

Annexes: Albania: Trafficking

Annex 1

Methodology

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

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

Desk research

Research terms of reference were devised with input from practitioners working in the field of asylum in the UK (see [Annex 2](#) on p.3 for the research terms of reference). The desk review was coordinated by an Asylos staff member working with a team of volunteer researchers and involved consulting a list of agreed sources, including English and Albanian language sources. Albanian sources were reviewed by a volunteer with native level Albanian language skills. The desk review incorporated a review of English language material published between 31 March 2021 - 6 December 2023, and Albanian language material published within the shorter research time frame 31 March 2021 - 15 June 2023, due to resource and time constraints (see [Limitations](#) on p.2-3). In the case of annual reports, such as the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons report, only the most recent report has been included, in the interests of brevity and inclusion of the most up to date information.

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

Interviews

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

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

Interviews were conducted by Asylos staff members and Asylos volunteers, between May and July 2023. Each individual who agreed to be interviewed was sent an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, and a set of interview questions (see [Annex 2](#) on p.3 to access the research questions). Interview questions for interlocutors with lived experience of trafficking were limited to

their personal experiences of rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania. All other interlocutors were presented with the same set of structured questions, which closely reflected the research terms of reference. They were encouraged to indicate any questions that were outside their knowledge or experience, either in advance of the interview or during the interview.

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

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

Transcripts and written contributions can be found in [Annex 4](#) on p.6.

Drafting and peer review

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

Presentation of findings

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

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

Limitations

- Despite attempts to incorporate a range and diversity of interlocutors, Asylos was unable to secure interviews with members of local or national government, the police, or journalists, constituting a limitation of this research.
- Despite significant efforts, Asylos was unable to secure an interview with an interlocutor with specific expertise on corruption, constituting a limitation of this research. Readers may wish to consult a recently published review by the former Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration of the UK Home Office's Country Policy and Information Note on human trafficking in Albania, which underscores the role of organised crime in trafficking in Albania and refers to relevant evidence on this issue that Asylos' research did not capture.¹ This is likely due to Asylos' limited capacity to review Albanian language sources.

¹ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, "[Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Albania and Pakistan \(October 2023\)](#)", February 2024, p.37

- The original time frame for the desk review of published material was 31 March 2021 - 15 June 2023. Additional desk research was carried out for English language sources, extending the time frame to 6 December 2023, to ensure inclusion of the most up to date information. This was not possible for Albanian language sources due to time and resource constraints.

A note on language

The term “victim of trafficking” or “VoT” is commonly used by sources cited in this report. It is terminology that is used in the European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings,² and as noted in a report by the Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, the term “victim” may be used by law enforcement, the justice system and some NGOs due to its legal implications.³ Notwithstanding this, Asylos recognises that other terminology is preferable in other contexts, for example, someone with “lived experience of trafficking” or potentially “survivor of trafficking”.

Annex 2

The following terms of reference were devised to guide the desk review. The same terms of reference were used to conduct structured interviews with most interlocutors. See [Annex 3](#) on p.6 for separate interview questions used to guide interviews with interlocutors with lived experience of trafficking and rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania. Interlocutors were encouraged to indicate any questions that were outside their knowledge or experience, either in advance of the interview or during the interview. As such interlocutor responses relate to areas within their areas of knowledge and experience. Transcripts can be found in [Annex 4](#) on p.6.

Research terms of reference

Profiles of Victims of Trafficking and risk factors

What are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

What factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked?

Trafficker Profiles and recruitment methods

What are the profiles of traffickers in Albania?

What are methods of recruitment into trafficking in Albania?

Trafficking prevalence

What is the prevalence of trafficking of boys and men in Albania?

What is the prevalence of trafficking of women and girls in Albania?

How does the prevalence of trafficking among boys and men, and women and girls compare?

What is the prevalence of trafficking among Roma, Egyptian and other ethnic minorities in Albania?

What is the prevalence of trafficking among LGBTQI+ persons?

What is the prevalence of trafficking among persons with disabilities?

What is the prevalence of sex trafficking in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by sex trafficking (men, women, boys, girls, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced labour in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by trafficking for the purposes of forced labour (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

² Council of Europe, “[Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)”, 2005

³ Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, “[A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking](#)”, October 2022, p.18

What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced begging? What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by trafficking for the purposes of forced begging (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

Recognition as a Victim of Trafficking

If a person has been recognised as a trafficking victim by the UK NRM, will they be recognised as a trafficking victim and able to access support in Albania?

Trafficking-related Legislation

What is the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

What legislation exists in relation to child protection in Albania?

How effective is the legislation that exists?

Is there judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked?

Is there an 'implementation gap' between legislation and what happens in reality?

Is there a witness protection programme? If yes, how effective is it?

State protection from trafficking

How effective are the following institutions at providing protection to victims of trafficking:

a) police

b) judiciary

c) other state authorities

What is the conviction rate for trafficking?

What State measures are in place to prevent trafficking of men, women and children?

Is there a child protection system? How effective is the child protection system in protecting children from trafficking or re-trafficking? Are there adequate provisions, particularly accommodation and social care, for children who do not have parental care?

What limitations are there in respect of existing prevention measures?

Do victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted?

Corruption

How, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking?

Is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

Assistance for Victims of Trafficking - State

What is the current capacity of state-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support (whether inside or outside shelters) to:

(a) trafficked girls,

(b) trafficked boys,

(c) trafficked adult women, and

(d) trafficked adult men?

How many people can they currently support in each of these categories, and how long can they provide the support for?

Are trafficked persons in state-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

What are the barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services?

Assistance for Victims of Trafficking - NGO

What is the current capacity of NGO-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support (whether inside or outside shelters) to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

How many people can they currently support in each of these categories, and how long can they provide the support for?

Are trafficked persons in NGO-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

What are the barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services?

How are NGO shelters funded?

Is funding for support services permanent or time-limited?

What factors affect funding being interrupted? When funding ceases or is interrupted, what impact does this have on service provision?

Stigma

To what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? Is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking (sex trafficking, forced labour, forced criminality, forced begging)?

Employment

What barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face to finding employment in Albania?

What support is available in finding employment? Does it include professional training or job placements?

What kinds of employment are they able to find, if any? And how do their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

Social assistance

What social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

What housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Availability of healthcare/rehabilitation services

What mental healthcare services are available to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

What physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? Are these adequate to meet their needs?

Internal relocation

What problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

Are trafficking victims able to avoid their traffickers by relocating to another part of Albania?

Do traffickers find victims of trafficking who internally relocate? What methods do they use?

Re-trafficking/further exploitation

What issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

What issues affect the likelihood of reprisals?

Annex 3

The following interview questions were used to guide interviews with interlocutors with lived experience of trafficking and rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania. The questions were also provided in Albanian to give the respondents the opportunity to review the interview questions in their native language ahead of the interview. Transcripts can be found in [Annex 4](#) on p.6.

Interview questions

Assistance for Victims of Trafficking – State

Can you tell me about your experience of rehabilitation and reintegration in general within Albanian society?

What have you found helpful for the process of rehabilitation and reintegration?

Have you experienced any general challenges in terms of your rehabilitation and reintegration within Albanian society? If so, what were these challenges?

Employment

What kind of support have you received to find employment? Has this included any professional training or job placements?

What kinds of employment would you like to find?

What challenges have you experienced in finding employment?

Social assistance

What kinds of social assistance have you received? For example, housing assistance, living costs?

Have you found this assistance helpful? If so, how has it been helpful?

Have you experienced any challenges in relation to social assistance (for example, difficulties accessing help with housing, living costs etc)?

Availability of healthcare/rehabilitation services

Were you able to access adequate physical and mental healthcare services, if you needed to use them?

Did you experience any challenges?

Final question

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience of rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania?

Annex 4

Interview transcripts of all interlocutors consulted are set out below. Some are transcripts of interviews conducted by videoconference, while others are written responses to the questions provided by Asylos. The mode of the interview is indicated within each transcript.

Different and Equal

[Different and Equal](#) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing high quality services for the protection and reintegration of victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and to changing the legal, institutional and social context to counter these abuses. D&E's main activities include: victim

identification and referral; provision of comprehensive, long-term, reintegration services (residential and community based); awareness-raising in communities about trafficking in persons, sexual abuse and domestic violence and the rights of the victims; prevention of sexual violence and trafficking through support to vulnerable groups; training and capacity building of state and civil society partners; research and evaluations; technical assistance in drafting laws and legislation to protect victims of trafficking, victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse; and advocacy around the rights and protection for trafficking victims, victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Different and Equal submitted written responses to questions provided by Asylos for the purposes of this research.

Written contribution by Different and Equal – received 20 June 2023

Asylos: What are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

Different and Equal: Based on D&E's experience, regarding the profile of victims of trafficking, we can say that there are several factors that affect their vulnerability and increase the risk of being exploited and falling prey to trafficking.

Here we can mention

- Gender
- Age
- Family
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Their place of birth/residence
- Occupation
- Their mental health
- Domestic or gender-based violence

The risk factors are related to the profile of the victims of trafficking, e.g

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

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

- Family

Mostly victims of trafficking come from families with severe social and dysfunctional problems. The composition of families with many members, alcoholic parents, violent, addicted to narcotic substances, families with 1 parent or they may also be orphans, negligent parents, parents with low education or no education at all, unemployed parents or parents who have problems with their mental health. Here we can also mention early marriages. Families who are homeless and in very difficult economic conditions.

Education

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

-Ethnicity

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

-Their place of birth/residence

Mostly the victims of trafficking are residents who have lived in deep areas of Albania where there has been a significant lack of socio-economic services or live in peripheral and informal areas of large

cities in communities with acute social problems where poverty and unemployment are very high levels.

-Occupation

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

-The mental health

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

-Domestic or gender-based violence

Also, violence is a factor that greatly affects their vulnerability to trafficking, because due to violence, adults and children often end up in street situations and are included by traffickers in exploitation networks.

Asylos: What factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked?

Different and Equal: Based on D&E's own experience, the factors related to the risk of trafficking are: violence, poverty, unemployment, being homeless, people with mental health problems, low education, addiction to alcohol or narcotic substances.

Asylos: What are the profiles of traffickers in Albania?

Different and Equal: Based on D&E's experience, regarding the profile of Albanian traffickers, we can say that they are of several typologies. There are those who are the most aggressive, the most violent and the most dangerous, to those who use children for certain illegal jobs by seducing and deceiving them.

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

Asylos: What are methods of recruitment into trafficking in Albania?

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

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking of women and girls in Albania?

Different and Equal: Based on collective statistics of the shelters in the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters (NCATS), 58% of females new cases assisted during 2022 were minors (girls) and 42% were (adults) women.

Asylos: How does the prevalence of trafficking among boys and men, and women and girls compare?

Different and Equal: Based on NCATS statistics, 73% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were females and 27% were males. Males were exploited mostly for forced criminal activities (drug distribution and stealing); begging and forced labour.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking among Roma, Egyptian and other ethnic minorities in Albania?

Different and Equal: Based on NCATS statistics, 37% of the new cases referred and assisted during 2022 were from Roma and Egyptian community.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking among LGBTQI+ persons?

Different and Equal: Based on NCATS statistics, only one new case assisted during 2022 was LGBTQI+ person.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking among persons with disabilities?

