 2022), if all documents are provided (C). The economic aid that victims of trafficking are entitled to (provided they meet the criteria), is ALL 9, 000 per month (HO FFM 2022, ESPN 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors). One source outlined the criteria that victims of trafficking must meet in order to access financial assistance, including:

- having exited the shelter
- being unemployed
- and having a declaration from the shelter that they are a survivor of trafficking who has been receiving support from the shelter (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors).

Some interlocutors also reported that victims need to be identified as victims of trafficking before they can be supported with monthly financial assistance (J, G) (refer also to [3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations on page 38](#), and [3.3.2 Stigma / familial and community issues on page 38](#)). One source noted that Roma families may struggle to access financial support if they are lacking in documents or are not registered with their local government unit (GoA, UNDP, CoE 2021).

Interlocutors noted that there is a legal provision for assistance with accommodation outside of the shelters (D, G, J), one listing three different mechanisms provided for by the law 22/2018, including provision of a rent subsidy, a program for the improvement of housing conditions for those without suitable housing, and specialised rented apartments for victims of trafficking before they are able to access one of the other types of housing assistance (D). Two interlocutors reported that the rent subsidy is provided through the municipality rather than central government (D, C), and a further interlocutor noted that provision of this service in smaller cities was difficult (G). Interlocutors indicated that victims of trafficking would need to provide necessary documentation to access housing assistance (J, C), some of which would need to be notarized, which costs money (C). One of these interlocutors provided a list of documents required to access housing (see 3.2.1 Housing and economic assistance in the [Full Report](#) or find the list in the interlocutor's transcript in the [Annexes](#)) and confirmed that victims of trafficking would be required to complete civil registration with the municipality in order to access housing support (C).

- Refer to [3.3.3 Adequacy of services & bureaucracy on page 39](#).



### 3.2.2 Employment

NCATS and the government provided employment services and vocational training (USDOS TiP 2023, A, E, D, H, J, C), and other organisations such as SHKEJ and Key Advisor also provide employment assistance (HO FFM 2022). The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) prioritised employment assistance for vulnerable groups including victims of trafficking (USDOS TiP 2023, HO FFM 2022). In an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, NAES affirmed that victims of trafficking must declare themselves to be victims of trafficking at the employment office in order to gain assistance, and also noted that (at the time of the interview), there were few declared VoTs that they assisted and all were women. A number of sources indicated that training (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors), internships, and support to start a new business (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors) can be effective forms of employment support for victims of trafficking. Shelters collaborate with employment offices in the local area (D, H), and collaboration with businesses forms part of efforts to create internship / employment placement opportunities (HO FFM 2022, G, C). Through a wage subsidy programme, the salaries of victims of trafficking can be covered for up to six months during professional placements / internships (HO FFM 2022, UNDP 2022). Victims of trafficking receive assistance to set up microbusinesses (Govt of Albania report to CoE 2022, HO FFM 2022, D, G), including purchasing the necessary materials (D, L). One interlocutor also described social enterprises created by NGOs, including Different and Equal, which have provided employment opportunities to victims of trafficking (C). The types of employment available to victims of trafficking were listed by a number of interlocutors and included work in the following domains: factories (H, J, D), hospitality (H, J, A, D), hairdressing (H, A, J, D), babysitting (H, D), cleaning (A, D), tailoring (H, J, D), beautician (J), work in shops (H, D), call centres (D), painters (D), mechanics (H), or work in car washes or car parking services (D). Interlocutors with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration assistance from two shelters of the NCATS described some positive experiences in relation to the vocational skills training they had received through the rehabilitation and reintegration programme within the shelters (K, L).

- Refer also to [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 40](#).