Different and Equal: Based on NCATS information that NCATS members prepared for the US Department of State report on Trafficking in Persons, there were some cases with mental health problems who have been exploited mostly for sexual purposes. Women and girls with mental health problems have been targeted by the traffickers because it is easier to manipulate them because of their mental state. 16% of victims/potential victims of trafficking referred during 2022 were with mental health problems.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of sex trafficking in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by sex trafficking (men, women, boys, girls, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

Different and Equal: Based on NCATS statistics, 55% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were exploited for sexual purposes. Almost all the cases were females, only one was adult male. 51% of the cases exploited sexually were minors (girls). 1 case was LGBTQI+ person. A significant number of the referred victims of trafficking are minors. This age group remains to be the favourite of recruiters and traffickers as it is the most vulnerable one. Women and girls with mental health problems have been targeted by the traffickers because it is easier to manipulate them because of their mental state.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced labour in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by trafficking for the purposes of forced labour (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

Different and Equal: Based on NCATS statistics, 8% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were exploited for forced labour. 44% were men and boys and 56% were women and girls. 56% of the cases were boys and girls (minors) and 44% were women and men.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

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

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced begging? What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by trafficking for the purposes of forced begging (men, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons, persons with disabilities)?

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

Asylos: If a person has been recognised as a trafficking victim by the UK NRM, will they be recognised as a trafficking victim and able to access support in Albania?

Different and Equal: According to our experience yes

Asylos: What is the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

Different and Equal: For information on this, please refer to D&E's submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Different and Equal, [Input for the Special Rapporteur's report on "contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities"](#), February 2022.

Following the amendments made to the Criminal Code in 2013, trafficking in persons is criminalized in Article 110/a and Article 128/b, please refer to the Albanian Criminal Code:

"Article 110/a - Trafficking in adults

"The recruitment, transport, transfer, hiding or reception of persons through threat or the use of force or other forms of compulsion, kidnapping, fraud, abuse of office, or taking advantage of social, physical or psychological condition, or giving or receipt of payments or benefits in order to get the consent of a person who controls another person, with the purpose of exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced services or work, slavery or forms similar to slavery, putting to use or transplanting organs, as well as other forms of exploitation, within and beyond the territory of the Republic of Albania, shall be punishable by imprisonment from eight to 15 years.

If such offence is committed against an adult female, it shall be punishable by 10 to 15 years of imprisonment.

The organization, management and financing of the trafficking of persons is punished with imprisonment of from seven to 15 years.

When the offence is committed in collaboration, more than once, accompanied by maltreatment and making the victim commit various actions through the use of physical or psychological violence, causing serious consequences to health or threatening the victim's life, it is punishable by imprisonment of no less than 15 years.

When the crime has brought about the death of the victim as a consequence, it is punished with imprisonment of no less than 20 years or with life imprisonment.

When the crime is committed through the utilisation of a state function or public service, the punishment of imprisonment and the fines are increased by one fourth."

Article 128/b - Trafficking of children

The recruitment, sale, transport, transfer, hiding or reception of children with the purpose of exploitation for prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced services or work, slavery or forms similar to slavery, putting to use or transplanting organs, as well as other forms of exploitation, shall be punishable by 10 to 20 years of imprisonment.

The organization, management and financing of the trafficking of children is punished with imprisonment of from 10 to 20 years.

When the crime is committed in collaboration or more than once, or is accompanied by maltreatment and making (coercing) the victim to commit various actions through physical or

psychological force, or brings serious consequences to the victim's health, it is punished with imprisonment of no less than 15 years.

When the crime has brought about the death of the victim as a consequence it is punished with imprisonment of no less than 20 years or with life imprisonment.

When the criminal crime is committed through the utilisation of a state function or public service, the punishment of imprisonment are increased by one fourth."

Asylos: What legislation exists in relation to child protection in Albania?

Different and Equal: Please refer to the following academic paper: Tandili, A, "[Institutional Mechanisms for the Rights and Protection of the Child in Albania, Their Practical Operation](#)", European Journal of Social Science Education and Research, September – December 2021 Volume 8, Issue 3. For more information for the system for child protection see the response for the other questions below on child protection system.

National Legal framework for referral and protection of children in Albania:

- Family Code (Law 9062 date 8.5.2003-updated)
- Criminal Code of Justice for Juvenile (law 37/2017)
- Law 111/2017 "On legal aid granted from the State";
- [Law 18/2017 "On the Rights and Child Protection"](#)
- Law 9669, date 18.12.2006 "For measures against domestic violence", updated;
- Law 121/2016 "On the Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania";
- Law 9355, datë 10. 03. 2005 "For Help and Social Services", changed;
- Law 22/2018 "For social sheltering";
- Law 9887 date 10.03.2008 "For protection of personal data", changed;
- Law 10221 date. 4.02.10 "For the protection against discrimination", changed;
- Law 44/2012 "On mental health";
- Law 119/2014 "On the right of information";
- CMD [Council of Ministers Decision] No. 129, dated 13.03.2019 "Procedures for Identification, Immediate Assistance and Referral of Economically Exploited Children, Including Children in Street Situation"
- CMD No. 111, dated 06.03.2019 "On the Procedures and Rules for the Return and Repatriation of the Unaccompanied Child".
- CMD No. 186, dated 04.04.2019 "On the criteria for employment of employees of child protection structures and employees working with children"
- CMD No. 465, dated 03.07.2019 "On measures for the protection of children from access to illegal and / or harmful content on the Internet"
- CMD 148 date 13.03.2018 "On the determination of the rules of collaboration between institutional consultative and coordinative mechanisms , child protection structures and not for profit organizations for the implementation of the national and local policies and the necessary services for child protection";
- CMD 636, date 26.10.2018 "For determination of all kind and manners of processing and exchanging of information and statistical data, request form State Agency for Rights and Child Protection, close to responsible state structures, in central and local level";
- CMD 499, date 29.8.2018 "For approval of Standard Operating Procedures for protection of victims and possible victims of trafficking";
- CMD 353 date 12.06.2018 "For rules and functioning of multidisciplinary technical group for child protection in Municipalities and local administrative units";
- CMD 91 date 14.02.2018 "For procedures of controlling and determination of sanctions from State Agency for Rights and Child Protection";

- CMD 578, date 3.10.2018 “ On the procedures of the referral and management of the case , development and content of the Individual Protection Plan financing of the expenses for its implementation as well as implementation of the measures for the protection of children’;
- CMD 54, date 31.1.2018 “For approval of the regulation for the functioning of National Council for the rights and child protection”;
- CMD 108, date 15.2.2017 “For approval of regulation for child protection in working”;
- CMD 573, date 24.6.2015 “For approval of standards services for Child protection Units”;
- CMD 372, date 26.04.2017 “For approval of National Agenda for Children Rights 2017-2020”;
- CMD 195 date 11.04.2007 “For approval of Standards for Residential centers for victims of trafficking”;
- Instruction 14, date 10.5.2016 “For offering of emergency services in the Care Social Institutions, financed by the public state budget that offer residential care services for vulnerable children’;
- Instruction 10, date 25.2.2015 “For manners, forms of collaboration and procedures of interventions for the protection of children in dangers for Institutions and the main responsible structures for child protection’;
- National Referral Mechanism for the identification, referral, protection, and improved assistance to victims/potential victims of trafficking – signed on 15.02.2012.

Asylos: How effective is the legislation that exists?

Different and Equal: As mentioned above, in Albania there have been some positive developments in recent years in improving legislation addressing trafficking, the rights of victims of criminal offenses in general, including the position of victims of trafficking. In the framework of the Justice Reform are adopted some laws that regulate special aspects of access to justice, including some specific laws on specific fields and categories, such as the organic laws of justice institutions (law reform package), Law on the Protection of Children Rights, Juvenile Justice Code, amendments to the law on measures against domestic violence, some other laws on the social service reform, etc. This indicates that Albania already has a consolidated practice of legal initiatives that regulate the protection of specific categories.

Despite the progress made, the implementation of this legislation in an effective manner remains a challenge. In addition to other factors, the lack of effectiveness in the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation has also been influenced by the fact that Albania still do not have a dedicated law for the fight against human trafficking and the legislation remains fragmented. In order to improve the effectiveness, there is a need for a special law against trafficking in human beings focused on the protection of victims of trafficking and to increase capacities in terms of professionals and financial resources. The reasons for a specific law against TIP are explained in detail in the Study Report of D&E. The initiative for the new law against human trafficking is part of the National Action Plan⁴ against Human Trafficking (2021-2023) as one of the main measures in the section of drafting and changing legislation. Currently we are waiting for the steps that will be taken by the Government institutionally to continue the process of drafting the new law.

Organization “Different & Equal” has identified some of the advantages of a special law for the protection of victims of trafficking, please refer to: Different & Equal, “[Study Report on the Need of Drafting a Special Law for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Albania](#)”, 24 October 2019. In particular:

⁴ National Action Plan against Human Trafficking (2021 – 2023): <https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/VKM-nr-670-date-10.11.2021-Plani-Kombetar-Antitrafik-2021-2023.pdf>

- *“It serves as a framework law integrating and complementing all actions to protect victims of trafficking, prevent and fight trafficking in human beings, giving better solution to the lack of reference to various acts regulating specific aspects of the Anti-Trafficking field;*
- *It serves as an instrument to guarantee effective protection with a pro-victim approach;*
- *It clearly defines the responsible structures and mechanisms for the protection of victims of trafficking and highlights the many efforts and actions taken in this regard;*
- *It improves coordination of efforts, structures and mechanisms in protecting victims of trafficking, preventing and fighting trafficking in human beings;*
- *It serves to create a state compensation scheme for victims of trafficking and fills legal gaps in compensation through litigation;*
- *It provides better protection for victims of trafficking, by promoting and enhancing their cooperation with law enforcement agencies, which directly affects the progress of investigating and adjudicating cases related to trafficking in human beings;*
- *It improves the process of formal identification of victims of trafficking, as it promotes proactive identification and self-identification of victims themselves;*
- *It also resolves the situation of determining the status of victims of trafficking, providing for an administrative and judicial appeal mechanism that is missing and is not even resolved in standard operating procedures.”*

Asylos: Is there judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked?

Different and Equal: In light of GRETA’s recommendation to include a specific non-punishment provision, in 2013, a new amendment was made to the Albanian Criminal Code. Article 52/a of the Criminal Code provides that victims of Trafficking in Human Beings may be exempted from punishment if they were forced to commit an illegal act or to refrain from action during the period in which they were trafficked.

Asylos: Is there an ‘implementation gap’ between legislation and what happens in reality?

Different and Equal: It seems that there is a marked difference between what is written and foreseen in the laws and the implementation in practice. More specifically, regarding the legislation that regulates the fight against trafficking and the protection of victims, it has been confirmed by various international reports that Albania has problems related to the implementation of the law in practice. Some of the influencing factors in this direction are:

- Lack of adequate human resources to deal with trafficking and to guarantee effective protection for victims of trafficking (There are no permanent specialists in key positions and the high turnover of professional cause the lack of knowledge about the phenomenon of trafficking);
- High level of poverty and lack of economic growth in society;
- During the last years, the recent events in Albania related to the earthquake of 2019, COVID 19, as well as the political situation, have caused a decrease of vigilance toward trafficking in human being, as well as the fight against human trafficking not being considered a priority.