### 3.2.3 Healthcare

According to a source consulted and interlocutors, victims of trafficking are entitled to access Albania's free public healthcare system (HO FFM 2022, D, H). The Ministry of Health and Social Protection in an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission in October 2022 indicated that this includes primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare, and intermediary diagnostic or treatment services provided in public and non-public hospitals (HO FFM 2022). One interlocutor explained that shelters assist victims of trafficking to obtain their legal identity papers so that they can benefit from the health card (which would provide access to the free public health system), and then accompany them to receive the services (G). Both victims and potential victims of trafficking are entitled to access free medical assistance (D, H, G), however several interlocutors indicated that some forms of healthcare are only available privately (H, D, J), including dental services (D, J) and some medicines are not free (J, C). Shelters helped with assistance to access medical support (L), including paying for medicines that are not available for free (J, C). One interlocutor observed that although physical healthcare is available and accessible, where someone has a severe medical issue and medication is not free, this can be a huge burden (C).

- Refer also to [3.3.6 Healthcare – limitations on page 41](#).



### 3.2.4 Mental healthcare provision

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection in an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission in October 2022 indicated that the free healthcare available to victims of trafficking includes mental health services (HO FFM 2022). Mental health support is provided to victims of trafficking by shelters (H, I, J), and where required, shelters may refer victims of trafficking for mental health services outside of the shelter (D, H, J). One interlocutor – the UNICEF Child Protection Specialist – indicated that shelters and state social services are equipped with psychologists (I) and described an online platform for individuals at risk and survivors of trafficking aimed at providing mental health support (I). Another interlocutor representing one of the shelters of the NCATS indicated that there are specialised staff who provide mental health support to women and girls in the shelters, while men and boys can receive mental health support through Vatra’s legal clinic which also has a department providing psychological support, or could be referred to psychiatric hospitals but this would only apply to acute cases (J).

- Refer also to [3.3.7 Mental healthcare provision – limitations on page 42](#).

## 3.3 Barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration

### 3.3.1 Identification to access services – limitations

A barrier to accessing support services noted by multiple interlocutors was lack of identification of victims and potential victims of trafficking (D, E, I, C). One interlocutor indicated that to access economic assistance an individual would need to declare themselves to be a victim of trafficking the relevant state agency and this could present a barrier due to potential prejudice (G) (see also [3.3.2 Stigma / familial and community issues on page 38](#)). Another interlocutor explained that the fear of self-identifying as a victim of trafficking was due to societal prejudice and stigmatisation (D). Another interlocutor noted that based on their 2019 study, children from the Roma community who are not in the civil register were unable to access state services (E).

- Refer also to [2.4.2 Identification – limitations on page 28](#).

\*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.

### 3.3.2 Stigma / familial and community issues

Stigma was cited as a barrier to accessing support (HO FFM 2022, I, G), including economic aid (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, G), and legal aid and housing assistance (HO FFM 2022), due to the need to declare oneself to be a victim of trafficking to the relevant agencies. One interlocutor explained that the fear of self-identifying as a victim of trafficking was due to societal prejudice and stigmatisation (D), which was corroborated by a source consulted (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors). Two interlocutors cited prejudice among employers as a barrier to accessing employment (D, E) (refer also to [3.3.5 Barriers to employment on page 40](#)). Discrimination against and lack of acceptance of LGBTQI victims of trafficking was also reported to be an issue (HO FFM 2022, J).



Lack of familial support was cited as a barrier to reintegration (HO FFM 2022, K, L, J), and a factor that has the potential to create setbacks in the reintegration process (Different and Equal 2022). Both interlocutors with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania referred to lack support from their families (K, L). One of them described how difficult it was for her family to accept her when she returned to Albania and explained that her family had prioritised the mentality of the community (L).

\*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.