Asylos: Is there a witness protection programme? If yes, how effective is it?

Different and Equal: The witness protection programme is regulated by the Law No. 10/173 of October, 22, 2009, “On the Protection of Witnesses and Persons Collaborating with Justice”. The Witness Protection Directorate is tasked with protecting witnesses and persons collaborating with justice. The protection envisaged includes measures such as providing a new identity and change of residence. The decision to place a person in the protection programme is taken by a committee made up of the Deputy Minister of the Interior, an officer from the Serious Crimes Directorate of the

police, a prosecutor from the Serious Crime Prosecutor's Office and a judge from the First Instance Court for Serious Crimes. In practice, this programme is still seldom used. Only two victims of human trafficking in Albania have benefitted from this protection programme (one case in 2012 and another case in 2018).

Asylos: How effective are the following institutions at providing protection to victims of trafficking:

- a) police
- b) judiciary
- c) other state authorities

Different and Equal: According to the Albanian legislation, victims of trafficking and potential victims of traffickers benefit from all the services as victims of trafficking until the determination of their final status or until their full reintegration even in the absence of determination of status as victims of trafficking. Victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking receive a full package of services consisting of: Housing, food, clothing; Psycho-social counselling; Continuous medical assistance; Assistance for re-entering the school system; Professional training; Advice and assistance for employment; Income-generating work programs; Development of life skills; Mentoring; Advice and legal protection; Mediation with the family; Information on services, rights, opportunities, etc. As mentioned in the comments above, the responsible institutions are not at the needed level in terms of their effectiveness in protecting the victims of trafficking. Although trainings have been developed and there are special structures, the Police does not properly respect service standards and does not provide sufficient security for victims of trafficking. In most cases, the police is also the first contact with victims of trafficking, and as the survivors of trafficking say, there is a lack of human treatment and care from the police. A factor that affects this direction is the fact that there is no stability in the police structures. Many employees who have been trained to work with victims of trafficking are replaced by other employees without experience.

Despite the legal improvements that have been made in recent years, even the justice institutions are not managing to properly fulfil the needs of the victims of trafficking for protection and respect for their legal rights. Justice institutions, including the Courts, the Prosecutor's Office and the Police, continue to have a mentality and behaviour oriented towards the perpetrator and less towards the victim.

Based on joint work by D&E and other members of the NCATS, we identified the following information: Based on NCATS information, related to access to justice, despite the legal improvements, the practical implementation of new law no. 111/2017 "On legal aid guaranteed by the state", toward the victims of trafficking remain a challenge. The law requires the completion of a procedure with certain requests for documents, which cannot be provided by victims of trafficking, both for primary legal aid and secondary legal aid. NGOs authorized to provide free legal aid will benefit from the state scheme only for providing primary legal aid and not for the secondary legal aid that a trafficking victim needs most. The list of lawyers engaged in providing secondary legal aid does not represent a group of lawyers specialized in representing and protecting the interests of the victims of trafficking. The recent changes (law no 35/2017) to the Criminal Procedure Code related to the competence of dealing with cases of trafficking, which has passed to the Prosecutor's Offices and District Courts, has made the work of providing free legal assistance difficult because there is a lack of specialized capacities and structures at the district level to guarantee such service.

Asylos: What is the conviction rate for trafficking?

Different and Equal: Please refer to D&E's submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Different and Equal, [Input for the Special Rapporteur's report on "contemporary](#)

[forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities](#)”, February 2022.

Asylos: What State measures are in place to prevent trafficking of men, women and children?

Different and Equal: The anti-trafficking structures: There is the Anti-Trafficking National Coordinator Office in Albania, where the National Coordinator is represented by the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs. The special anti-trafficking department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs is the secretariat of the special anti-trafficking body. The special anti-trafficking body includes 9 government bodies. All these government bodies have access to the trafficking case database, but the main data entry is done by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Efforts to coordinate work between state institutions and civil society organizations have materialized with the Cooperation Agreement on the functioning of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims and potential victims of trafficking signed by 15 organizations, including government bodies, international organizations, and NGOs. The NRM includes assistance to both Albanian citizens who have been trafficked domestically or abroad, as well as to foreign victims who have been exploited in Albania. The agreement clearly stipulates the duties of each party according to the field of responsibility for intervening to identify and protect victims of trafficking. Article 7 of the agreement defines the role of the Responsible Authority as the structure that guides the implementation of the agreement and Article 8 “Monitoring and coordination of the agreement” refers the National Coordinator as the institution reporting periodically on its progress and the role of the Anti-Trafficking Unit as the technical secretariat of the Task Force monitoring this agreement.

There are several measures in place to prevent trafficking of men, women and children:

- Albania has a national hotline: 116006, which operates 24/7, as well as 4 shelters, one of which is funded by the government, but managed by non-profit NGO. (The National Reception Center for Victims of Trafficking (NRCVT) is 100% financed by the State Budget and is dependent on the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. NRCVT cooperates with 3 other NGOs that manage residential centers for VoT and is part of the Coalition of Anti-Traffic Shelters).
- Non-profit NGOs receive funding from both the state and donors. Mostly the U.S., British, German, and Swiss governments.
- Albania has agreements and supplementary agreements with 6 countries (including Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and the UK) that clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, as well as anti-trafficking procedures.
- Ongoing anti-trafficking training and education for the prosecutor’s office and the labor inspection are underway.

Asylos: Is there a child protection system? How effective is the child protection system in protecting children from trafficking or re-trafficking? Are there adequate provisions, particularly accommodation and social care, for children who do not have parental care?

Different and Equal: Up to the Law 18/2017 “On the Rights and Protection of the Child”, is the main structure for the rights and protection of the child in central level is the Minister coordinating the work on issues for the rights and protection of the child. Please refer to an academic paper by Tandili for more information: Tandili, A, “[Institutional Mechanisms for the Rights and Protection of the Child in Albania, Their Practical Operation](#)”, European Journal of Social Science Education and Research, September – December 2021 Volume 8, Issue 3.

The State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child is the authority responsible for guaranteeing the functioning of the integrated protection system for unaccompanied children,

inside and outside the territory of Albania. In cases where Albanian families leave their children abroad with the hope that the children will be able to obtain the nationality of the country and/or access education and work, the State Agency works with the families to find a solution but often has to place the children in shelters or foster families. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 111 of 6 March 2019 "On procedures and rules for the return and repatriation of children" aims to guarantee the rights of unaccompanied children and provide them with the highest possible protection, through the creation of an integrated system of protection and efficient coordination of all state institutions and non-profit organisations.

The situation on child trafficking in Albania remains problematic. Referring to the GRETA Report for Albania 2020 the proportion of child victims of trafficking remains high (around 48%). Children are mainly exploited in begging by their parents or close relatives, or trafficked for the purpose of committing criminal activities, including work on cannabis farms in Albania. Children from the Roma and Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. There has been an increase in the number of Albanian children subjected to forced labour in Kosovo and the UK. Some Albanian children who travelled with their parents to the Netherlands, France and Germany were reportedly left there unaccompanied and vulnerable to exploitation.

Asylos: What limitations are there in respect of existing prevention measures?

Different and Equal: The phenomenon of trafficking always remains complex and actions for prevention must be continuous. In the following, awareness campaigns were developed and in this direction it is worth highlighting the areas of the anti-trafficking month of October that takes place every year in the framework of the European day against trafficking. It has now become a tradition that all Institutions in cooperation with civil society work together by drawing up a plan of activities at the national level, coordinated by the Minister of the Interior - the Office of the National Coordinator against human trafficking. The most common activities are information sessions in schools or with other vulnerable groups to inform them about the causes and consequences of trafficking. Despite these [anti-trafficking] efforts, not enough is being done to have more results and stability in the prevention of trafficking. At the local level, there are more difficulties due to the lack of capacities.

Asylos: Do victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted?

Different and Equal: Regarding to the compensation of victims of trafficking, the following information was included in a joint submission by D&E along with other members of the NCATS to the US Department of State in preparation for the 2023 Trafficking in Persons report: Based on NCATS information:

Albanian legislation provides for two forms of compensation for victims of trafficking, through the judicial process against the perpetrators and the state scheme.

- Compensation through the judicial process is regulated in the Criminal Procedure Code - Article 61 of the CPC regulates the filing of a civil lawsuit in the criminal process, while Articles 625 and 644 of the Civil Code regulate the procedure for filing a civil lawsuit after the end of the criminal process.
- Compensation through the state scheme is regulated in the law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009 "On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against property", changed. The law, also provides for the establishment of a Special Fund as a source for the compensation of victims of trafficking, but which has not yet been implemented in practice.

Unfortunately, both of these forms have not yet become effective.

In order to improve the situation, D&E has recommended that the Agency of the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets (AASCA) to be part of the NRM. AASCA is a very important institution that has actually started to support with funding programs and projects for the protection of victims of trafficking. By including AASCA as an NRM member, its role and contribution could be increased in order to use the special fund and other assets for financing the needs of victims of trafficking, including compensation for victims of trafficking.

Asylos: How, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking?

Different and Equal: The level of corruption in Albania remains a concern and directly affects any aspect of the life of citizens, including the victims of trafficking.

Asylos: Is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

Different and Equal: Law enforcement institutions do not report on direct connections between traffickers and employees of public institutions. However, referring to the report of the US Department of State - Trafficking in Persons Report 2022 *“The government reported permanently dismissing a police officer for “prostitution and maintaining a brothel,” and in 2020, the government suspended five police officials, including the Director of the Border and Emigration Directorate of Tirana and three chiefs of units, after media reported a story alleging their complicity in an organized trafficking operation. The government conducted an investigation into the officers involved, which is reportedly still under investigation by the Tirana Prosecution Office”*.

Asylos: What is the current capacity of state-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support (whether inside or outside shelters) to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

Different and Equal: The capacity of state-run shelter to provide accommodation is 100 persons, girls and women victims of trafficking of all ages.

Asylos: How many people can they currently support in each of these categories, and how long can they provide the support for?

Different and Equal: The duration of the victims of trafficking in the shelter run by the state depends on the case, mostly when they resolve their security problems that comes from the denunciation towards their traffickers.

Asylos: Are trafficked persons in state-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

Different and Equal: National Reception Center has provided rehabilitation services in shelter. The final goal of these services is rehabilitation and preparation for an independent life.

Asylos: How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

Different and Equal: The state run shelter provides rehabilitation services for victims of trafficking. There are accommodated the cases with high security problems. After their rehabilitation, the victims of trafficking are referred at Different & Equal organization for further services in the reintegration process.

Asylos: What is the current capacity of NGO-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support (whether inside or outside shelters) to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

Different and Equal: The capacity of three NGO-run shelters is 49 VoT/PVoT and 8 children of them. Two shelters accommodate only girls and women victims/potential victims of trafficking. One of these shelters accommodates children VoT/PVoT, both females and male children. The services offered by this shelter are dedicated to PVoTs/ VoTs as minors in a mixed group, composed of male and females of age 6 to 18 years old. The facilities within the shelter are divided for both target groups. For the cases of VoT/PVoT assisted outside of the shelter, each organization assists 80 – 100 cases each year.

Asylos: How many people can they currently support in each of these categories, and how long can they provide the support for?

Different and Equal: The reintegration program is a long-term program. The duration of the beneficiaries in the reintegration program varies from case to case. Some categories of the beneficiaries VoT need to be assisted in the program for a longer period compared with the others. These categories are: minors VoT cases; cases who have denounced the traffickers; cases who have entered in the program accompanied with their children and cases with mental health problems. So, the duration of the cases in reintegration program can go from 2 to 5 years.

Asylos: Are trafficked persons in NGO-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

Different and Equal: The NGO-run shelters provide a full package of reintegration services.

In a joint document developed by the NCATS shelter, we provide an overview of the services available for victims of trafficking throughout three phases of rehabilitation and reintegration (these are the phases that we describe in our “Reintegration Guide for Practitioners⁵):

The reintegration services include: accommodation, security and reintegration plan; medical assistance; psychological assistance; psycho-social assistance; intermediation/facilitation with the family of origin; assistance to education and attending school; legal assistance; vocational training; coaching for employment, counselling and support for employment; social activities, mentoring; services for economic empowerment including grants for microbusiness; assistance to children of victims of trafficking; financial support and long term accommodation; information on available

⁵ Different & Equal, “[Stages of Reintegration of trafficking victims: A reintegration guide for practitioners](#)”, 1 March 2022

services in the community and respective contact information; monitoring and on-going supervision of the beneficiaries of the program.

The reintegration program is divided into three phases, including emergency services, rehabilitation services and long-term services and monitoring during the process of social inclusion.

Phase #1: Crisis intervention and Accommodation

The initial assistance for VoT deal primarily with accommodation of victims of trafficking in the residential center where beneficiaries are provided with basic needs and crisis services - e.g. accommodation, housing, clothing, feeding, medical assistance, psychological assistance, professional trainings, protection and security 24 hours, family mediation, as well as preparation for the next stages of reintegration. In this phase beneficiaries, together with the staff (multidisciplinary team), design and following their individual reintegration plans.

Phase #2: Transition phase including semi-independent living

Most of the beneficiaries are unable to go home because of the mentality and social stigma, security reason or they are rejected by the families so they are therefore provided with a full range of in house assistance in preparation for independent living. The three NGOs provide rented apartments for beneficiaries who have begun to make the important transition into 'normal' life. Adults are supported toward their economic independence - e.g. after completing vocational trainings and maintaining a job for some time, they move out of the shelter and into rented apartments, subsidized by the center. For minors, placements into families of origin and alternative care settings are facilitated. Staff of the center monitors beneficiaries' progress in these half-way houses and families, providing regular psycho-social assistance.

Phase #3: Re/integration and social inclusion

The support given to cases in this phase is to empower them and gradually leave the program. This support consists in: offering reintegration assistance to the family and community where the beneficiary resides; information on resources and services available in the community, assistance to the beneficiaries in strengthening relationships with the support institutions in the community in which they live; and regular case monitoring and follow-up. The services provided for victims of trafficking are not conditional upon victims' cooperation with law enforcement on prosecution.

Asylos: How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

Different and Equal: Please refer to D&E's manual, in particular: "Reintegration after trafficking is a long-term process that takes place over many months and years. The full process of recovery and reintegration (crisis, transition and reintegration and inclusion) generally takes around three years.

Each victim requires a different amount of time to recover and reintegrate after a trafficking experience. Some victims reintegrate successfully within this three-year period. Other trafficking victims may need up to five years to recover from their exploitation and successfully reintegrate."

Each victim of trafficking has professionals focused on them and they are provided with comprehensive assistance that secures their reintegration.

The reintegration program is built in three phases of reintegration with the aim that the transition to independent life for the beneficiaries to come smoothly and gradually. Since at the beginning when the beneficiaries are referred in the program they become aware that this program will help them with their participation and involvement, that they will be helped to help their self for their reintegration towards independent life. The beneficiaries together with the case managers are developing objectives to be realized within each of these phases with the appropriate activities for realizing them within the timeframe. The process is coming by reducing the organization's support in the second and third phase and increasing the self-support of the case.

The organizations work in continuation to ensure access of the victims of trafficking to services including vocational training, employment, and economic empowerment.

The reintegration services are effective as they are based also in some principles of reintegration. They include but are not limited to:

- Individual-focused intervention, making the individual the center of the intervention;
- Developing participatory approach to planning and implementation of intervention
- Attending special needs of beneficiaries;
- Considering the physical, mental and social well-being of the individual as determined and affected by his or her community;
- Promotion of self-dependence and empowerment;
- Taking account of the particular needs of individuals in different parts of the area in which the service is being provided;
- Taking into account of the particular characteristics and circumstances of different individuals;
- Respect for the rights of service-users;
- Taking into account of the dignity of individuals;
- Taking into account of the participation by individuals in the community in which they live;
- Protection and improvement of the safety of service-users;
- Continuous improvement of the quality of the service;
- Making the best use of the available facilities, people and other resources

Asylos: What are the barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services?

Different and Equal: Treatment and referral of beneficiaries with mental health problems is still an issue that creates lots of difficulties. The challenge is the lack of alternatives for long term accommodation and care for the VoT with serious mental health problems due to the gaps in the system.

There are no specific shelters for men victims of trafficking. Males are assisted mostly in rented apartments, in the family of origin or in other alternative placements.

Long-term reintegration of children victims of trafficking is a long and difficult process, because alternative services such as: foster care and specialized services for children are limited.

Asylos: How are NGO shelters funded?

Different and Equal: The organizations funds are mostly international donors based on projects proposal application. They are supported financially also by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to cover the salaries of employees who work with victims of trafficking and the food for shelter on yearly basis.

Asylos: Is funding for support services permanent or time-limited?

Different and Equal: Funding for support services is time-limited based on project proposals applied to different donors with different timeline.

Asylos: What factors affect funding being interrupted? When funding ceases or is interrupted, what impact does this have on service provision?

Different and Equal: The factors are: changes in the donors' agenda, *the constantly shifting priorities*. When funding is interrupted, they impact the service provision in limiting the services, the quality of services decreases, the staff will be reduced.

Asylos: To what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? Is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking (sex trafficking,

forced labour, forced criminality, forced begging)?

Different and Equal: Please refer to our 2015 report regarding trafficked boys, in particular the following passage, in relation to trafficking for sexual exploitation: “Those who were sexually exploited are not ready to talk openly to police about their trafficking experience. Some of them fear the prejudices and stigma that may accompany this process, the fear that somebody from their family may come in contact with what has happened and the fear that they may know their different sexual orientation in some cases. Also, the topic of abuse or sexual exploitation of boys is considered as a cultural taboo for many societies, and for the boys it is extremely difficult to share this painful experience. In many cases, they decide to remain silent and to consider this trauma as a dark and unexplored part of their past. Self-blame amongst the boys: According to the experience of the service providers, there are many boys that blame themselves for what has happened to them. In addition, we should take into consideration the assumptions about homosexuality when involved in prostitution (confusion amongst boys).”

Asylos: What barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face to finding employment in Albania?

Different and Equal: For information on employment, refer to a July 2022 report by UNICEF Albania on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors.⁶

Asylos: What support is available in finding employment? Does it include professional training or job placements?

Different and Equal: Economic empowerment is in the focus of D&E's daily work with trafficking and gender based violence survivors. D&E supports the beneficiaries of the program in their efforts to enter into the labor market, through guidance and support through employment counseling and career development.

Beneficiaries are trained individually and in groups by supporting, advising and providing information on how to prepare to enter into the labor market.

In these meetings girls and women learn practical skills on how to write a CV, a letter of interest and how to prepare for a job interview.

Through training, D&E staff work to provide them with professional career and educational advice, as well as to help them organize their thoughts, interests and skills. They are supported to be registered as jobseeker at Office of Employments and the support continues until:

- To start a vocational course/training
- To conduct an internship
- To start a small business
- To purchase the necessary materials to start income generation activities
- To find an appropriate employment

D&E has a strong collaboration with Offices of Employment and private companies/businesses in order to:

- Register the program beneficiaries as unemployed jobseekers
- Counsel for employment
- Involve in employment promotion program as an employment for program beneficiaries
- Find safe and appropriate jobs

⁶ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022

- Generate new employment opportunities

Asylos: What kinds of employment are they able to find, if any? And how do their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

Different and Equal: They can find jobs according their level of education and professional skills. They can be employed as cook assistant, tailoring, pizza delivery, advertisement delivery, supermarket workers, sales in small shops, operators in call centre, waiters, bartenders, babysitter, painter, working in shoes factory, workers in trade centres, workers in carwash, car parking, pizza splitter, hairdressers and cleaners etc. Most of them receive only the minimum wage and have difficulty in making ends meet.

Asylos: What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

Different and Equal: The unemployment rate in Albania, in 2021, is 11.5%. This means that around 163,000 people are unemployed. The unemployment rate is 11.3% for men and 11.8% for women. (See INSTAT, "[Unemployment in Albania](#)", undated)

Asylos: What social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Different and Equal: In Albania, there is the National Program for Recuperation and Reintegration of Trafficked Persons. Albania has a separate service that deals with children with special needs. Assistance is provided to all women whose children are under the age of five. There is a state social fund that finances the activities of various centres to help vulnerable people, including funding for shelters. The State Social Service has its own social workers. They identify and assess the needs of victims of trafficking and work in partnership with non-profit NGOs. There are four shelters that accept trafficked persons – one of them is state and 3 are non-profit NGOs. A trafficked person may receive the whole range/list of services that he/she needs. The social service participates in all stages of identification. After a trafficked person leaves the shelter, he/she receives a 100\$ per month during one year.

The difficulties in accessing the package of services for victims of trafficking are firstly based on the fact that only a small number of victims manage to be identified and receive services. The other difficulty comes from the fear that the victims have to be identified as such because of the prejudice and stigmatization that society does to them. Unfortunately, there are cases when the victims are also prejudiced by the employees of different institutions. For this purpose, more work should be done with the awareness raising activities for the society as well as for the improvement of the system so that it enables services for the victims of trafficking even while hiding their profile as victims.

Asylos: What housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Different and Equal: Through municipalities, state cover the rent (rent bonus procedures) for the residence for one year for victims of crimes, including victims of trafficking.

In 2018, the law "On Social Housing" was approved (law 22/2018), which provides for several forms of housing for victims of trafficking and other vulnerable groups. The law provides these mechanisms for solving the problem of housing for victims of trafficking:

- **Rent subsidy** (article 34-35 of the law) - As a rule, it is carried out from the income of the local self-government unit. Rent subsidy can also be done by the central government,

according to the provisions of point 3, of article 35, of this law, where victims of trafficking are also beneficiaries;

- **Program for the improvement of housing conditions** (Article 43) - Families/individuals who lack suitable housing, including victims of trafficking, benefit from the program for the improvement of housing conditions, as well as from improvement to new construction;
- **Specialized apartments for victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and victims of domestic violence** (Article 60) - Specialized apartments for victims of trafficking/potential victims of trafficking and victims of domestic violence are equipped with the service of employees of social specialists and are protected (under supervision) by State Police employees in cases of danger to life and health. These categories benefit from the specialized housing program until they are provided with the benefit from one of the other social housing programs.

In practice, for the cases of victims of trafficking followed by D&E, it is possible to benefit only from the rent subsidy program and this only for some of the big municipalities, because there are not enough funds in other municipalities. While other programs have not yet been implemented.