### 3.3.3 Adequacy of services & bureaucracy

Inadequate state social care and services are barriers to reintegration for victims of trafficking according to one source (EC 2023). State benefits that should be available for victims of trafficking are not always available due to resource constraints (HO FFM 2022, J), including housing benefit (HO FFM 2022, Vatra 2021). Even where services are received, they are of insufficient quality (Vatra 2021) or duration (Vatra 2021, A). One interlocutor noted that lack of social services and professionals was a particular problem in smaller municipalities (A), and (citing another source), one report indicated that 53 out of 61 municipalities had no services for victims of trafficking (Haarr 2022). Referring specifically to housing assistance, interlocutors indicated that accommodation support depends on the funds that municipalities have (D, C), and that smaller municipalities do not provide this benefit (C). Individuals from the Roma / Egyptian community face challenges in accessing services due to registration issues according to one source consulted (HO FFM 2022). Some services were noted as lacking in a study published by Vatra, including long term housing and care for victims of trafficking with mental health issues, specialised psychiatric services, provision of certified education in shelters and compensation (Vatra 2021).

The process of applying for municipal financial benefits or housing was described as lengthy, bureaucratic (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, Vatra 2021) and requiring extensive documentation (Ramaj 2021, Vatra 2021, I, J). One interlocutor and a source explained that even after the application process, there may be a lengthy wait until a service is provided (Ramaj 2021, G). An individual with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration services and who received a rent bonus from the municipality explained that this support was not always paid on time or at the correct amount (L). The same interlocutor indicated that it was difficult to obtain an official contract for the rent of an apartment (L), which is required to access housing assistance (Ramaj 2021).



### 3.3.4 Level of financial support

Interlocutors and a source indicated that the level of financial assistance currently available to victims of trafficking is not enough to cover the basic costs of living (HO FFM 2022, A, E, J), even with the recent increase to 9,000 ALL (B) [it was previously 3,000 ALL]. One interlocutor explained that a mother with children would also receive financial support for each of her children, but this still is not enough (A), and also opined that it is not possible to recover from a trafficking situation with such low financial support (A). An interlocutor explained that to cover basic living costs, around £350 per month is necessary, meanwhile the financial support available to victims of trafficking from the state is only equivalent to £70 per month (C).<sup>6</sup>

One interlocutor reported that most victims of human trafficking do not apply for financial support because the level is so low they judge that they would be better off working (J), while another interlocutor suggested that victims of trafficking assess that it is not worth exposing themselves to bureaucracies only to receive such minimal support (B). An interlocutor with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania indicated that they will likely find supporting themselves difficult at first due to high prices, low salaries and being alone (K). Another interlocutor indicated that, based on their study, available assistance was not always helpful, especially where there is no support from the family (E). One interlocutor observed that there is a risk of homelessness for victims of trafficking (J), and another, that victims of trafficking are vulnerable to homelessness (C), including where municipal housing assistance is not granted (J).

### 3.3.5 Barriers to employment

The USDOS TiP 2023 observed a lack of resources for employment and other reintegration efforts, particularly for children and individuals with children. Interlocutors with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration services for victims of trafficking in Albania pointed to a number of barriers to employment, including their own lack of professional skills (K), lack of labour market opportunities for victims of trafficking (K, L), poor quality of jobs available (L) and employer refusal to accommodate their personal circumstances, including illness (K), and childcare needs (L). Another interlocutor also observed that employers do not always accommodate childcare needs among victims of trafficking (C), and a source also indicated that there is a lack of access to free childcare (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors). Other barriers to accessing employment included stigma related to having been in a situation of trafficking (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, F) and prejudice among employers (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, Ramaj 2021, D), or fear that employing a victim of trafficking would lead to security issues (G). Sources and interlocutors observed that the quality of employment opportunities available to victims of trafficking is poor (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, D, H, C) and pay is low (HO FFM 2022, Ramaj 2021, D, J, C). One interlocutor indicated that survivors of trafficking are often paid less than the minimum wage, which makes economic survival difficult (H). Lack of alignment between vocational support and labour market needs (I, C) and low quality of vocational training in some instances (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors) were also observed to be barriers to accessing employment. Sources and an interlocutor also suggested that to access assistance to find employment, an individual would need to declare or prove themselves to be a victim of trafficking to the employment office (HO FFM 2022, H), unless accompanied by a shelter (HO FFM 2022, H). Meanwhile in an interview with the UK Home Office as part of its fact-finding mission, NAES stated that sometimes when unemployed jobseekers come to the labour offices and refuse to declare themselves as a victim of trafficking, they still provide support (HO FFM 2022).