Asylos: Does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Different and Equal: The state provides assistance in employment and training in the skills needed for employment. Economic empowerment remains the biggest challenge in the process of reintegration of victims of trafficking into society. According to the reintegration program, victims are assisted by various initiatives to enable a kind of economic empowerment and financial independence that will guarantee their full reintegration into society. D&E in collaboration with public institutions, such as Vocational Training Centers and Employment Offices, including business, work to enable victims to be able to find and maintain a job. The forms of employment are different, through employment offices, businesses or even through the support of the start-ups of the victims themselves.

The biggest difficulties for the employment of victims of trafficking lie in their vulnerability, with a low level of education and without work experience. Although it is possible to find a job in one of the ways mentioned above, it is very difficult to have persistence in carrying out the work position. In addition to the lack of skills for work, the premises where the victims work are difficult to accept, and when the victims tell their history of trafficking, they feel that employers are very prejudiced.

Asylos: What mental healthcare services are available to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

Different and Equal: After evaluating the case, if there is mental health or other problems, it is referred to the relevant specialists. In the field of mental health, the psychiatrist makes the diagnosis and gives the medication. The case can also be treated with psychotherapy and pills.

Some of the other forms of support for people suffering from mental health are community centers and supportive homes.

The network of mental health services consists of:

- a. Primary health care services;
- b. Specialized outpatient services;

- c. Community-based mental health services, such as: Community mental health centres; Multidisciplinary mobile teams; Day care centres; Supported houses for 8 former chronic patients of psychiatric hospitals; Supported houses for psychotic patients; Recreational centre; etc;
- d. Mental health services with beds;
- e. Special Medical Institutions.

Asylos: What physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? Are these adequate to meet their needs?

Different and Equal: The public healthcare service is organized at the primary, secondary, and tertiary service levels. Approximately 413 public healthcare clinics offer primary and secondary healthcare services and 42 public hospitals offer tertiary healthcare services. Pharmaceutical and dental services are almost entirely private.

The D&E doctor assesses the medical needs of the new cases entered in the program and addressed and treated the medical needs of all the beneficiaries of the program and their children. For each new case entered into the program, routine analyzes such as complete blood, biochemical balance, and also abdominal echo, graph and other more specific examinations are done in cases of need. With the support of the Ministry of Health and social protection every beneficiaries VoT and potential VoT are equipped with health card / Free medical assistance (family doctor/ specialist doctors). Cases that encountered health problems are referred to relevant specialists and are treated with medications. Most frequent health problems encountered by the beneficiaries were mainly infectious (viral, bacterial and fungal), dermatological, ocular, dental and gynaecological, etc. For some cases medication are reimbursed from the state and for some others medication are provided from organization.

Asylos: What problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

Different and Equal: Victims may have security problems and problems with their transportation from one place to another.

Asylos: Are trafficking victims able to avoid their traffickers by relocating to another part of Albania?

Different and Equal: Albania is a small country and it is not easy to escape the traffickers by moving to different places in Albania

Asylos: Do traffickers find victims of trafficking who internally relocate? What methods do they use?

Different and Equal: There are several methods for finding victims, using personal social messages and their search through social networks.

Asylos: What issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

Different and Equal: The victims of trafficking who are not referred in the reintegration programs and do not have access to the services might be at risk of re-trafficking.

Even the victims of trafficking who stay in the programme a short period and they decide to leave the programme (as the program is on a voluntary basis), they are in risky situations, and at risk of being re-trafficked.

Different and Equal Beneficiary

And individual with lived experience of trafficking and receiving rehabilitation and reintegration services from Different and Equal was interviewed for this research. To protect their identity, their real name has not been used and no personal information, beyond that which the beneficiary chose to disclose in the interview, has been included.

The interview was conducted by a Different and Equal member of staff on behalf of Asylos, and written responses were submitted to Asylos.

Transcript of interview conducted by Different and Equal with a Beneficiary, based on questions provided by Asylos – interview transcript received 29 June 2023

Asylos: Can you tell me about your experience of rehabilitation and reintegration in general within Albanian society?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: When I came in Albania, D&E staff came to the airport to pick me up. At the beginning I was very confused, because I didn't know them. D&E helped me a lot to reintegrate into society, my family not so much. It is almost 4 years that I am part of D&E program and thanks to their support I have reached everything I have now. When I decided to go to my city I thought that everything will be easy because my family was there, and with their support my life will change for better, but the opposite happened. I stayed for about 1 year there and all this year I received support from D&E organization. Then I decided to move to Tirana, I was accommodated in the shelter. I felt very comfortable there I was together with my son, in a very nice and safe place, I had time to find a job, a kinder house for my son, and to do many other things that at that time I needed so much.

Asylos: What have you found helpful for the process of rehabilitation and reintegration?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: In fact I wanted the best for myself but alone it was impossible. I was lucky being a beneficiary of the D&E organization and profit a lot from their services. D&E staff supported me in many ways, I received all the support I needed at that difficult situation, like psychological counselling, medical support, legal assistance, participation in many activities, trainings, finding a job, enrolling my son in the kindergarten etc. I tried hard to work with myself to change my life for the better.

Asylos: Have you experienced any general challenges in terms of your rehabilitation and reintegration within Albanian society? If so, what were these challenges?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: There were many challenges and I don't know where to start. The first challenge was when I returned to Albania, my family didn't accept me, they prioritized the mentality of community and did not see the pain of their child - this was the biggest challenge. Then the second challenge was the place where I lived, there were no job opportunities, the stigmatization... I don't want to remember anything from that time because at this moment we are talking, I am very well, I have passed that phase - I made it...imagine how difficult it was to be in the same city with your family and you see them in the market they did not speak to you. We saw each other almost every day. Now things are different, I talk with them. I'm not far from them, they're not present in everything I do, they feel comfortable with the people around them - telling them that I got married, live with my husband, and all this is for them to have a good image in the community. They can come and visit me but without interfering in my life.

Asylos: What kind of support have you received to find employment? Has this included any professional training or job placements?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: I have been involved in several trainings that were conducted by the job coordinator like: counseling for employment, how to write a CV, how to apply for a job, how to introduce myself in any working place and how to use a computer. I attended one-month training for hotelier - tourism, and also I am certified as a pizza maker. I also practiced and worked as a tailor, D&E supported me with supplies for tailoring: sewing machine, clothes - meter, iron. I worked at home. I also was connected with companies that worked in our area that supported me. It was a good opportunity for me at that time. I grew up economically and professionally with my job as a tailor. At the beginning I wasn't good enough with sewing, but with practice and my desire to do my best I became professional. From this work I could cover a lot of my expenses; I paid water and electricity bills and other expenses. It also affected me very positively both personally and emotionally.

Asylos: What kinds of employment would you like to find?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: I have applied for some job placement in state institutions, but it is very difficult. Some years ago I very much liked to work in the elderly house to support them for their daily activities, they need our care. Recently I worked for 6 months in the kindergarten with kids. I really felt very good with them, maybe because I am a new mother myself. I really like this kind of job.

Asylos: What challenges have you experienced in finding employment?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: There are a lot. The moment you apply and they call you - when you tell them that you have a child, they change their attitude, they don't like it when you have other commitments. It should be the opposite in fact, for us as single mothers. As such it is very difficult to find an apartment and a job. In fact they should offer us more opportunities, support, and not having a child it's an obstacle in the process of our reintegration. There are also situations when one job is presented to you, and when you go to work, in reality it's a completely different job - this part disappointed me.

Asylos: What kinds of social assistance have you received? For example, housing assistance, living costs?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: Since 2019 I have been part of D&E organization, I received a lot of services. In the beginning D&E supported me with rent of the apartment, food packages for about 1 year, psychosocial counseling for me and my son, legal counselling and support, medical assistance, and provided me with necessary materials to run my tailoring at home, etc. I received financial support from government for my son through the orphan status, I received economic aid from municipality as a victim of trafficking and also I benefited from the social housing in the Municipality through receiving financial bonus for the rent of my apartment.

Asylos: Have you found this assistance helpful? If so, how has it been helpful?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: It has been a great help to me, D&E gave me great support to get out from the difficult situation in which I was. It's due to the work done by the organization, services provided to me and everything they did made me the person I am today. If D&E hadn't given me a hand I wouldn't be where I am now, I wouldn't have had the strength to face things alone - I didn't have that strength... now I feel stronger and empowered.

Asylos: Have you experienced any challenges in relation to social assistance (for example, difficulties accessing help with housing, living costs etc)?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: Yes, I have. During this time, regarding the bonus for the rent I receive from the municipality, they are not correct with the payments, sometimes they do not transfer money in time, and sometimes they do not transfer the exact amount. This is a big challenge because you don't feel economically secure and you will have problems with the owner of the property. In addition to this, having a modest salary you could not afford the daily expenses because of the high prices. Another difficulty is finding someone that agrees to make an official contract for the rent of the apartment. You must have someone you know to help you with this part.*

*[*In further written clarifications, Asylos asked whether the beneficiary meant they needed a guarantor, when they stated "You must have someone you know to help you with this part". A representative of Different and Equal responded as follows:*

"Referring to this, the official notarized contract is required to complete the documents to benefit from the lease bonus (one of the municipality's housing programs). Many apartment owners do not want to make this contract for various reasons, and for this reason the beneficiaries encounter difficulties in completing the documents to benefit from the housing programs in the municipality where they live. During this period the rent of the apartment is paid by the organization (D&E)."

Source: Different and Equal, further written communication, 20 November 2023]

Asylos: Were you able to access adequate physical and mental healthcare services, if you needed to use them?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: Yes, I have. D&E supported me with medical assistance, medicines for me and my son. I also have been registered and equipped with a health card from the government health care centre. I did several tests for me and my son – and for a 6 month period I received support for a specific treatment of my son.

Asylos: Did you experience any challenges?

Different and Equal: Medical services and buying medicines are really a challenge in itself as not all medicines can be received through the health card. Without the support of D&E I could not afford to buy the medicines, they are very expensive.

Asylos: Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience of rehabilitation and reintegration in Albania?

Different and Equal Beneficiary: Besides all the difficulties that I have gone through, I feel happy that I am here today. I also am very happy that I accept D&E's support, and tried to use in my best interest every service that you have given to me. I am very happy to know you and without your support I don't know how I would have managed my situation. I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life. THANK YOU!

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

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. The information provided by Ana Majko for the purposes of this research is based on both an interview conducted by Asylos, and, due to time constraints at the

time of the interview, subsequent written responses to a number of questions that could not be covered during the interview. For further information about Ana Majko, please see her full bio [Annex 5](#) on p.146.

Interview transcript – interview conducted 19 June 2023

Asylos: Okay. Brilliant. So first off, I would like to ask a bit about the profiles of victims of trafficking and risk factors. So the first question is, what are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania? And what are the risk factors associated with being trafficked?

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

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

Asylos: Yeah. Can I ask what's the age of legal or criminal responsibility?

NISMA ARSIS: After 14. So up to 14, you can be not prosecuted legally.

Asylos: Just thinking a bit more about the trafficker profiles and recruitment methods. What are the profiles of traffickers in Albania and their recruitment methods? I realize you've touched on it a bit with the online sexual exploitation, but if you have--

NISMA ARSIS: I think it's increased way on how they have changed the way how they identify the potential one. If they write to someone and someone responds, this is the easy way how they can potentially identify vulnerable cases who be in contact with. The second one is the street, I think. So they are very vigilant on identifying children. We have a lot of children in street situation unfortunately still, even though we have a lot of new mechanism trying to support the system and work on that. But still we have a high number of children in street situation. A part of them are from Roma and Egyptian communities. But I can say that it's direct contact. So from the street situation is from the peer to peer. For example, if someone is part of a network, they can

invite other friends and other children to be part of the network who they are friends with and online. So I think these are three main-- so I don't know if schools-- it's not my opinion, so I don't have statistics on that, but I think that if you are abandoning schools and you are not potentially being part of the school like in usual day and you are around school. So I think this is a new way of how they identify children that have this potential of vulnerability, I can say.

Asylos: Okay. So that would be children who aren't attending lessons but they're somehow hanging around the school.

NISMA ARSIS: Yes. Yes. At risk of abandoning school. Not so interested about school, so they find this way on potentially being recruited from them.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then I've got a few questions about trafficking prevalence. And I understand that your expertise is around children. So don't worry if it's difficult to answer some of these. But my first two questions are, what is the prevalence of trafficking of boys and men in Albania, and what is the prevalence of trafficking of women and girls in Albania?

NISMA ARSIS: It's a very good question, but I don't have a response, and no one can respond to you in Albania in statistics, unfortunately. Because if we talk officially, we don't have officially data or indicators published that you can refer to. This is, I think, maybe needs to be in all the sectors where the children are-- where the social services are provided. There is somehow an improvement on how they track, identify to whom they serve. But I think the trafficking, we still do not have a database or a dashboard of statistics on how many trafficked children or adults we have. This is sure. But I can say from our work in House of Colors in the emergency shelter and in our daily services we provide for these groups with our partners like UNICEF is that, in average, we have 15 to 20 cases per year, children, who majority of them are potential victims of trafficking. Not all of them have the status of trafficking, but potential victims, meaning that they have some risks or indicators that are related to trafficking. For example, children in street situation or children who has been identified from police cooperation with us as potential victims of trafficking. I think that there is no difference between males and females, so between girls and boys. In this case, we had cases of women and girls, and we have also cases of boys identified as victims of trafficking. So there is not a big discrepancy or difference between them. And I can say that the number has been increased after the COVID situation. Maybe the reporting has been increased. Not that there has been less before, but maybe the reporting has been increased.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you for that. And just in terms of your expertise around boys and girls - and your impression is that the numbers are fairly similar between boys and girls - I just wondered, is there any types of trafficking that boys respectively and girls respectively are more associated with? So for example, forced labor, sex trafficking, forced criminality, forced begging?

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

Asylos: Thank you. There are some other questions on prevalence, but they are about other communities, so LGBTQI, Roma, Egyptian, persons with disabilities. Would you be able to answer any of those, do you think, or would you prefer to skip?

NISMA ARSIS: No. I think that we made a joint study in 2014. It's a very old study for now. We are like nine years later. But it's the only one who has official data, which somehow showed that, unfortunately, the majority of children identified as-- children in street situations because we have more experience with, but it's not only that. And children victims has been more children from Roma and Egyptian communities, unfortunately. So like a high proportion of them. I now believe that in 2023, there is not such a big difference on ethnicity in terms of being exploited or victims of trafficking. There are children from Roma and Egyptian communities, for sure, but also there are cases of-- majority, not Roma. So there is not such a big difference. Before, yes, but still, in street situation, high percentages from Roma and Egyptian communities as they are the most vulnerable groups still in Albania living in suburb areas, in poor conditions. And there is a high potential risk of being exploited in the street. But not only. There are children from rural areas, for example, who have come to the capital of Tirana from rural area, from other municipalities, who has been transferred recently, living in very-- we called suburb areas but these are informal areas without not social organize, with a lack of social services. So the larger those communities are, the higher the risk of being exploited or becoming victims of trafficking.

Asylos: Thank you. And have you had any-- do you have any information about the proportion of children, potential victims of trafficking, who may fall into the category of having disabilities or being from the LGBTQI community?

NISMA ARSIS: What I know is, from the cases we have cooperated with another organization who were working with LGBT cases, is that most of the cases of LGBTIQ are sexual exploited. I don't have the information if how is the percentage, but there are cases.

Asylos: Of children as well?

NISMA ARSIS: We can call children because, children, we call up to 18. So maybe they'd be adolescents who have somehow defined orientation because they are still in this exploration of their sexual orientation, and maybe this has been part of their vulnerability and part of risk of exploited by the other people. But in terms of trafficked children with disabilities, we have no information at all. In our work, we don't have any case identified from us. But we don't have a knowledge, even on profile of children with disabilities in Albania or other groups with disability victims of trafficking.

There just isn't the data.

There is no data about that. Even any study or specific information about that. It's a very good point, I think, and need to be explored in the near future, but no specific data on that.

Asylos: Thank you. And just as a last question on prevalence, among the children that you see, do you have a sense of which types of trafficking are most common? So whether that's--

NISMA ARSIS: As I mentioned, [among trafficked minors, it's more sexual trafficking], unfortunately, in terms of group age like adolescence. In youngsters, it's exploitation in the street for begging and selling, so begging, selling, and washing cars. Still there is this situation. Before, it's been also informal parking, but with the new regulation of the municipality, that is not possible anymore. So begging, selling small products in the traffic lights and in the main streets, and also substance abuse distribution.

Asylos: Right. Yeah.

For sure. Especially near schools or near central areas.

Asylos: And you mentioned a 2019 study. Was that by NISMA ARSIS?

NISMA ARSIS: Study was made in 2014. It was made by UNICEF and Save the Children together. But they contracted us for the field work for the research.

Asylos: Brilliant. Okay. I will email you after this then.

NISMA ARSIS: Yeah. Also, there are some studies made by UNICEF. I can share it with you because they have-- I would suggest you to contact them because they have a UK program in Albania for trafficking specifically and tracking children. And also mothers with children. So they have a big program, three-year program. They started this year, the new one, the new phase. So I think they have made a lot of research, analysis, have supported services work with the government for that approach. So you will have, maybe, a better approach, especially on the system in overall.

Asylos: That would be brilliant. Thank you for the recommendation. Okay, then. So moving on from prevalence and thinking about recognition as a victim of trafficking. I have one question on this which is, if a person has been recognized or a child has been recognized as a trafficking victim by the UK National Referral Mechanism, will they automatically be recognized as a trafficking victim by the Albanian National Referral Mechanism and then therefore able to access support?

NISMA ARSIS: I don't know if there is an agreement between two countries for that because there should be somehow a legal framework who can define that cooperation. But still, even though if the child is in UK or victims of trafficking, when they are in Albania, they should be proceed according to our internal procedures. We have a SOP document that is approved in 2018 and then revise again and again, but the main document that is the DCM 499 - I can share it with you - where it is defined the set of indicators to have the status of victims of trafficking or potential victims of trafficking. So we have a very good regulation on that and very good, all well-defined procedures who entitles and defines when a child or an adult is a victim for trafficking. And for sure, I do believe that if in UK, they fulfill all the indicators, they have this status of victims of trafficking. And when they came in Albania, I think this indicator will be quite the same because there is a reason why they have the status. And they have from our internal procedures in Albania-- for example, in Albania, we have a child protection unit who is responsible in municipality level for interview of the child and defining status together with police. And if, during their first assessment template they have to fulfill, for sure fits with the indicators of that, they get the status immediately and all the dedicated services. But to have immediately the status, I think that should be an agreement, and I'm not aware of that agreement.

But still, if they came in Albania, they should be-- we had to know the child, for example, in order to get, again, the same status. Meaning for me, having the status, meaning that you have a knowledge of the needs of the situation of the child in order for them to provide the protection and all the necessary services. For sure, they should be part of an assessment process in order to have an individual protection plan and all the necessary services they need.

Asylos: Thank you. And then just moving on to think about trafficking-related legislation. The first question is, what's the legal framework in Albania in--?

NISMA ARSIS: For children specifically, we have the Law on Child Rights and Protection No. 18/2017. So this is a dedicated law in children who trafficking is part of. Every child who is identified as victims of trafficking, he is in care of the state authorities or the Child Protection Unit with all the legal procedures to be-- it's very well-regulated, I can think. Also, the SOP I mentioned before, 499, it was re-signed after a revision in June 2023. It's a document which is in line with the national strategy of anti-trafficking in Albania and which defines specifically for the cases of children who are victims of trafficking all the procedures which are in line with the Law on Child Rights and Protection, and orientates the local authorities and national authorities on how to proceed and protect, provide services, so for prevention, protection, and prosecution

then of cases of children. So it's very well, I think, regulated. I can talk later about the gaps that in paper and in structures. I think that we have all the necessary types of law procedures and structures.

Asylos: Thank you. That's super comprehensive. And yeah, I do have some questions about the gaps as well in a minute. But firstly, I just wanted to ask about how effective you think the legislation is that exists.

NISMA ARSIS: There have been a lot of efforts to improve the legislation in centers. A lot of efforts from international organizations. Again from the state has been this kind of willingness to have a process of improvement. I think now we have a very good one. What should be revised, it's the package of services dedicated to the victims and then prosecution. I'm not specialized on prosecution. I know that there are gaps from our networking groups. There are other organizations where a lot of-- focused on that, on how to protect the child in the court, protect the victim after the court proceedings from the traffickers, etc., etc. But in the terms of protection, we are more specialized. I think that mostly what is lacking and what needs to be strengthened and more present is the package of the social services dedicated to victims are not enough. And these need to be regulated in law and then to be further supported by the local authorities which are responsible. Just to explain for you to make an example. For example, the economic aid for the victims of trafficking is only €90 per month, and this is legally written. So you can imagine what victims with €90 per month can do. Nothing. It's nothing. Even to have a normal life, a regular life, it's quite impossible to live with €90 per month. Adding the vulnerability of trafficking and the risks and the all the necessities of today, it's totally not possible to recover from that situation.

So in the legal proceedings, it's better to be revised a dedicated set of supporting services, meaning not only amount, because the supportive services meaning a lot of other services. But in overall, the package of social service needs to be improved, I can say, in these terms.

Asylos: Thank you. That's really interesting and comprehensive. Just thinking about something quite specific, which is judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked. Are you aware of cases of there being judicial punishment for things that a victim or a potential victim of trafficking might have done whilst they were being trafficked?

NISMA ARSIS: I think this is the most common in cases of sexual exploitation you might understand. Because when a victim of sexual exploitation somehow is seen from the court as a-- because in Albania, if you are a sex worker, it's a crime. So you cannot define whether it's exploitation or they do not have the right mechanism to identify if it's exploitation or if individuals are doing it from their own choice.

Asylos: Yeah.

NISMA ARSIS: And in these cases, they are not treated as victims, but they are treated as persons who have violated the law, as criminals. And this is the most difficult part. We are not specialized on that. I have no specific information. But we do know from other organizations that there is a lot of efforts from the court and from police when they investigate the case to be unbiased on this process. So to be professionally investigating the context. If it's sexual exploiting - I think that most of the cases is yes - or it's someone that is offending the law. So for this purpose, I think that we still need a lot of work on how we define the process. But I don't know very specifically because we focus on protection and immediate response but not on follow-up of the case in the court and because there are other authorities who are responsible for.