<sup>6</sup> 9,000 ALL = £74.70 on 20 March 2024, see: XE, [Currency Converter](#), 20 March 2024





Two interlocutors indicated that a lack of connections, in a context where family or social connections / nepotism can lead to employment opportunities, can be a barrier for victims of trafficking in finding employment (F, C).

Individual factors presenting a barrier to finding employment among victims of trafficking included the following: ongoing health issues (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, Different and Equal 2022, J, C), lack of education / qualifications / skills (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, Ramaj 2021, D, J), lack of business know-how and capacities (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors), lack of interest (Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors), and disappointment (L) or difficulty accepting the working conditions (D).

The generally high unemployment rate in Albania was mentioned as a challenge for victims of trafficking seeking employment (A, J, F). Sources and interlocutors cited varying unemployment rates, ranging from between 11 – 14% (EC 2022, EURACTIV 2021, INSTAT undated, D, E, C). Youth unemployment was reportedly higher, at 26% (E, G) or 27.1% (INSTAT undated, C). According to one interlocutor, most youth who are unemployed are not in education or training and are vulnerable to trafficking (C). Another interlocutor opined that the unemployment rate is underestimated as there hasn't been a census since 2011 (G). The level of unemployment in Albania, including among youth (G), is high when compared to other countries (J) according to interlocutors.

### 3.3.6 Healthcare – limitations

The health card / public health system does not always cover the cost of medications according to a source and interlocutors (Ramaj 2021, L, J), and lack of funding is a challenge (Vatra 2021). One source noted that the impact of having to pay for medications can constitute a set-back to reintegration for victims of trafficking (Different and Equal 2022). One interlocutor with lived experience of rehabilitation and reintegration reported that she could not afford the cost of medicines without assistance from the shelter (L). Another interlocutor reported that medications available through the public health system are lower quality, less effective and may have side effects, and that to access better medications they would need to be paid for by the individual (G). According to another interlocutor, corruption exists within the healthcare system and access to free healthcare would not always be granted, particularly if a victim of trafficking is not assisted by a shelter (J). Lack of professionalism by healthcare staff and unclear legal provisions in relation to healthcare were also cited as challenges by one source (Vatra 2021).



### 3.3.7 Mental healthcare provision – limitations

Sources and interlocutors cited limited mental health care options for victims of trafficking (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, C, J, A). Limitations included a lack of mental health provision for victims of trafficking with substance abuse issues (HO FFM 2022, Davy 2022 – Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, B), lack of specific shelter for victims of trafficking suffering from mental health issues (UNDP 2021), and a lack of capacity within existing mental health institutions to deal with victims of trafficking – men, women and children – who are suffering mental health issues (J, A). One source indicated that there is a scarcity of mental health support after leaving the shelters (Ramaj 2021). An interlocutor working for an international NGO with a presence in Albania, indicated that whether a victim of trafficking could access mental health support would depend on whether they were accompanied by a social worker, or felt empowered, and suggested that if they are vulnerable or timid they may be neglected by service providers (G). Psychologists were reportedly not available through the public health care system (HO FFM 2022).

One interlocutor discussed difficulty accommodating individuals with mental health problems alongside others with significant trauma within shelters (G), while another interlocutor mentioned the lack of long-term accommodation options for victims of trafficking with serious mental health problems (D). Two interlocutors representing two of the shelters of the NCATS mentioned the lack of specialist mental health care provision for minors (H, J), with only one centre in Tirana for children and adolescents (J), and both cited difficulties in referring minors for mental health support without parental presence (H, J).

One interlocutor explained that if a mental illness is categorised as a “chronic illness”, the prescription for medication can be reimbursed, but the interlocutor had heard that for severe mental health cases, most victims have not been able to access medications for free, which puts a “huge” burden on shelters or organisations supporting them (C).



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