Asylos: Thank you. Just going back to the point you made about economic aid and €90 a month. Is that the case also for minors, they would get that amount, or is that talking about anyone? Could be adults?

NISMA ARSIS: This is the amount for the mother.

Asylos: Okay. Mothers. Yeah.

NISMA ARSIS: For the mothers. And if the mothers is with children, they get also. Because someone able can take the amount of money. A child cannot administer money. So in Albania it is the law that if the mother, for example, had three children, she will get the money for each of their child, €90, and for her also. That still is not enough. So for each person.

Asylos: Right. Okay. Got it. Thank you. And just in terms of the judicial punishment point, were you answering about in general or about children?

NISMA ARSIS: I think in general, because as I mentioned, especially for children, we don't have cases because-- just for you to know, in case when we have a child in our services, in our shelter, it is an emergency shelter for 72 hours up to 11 days. And if a child arrives as a victims of trafficking, we are only providing protection on that short time. And then there is the child protection unit who is responsible for and the court. Because if the child is without parental care, for example, the parents has abandoned the child, there is the State Social Service Directory which commissions the decision for the placement of the child in the Residential Care institution in cooperation with the Child Protection Unit, which provided support with the follow-up in the court or other services needed. So we are not somehow the responsible authority. But if the child is with the mother and the mother is the victims of trafficking and indirectly the children are affected by this process, for sure we support the mother legally to follow up the case in the court. But this is not an easy process because not all the mothers are willing to cooperate and to follow up because they are threatened, they have fear of their own children, or they are not duly supported by the legal system [and duly informed?] in this case. So free legal support and the legal orientation should be provided by the by the state. But up to now, in my knowledge, most of the cases are supported by programs of international NGOs or local NGOs who are working with the victims of trafficking.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you very much. So the next question we've-- you've actually already touched upon some of this, but it's about implementation gaps, so differences between what's written in the legislation and what happens in practice. And the question is, how fully do you think the legislation is implemented in practice? And if you feel you've already answered it, then that's fine. But if you want to add anything, then that's also ok.

NISMA ARSIS: Yes, I can share that it's not enough. As I said, there is a lot of improvement. We came from a system that we do not have child protection units. For example, in 2008, we have only one employee or two employees in all Albania working on protection. So you can imagine from the last 13 years, we had a great development. Now we have more than 240 child protection workers who are responsible for the identification and protection and support of the cases of children that are victims of trafficking from 0 to 18. So this is a very big difference and big change. But it's not enough because if a child protection worker is responsible for 3,000 children, now, according to the law, they are responsible to more than 10,000 children. So the need for their presence is higher in order to duly identify on time or to work on prevention or to work on providing support to the victims. So dedicated human resources, professional resources, it's a must, and it's need to be improved. The law is very well written. It's written one child protection worker for 3,000 children, but we have a higher number of children who are taken care of. This is the big issue in my opinion. The second one is the supporting social care services. A victim needs services that are long-term. You cannot provide support to a child for two or three months and you can see that they is now recovered. I think that the services should be long-term, and what we are missing is that we do not have resources - and this is financial resources - on dedicated case management program and services to the victims for the long-term, for three, for four, for five years. Because you need to follow up the case and the child's well-being in the

long term. We provide immediate support. We try to find different program services, but dedicated services to victims of trafficking budgeted from the local municipality are still lacking.

What does it mean? This means that, for example, if a municipality, for example, in 2022 had 10 victims of trafficking in their municipality, they should foresee dedicated budget for at least 10 people for the next year in order to monitor their well-being, to provide dedicated service, to integrate in the community, and to make some prevention work because it's not an issue that stops there. This is an issue that is all time there, and the identification and prevention, support should be all the time. And I think we need more support on financial resources on the local municipalities' mindset, planning, budgeting, and professionals on how to better response to the cases.

Asylos: Thank you. That's really comprehensive. I just have a few follow-up questions. On the ratio first, so, the ratio of child protection officers to number of children who need the service, did you say that in practice at the moment, it's about one per 10,000?

NISMA ARSIS: I don't have the statistics of that, but still, we do know is that the number of children they take care is triple. It's more than the exact number that is in the law.

And some of the cases, they do even other works because they are not working only with victims of trafficking. They are working with all the categories of children at risk: sexual abuse, violence, exploitation, neglect, children in conflict with the law. So there are different profiles of children. That is not an issue because the law is the same for all the children. They should provide protection to all the categories at risk, including children of trafficking. But the overload, if you have too many cases to provide support, your quality of services, your interventions are reducing because you are only one person. You cannot do everything.

So I don't have a statistic for the ratio for how many, for example, child protection we should have and how we have in reality. There is no information about that. But we know that, for example, in this part of Tirana where we are working, we have 27 child protection workers, but we have more than one-half million citizens in Tirana. So you can understand how the number of child protection workers is very low in comparison to the number of children in the territory.

Asylos: Yeah. Understood. Thank you. And the second follow-up question was just-- you made a point about if in 2022 there are a certain number of potential child victims of trafficking and they are provided with services, that there should be foreseeing some budget for the following year to provide assistance. With this, are you saying that the budget kind of gets made just year on year and that's no kind of long-term financial budget for those child victims or potential?

NISMA ARSIS: Yeah.

Asylos: Yeah. Okay. I have one more question on the legislation side. And from what you've said so far, I understand that this might be outside of your experience. But the question is about witness protection and what provisions exist to protect witnesses. Is there a witness protection program, for example? And if there is, how effective do you think it is?

NISMA ARSIS: As I know, and I'm not very well informed about the issue, but just for you to respond to the question is that we have legal provisions about that, very specific ones. But what I know is that we have a lot of somehow lack of implementation. So I'm not sure if the implementation of the law is quite well defined. So maybe in the studies I will share with you, you can have a little bit more information on the implementation. So we will have also research data in order for you to be more concrete on that point and what legal provisions are for the witnesses protection and everything else.

Asylos: Thank you. That would be great. And then just moving on to start thinking about state protection from trafficking. How effective do you think the following institutions are at providing

protection to victims of trafficking? And in your experience, this would be around child victims of trafficking. So I'd like to know specifically about the police and the judiciary but also any other state authorities.

NISMA ARSIS: I will talk about my perspective because we are working for years now with the police. When a child is in the police station, we are present during the interview of the child. So we're the first contact with the victim. And second one is that we are part of the national referral mechanism of anti-trafficking with the Ministry of the Interior. So our services and our somehow programming toward fight anti-trafficking is well known, and somehow we are part of the mechanism for cases of children. I want to share we have a national referral mechanism. So there are very good, well-established structures on how to identify and proper support on the cases. Also, we have an anti-trafficking office in the Ministry of Interior who's dedicated. We call responsible authority, that is, the office who is gathering all the cases in Albania and trying to provide somehow coordination, monitoring, and support. Not only these child protection units in local level, but in national level, we have an anti-trafficking office and the responsible authority. For the most difficult cases, we refer the cases to the national authority and they provide these group-coordinating meetings. We have a national center in Albania, waiting center for victims of trafficking that is a public one. It is established in the last years. So it was operational and functional, who provide support to cases of girls. And also we have three shelters run by the organization but with public funds who are providing support to children and to victims, to adults, men and women, girls and boys, who provide not only shelter in long-term, but also recovering and rehabilitation services.

So somehow now we have a very good structure and system on how we follow up the cases. In terms of [judicial?] systems, I do not have specific experience, but in my opinion, what we have known from our cases with support is that we have a lot of work to improve on that part, especially in our judicial and law enforcement agencies in the court, judges. They have been trained but this process need to be in overall process. Also, the court proceedings delay very long because we had vetting process for the law judicial reform, so a vetting process for all the judges and prosecutors. And this has impacted the overall process because we have a few number of judges and prosecutors available for the court proceedings. And this has delayed a lot of the process not only for the victims of trafficking; for all the cases. And how it impacts is that one court proceeding can go for three or four years. And if you are a victim, you cannot be part of this court proceeding for so long to have, for example, the rewarding part from the state authorities. So in my opinion, there is a process of improvement, but still we lack a lot of somehow, as I mentioned, professionals, and second one, the law enforcement agencies need to be a lot of part of the capacity-building process in continuance. In terms of services and how we respond as in these structures, as I mentioned, the structures we have a very good law. As I mentioned before, we have a lot of work on that part to extend and to provide more support.

Asylos: Great. Thank you. And then this is a statistical question, so don't worry if you don't have the answer, but what's the conviction rate for trafficking?

NISMA ARSIS: I don't know. I'm sorry.

Asylos: And then just thinking about prevention measures. So this isn't just legislation, but it can also be policy and practice and campaigns. What measures are in place by the state authorities to prevent trafficking of men, women, and children? I understand in your case, you may know more about the children's side of things.

NISMA ARSIS: The focus of the state authorities, for example, of the Minister of Interiors is we have a dedicated month like month of anti-trafficking that is October, which more of the focus has been placed by the national authorities. So they plan activities and a lot of campaigns toward that. But we lack this-- for me, this campaign and awareness process and prevention should be

part of our curricula, should be part of our everyday work, should be part of local-level initiatives, not only on national level. What I have to say that this child protection unit also responsible for the prevention. And the social services directors are also responsible for prevention.

Asylos: And the child protection units, what are the measures that they're undertaking in regards to--?

NISMA ARSIS: Well, they are [Child Protection Units] are [responsible for] prevention, identification, protection, and follow up: case management, rehabilitation. So all the steps. You can imagine one person, how can do everything. It's quite impossible. You need resources for the prevention, for example, working with schools, working with citizens, with community members to-- most of the prevention-- I can share this. Most of the prevention work is made by organizations, programs. So most of the prevention actions are, majority of them, provided by NGO organizations. They have established this mobile units we call psycho-social teams in the streets, in the community level with schools who make awareness-raising sessions and inform citizens and children mostly about risk of trafficking and how they can report is very important and where can they find support if they have a case they want to report. So the majority of prevention initiatives are from NGO organizations, but there are initiatives that are running cooperation with the ministries and the organizations because the funds-- for example, this UK fund that is run by UNICEF, it's in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. So each of the programs are implemented in cooperation with the ministries or the local authorities.

Asylos: Okay. So is it a mixture? When you say organizations, it might be that an NGO delivers it, but it's working with the state of--?

NISMA ARSIS: Yeah. It's in the referral mechanism.

Asylos: Okay.

NISMA ARSIS: So they not operate alone. Even our programs that we implement in the organizations cannot be without the coordination of the national authorities. And even if we have a case in our shelter, we immediately report to them. So we are obliged by law to be connection and to report and to be coordinated in systems. So they know everything quite well. But still, in terms of delivery, most of them are from organizations.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then just thinking specifically about children. I have a few questions, and some of it you have already touched upon. So it's fine to say, "I've already answered that," if you don't want to expand anymore. The first question is, is there a child protection system, and how effective is the child protection system at protecting children or preventing children from entering trafficking or being re-trafficked?

NISMA ARSIS: I explained a little bit, but I will define in one sentence very specifically. Even for you, it will be easier to understand. We have a new child protection system in my opinion. So only 13 years of an existing real system with dedicated resources, with people, professionals, with laws and by-laws developed through years. So for me, it's still fragile and still needs a lot of enforcement and strengthening in three directions. It's professionals. We need more professionals, especially at the local level for the identification, prevention, and support. We need money, so we need financial support in order that these professionals to be engaged and to be on the field and to be reacting professionally. They need social care services with them. If they identify a case, they need an emergency shelter. They need support for the parents, support for the child, trauma rehabilitation, and all the other services. And they need a better responding mechanism. What it means is that coordination needs to be between not only the child protection unit, but with schools, with health centers, with police, with informal education agencies. So this is a responsibility not only of the child protection unit in itself, but all the other sectors who are very important on the identification. If a child goes to the health center injured

with trauma, with visible violence elements, for example, and there are elements of exploitation, for example, they should be reported by health sector. If the child is missing at school for one month, two months, but he's around of the school and the school identifies and knows that, they should report that. So I don't think it's a responsibility only of the child protection system. They are the main authority who are coordinating and providing all the necessary steps. They know everything, for example. But they cannot do it alone. They need all these sectors to be part and to be coordinated with each other. Otherwise, it's impossible from only one agency and one authority to react.

Asylos: And is that coordination from the health sector?

NISMA ARSIS: [crosstalk] more support. And that should be continuously because you can do a huge big package of training for all the health sector, for example, but the people rotate, the professionals change. So you should do it continuously to keeping on the loop. For example, once per year to make workshops, to engage them, to participate them in the round table. And then this needs money. This needs the resources. It needs the engagement. It's not easy. And in the local-- in a very small country as we are, they see this social care approach as not very important because we had a lot of gaps in infrastructure, in health sector, in education sector. So this social sector I can envisage is a little bit less visible. [crosstalk] more and more and more support. As we are new, we need to strengthen our capacities on that.

Asylos: Okay.

NISMA ARSIS: Our national agenda, for example. We have a national agenda that we call - it's a strategic document. A very important one - National Agenda on Child Rights and Protection 2021-2026, which specifies measures dedicated to trafficking in line with the national strategy on anti-trafficking. So we have very good nice policies, and we have a lot of activities there to change social norms, to provide support and to identify victims of trafficking, to integrate them in the community. We have a lot of problems of integrating them into community. We have too many prejudices, stereotypes toward them, and it's not easy their recovery. So we need to be improved. We have a lot of new good improvements, but we need to improve. You should read the report of US Department in Albania.

Asylos: Yeah. The Trafficking in Persons report.

NISMA ARSIS: Yes. Because we report there and all the service providers reported, and they are very well elaborated, I think, and all of service providers contribute to that report. Also, the [EU?] report for Albania where you can identify-- 2022 is the last one where you can identify potential gaps, especially on prosecution and criminal punishment that you mentioned before.

Asylos: Thank you. We'll definitely be looking at that report. And then I have another question specifically on children, and it's children who do not have parental care. I just wanted to know a bit more about whether there are provisions and how adequate those provisions are for children who don't have parental care, both in terms of their social care and their accommodation.

NISMA ARSIS: Very good question. I have a loads to share on that because we work for the last four years now with we call programs. So trying to reunite children with their family members because 80% of children in our residential care institutions, so without parental care, have their biological families but are in residential care institutions because of economic reasons or social reasons. Because in some cases, a mother that has been victims of trafficking has left the child in the residential care institution. We don't have a foster care system, unfortunately. We have a good legal provisions on that, but we don't have a system. We are still facing problems on identifying potential foster care families in local levels. So the local authorities are not able to provide a list of families who are potentially willing to provide care for children. And if you don't have potential foster care list of families-- the first solution of a child without parental care is

placing them in residential care institutions. But all the old countries are trying to close, are trying to transform them in community centers or small group homes, but we are still with the old type of residential care institutions. So big institutions with a big, high number of children, with a high number of staff, but without the approach of best interest of the child.

So in lacking of the foster care system, now we are in the process of good improvement. I can share now the Government of Albania is trying to transform this institution, at least to provide the models from residential care institutions into other alternative care like community centers to transform the daily services in order to empower the family and to reunite them with their children into, they call, child and family support hubs; a professional foster care, so to pay parents to take care of children and to take a salary about that, not only just to volunteer but to be paid about that; and kinship care. You know what is that. It means somehow a care on family members, so why their family members can provide support to children. The government is also establishing a small group homes or other alternative care. So we're in the process. We started in 2019. So you can imagine how new we are in this process.

But still, there is an interest from the government to transform and toward working of children without parental care on the process. Because what happens now, just for you to get the information, is if a child is a victim of sexual abuse or trafficking or domestic violence and this happens in the family circle, so from the father or someone else in the family, what we do now is that if the family is the abuser, we immediately place the child in a residential care institution. And what should happen normally is the placing of foster care family who is trained, has the willingness, has the professional capacity to take care of the child. Placing the child victim of trafficking or sexual abuse in residential care institutions with all the other children does not treat the traumas or the situation with the child. So this transformation, I think, will help also the mentality and the work on identifying professional foster care, for example, who are able, trained before, to take care of the victims. But this is the process, how has been starting. Now we are working on developing the models, piloting the models. So it's a long way forward in the future.

Asylos: If I understand correctly then, the residential care institutions are not specialized in dealing with child victims or potential victims of trafficking. And they also haven't incorporated the best interests of the child approach yet. And so you're trying to move away from that to alternative settings: professional foster care, kinship care, a smaller kind of care settings that are more specialized just for those children. Is that correct? But it's quite young and in its infancy.

NISMA ARSIS: Yes.

Asylos: Okay. Do you have any information about the current conditions in residential care institutions or any sources you recommend we consult?

NISMA ARSIS: As I mentioned there are typical buildings of residential care institutions; that, these, somehow, even though they can have good conditions, they are big buildings, children accommodated in the same place. But for me, this is an issue. As a professional, but as also with the mother, you cannot take care of a child in the same way for all the children. Children have different needs. And we have somehow the national action plan in Albania, so trying to reunite children with their families. And this action plan defines that-- somehow their analysis defines that the institutions do, how to define, impact the well-being of children. It's not the solution of children where should live. They impact their development, mental development, social integration. So it's very hard. And they suggest in this action plan there should be more enforces and actions in order to make possible the children lives in a family care model: small broken homes or alternative care or professional foster care, foster care itself, kinship care. So we don't think that we have the best conditions, but even though they are very good, nice buildings, the approach and the services, how it is provided, it's not guaranteeing the child well-being.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. Understood. It would be great if after this you could share with me the action plan.

Yes. Yeah. It's in Albanian, but. I don't know.

Asylos: And then just in terms of stepping back again and thinking about prevention measures. Don't worry if you feel you've already answered this. We can skip. But what are some of the limitations in respect of existing prevention measures?

NISMA ARSIS: More efforts-- I mean, for me, efforts mean there is financial resources and professionals engage in the identification process. And in terms of reports, more effort should be placed on that. Because if we don't-- it's my opinion. If we don't share the data about trafficking, it's a limitation. It's a way of not talking about trafficking. And if you don't talk about trafficking, you are not aware of what are the mechanisms, what are the reporting mechanisms, what are the supporting services, and all this data, or some information about how we protect the individuals who report being trafficked so that the victim can feel safe and know that if they report, they will be protected. So we should talk about that.

Asylos: And just in terms of victim compensation, this might be outside your experience, but do you know if victims receive--?

NISMA ARSIS: The example of court proceedings delay. If they took three, or four, or five years, compensation process, the rewarding process will be delayed. And she needs money now, not after five years, so.

Asylos: And then moving on. I've got a couple of questions on corruption. How at all does corruption-- how, if at all, does corruption among state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking?

NISMA ARSIS: I don't have information to be sincere about that because we have never explored or worked on that approach. And to be sincere, in my work with the police stations or with the case, we don't have any case as an example to share. So we work very close with police and up to now have never faced a case for 13 years of work, mine especially, in the field, even with the victims of trafficking, that has been prohibited due to corruption or has been delayed due to the corruption. I think the services has been-- at least the identification or the-- the assessment process or the interviewing process in the police station has been going very well, or the process of the social services has been provided as much as they can. They were very limited or not at all, but they were very sincere to say that we don't have any support to provide because we left. And we asked for support to the NGOs who are running services like that. But we don't face any case of which we have faced individually with any case to-- they denied the services because they needed money, for example. We don't have any case. We have heard also that there are cases, especially of traffickers who try to prohibit the identification of the case. But I cannot say explicitly-- I don't have any case as an example to share it with you.

Asylos: No problem. And probably it's the same answer for this question, but are you aware of any evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or public officials?

NISMA ARSIS: No. What we have heard in the television maybe.

Asylos: Yeah.

NISMA ARSIS: But not specifically on trafficking. Maybe more so on corruption in overall their mandating the official offices but not specifically for the trafficking.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And moving on then just to think about assistance for victims of trafficking. And when I'm asking these questions, I'm asking it about both the state, so the

national reception center and the national referral mechanism and all the state bodies to deal with trafficking, but I'm also talking about the NGOs and the shelters. So let me know who you're talking about when you respond. I've just got a few questions, then. So the first is about capacity, and I was just wondering what the current capacity of both the state-run shelter and then also the NGO-run shelters are at the moment.

NISMA ARSIS: In terms of capacity-- for me, supporting services are in three levels. First of all is emergency. So first immediate response. Second is shelter, if they need. So if the family is not supportive or if the family is the trafficker, in this case is the shelter or the biologic family. And the third one are the rehabilitation and resocialization services. They are in three different levels. And we have gaps in all three different levels. For example, for the emergency, it's provided mostly by the shelters, but they are run by NGO but with public funds. We have to confirm that. So somehow there is the engagement of the government. Maybe it should be higher because the needs are growing, for sure, but at least there is some support there. Also, we are running an emergency shelter, but with foreign donor support.

In terms of sheltering or provision of support is that the capacities are covering, I think, the needs because we don't have at least a very high number that we cannot afford. But more support should be provided. We have three shelters and one public one. So four shelters who are providing support. But I think that the needs, especially with the inflation and with this crisis and increase of prices should be higher for sure.

I mean, in terms of recovery and the resocialization, I think, this is the biggest gap. Because although they try to provide support in one or two years, I think the needs for supporting services should be in long term and more specialized ones. The more specialized they are, the more costly they are. So in terms of dedicated budgets for this resocialization and rehabilitation programs in local level are lacking.

Asylos: Just thinking more then about the length of support that can be provided and also thinking about the different categories - so you have girls and boys, children, and then of course, adult women and men - are there differences in the capacity to provide accommodation and financial support to each of those categories? And also how long can support be provided for?

NISMA ARSIS: This is very individual from the services from that point. At least, in what I can share, especially from organizations, they need no case out of the services. They find a way of how to provide dedicated services. So no services is left because we don't lack-- we lack services outside of the program. But is challenging in itself, because you have to have all the resources to be safe on the field, and when you promise and you engage that you are a service provider, you should be equipped with all the necessary services. And when you lack them, you challenge yourself and all your stakeholders in order to potentially identify. At least I know that the shelters and the programs of NGOs are for sure working on one or two-year programs.

Even more. At least one year. At least on year. So for sure, they have long-term programs, but the resources are in time decreasing.

Asylos: Yeah. And then I have some questions about the rehabilitation and reintegration angle. So it's just about the ability of trafficking victims, whether that's children or adults - and you can specify what you answer to - can they access rehabilitation and reintegration either from the state-run services, shelters, or the NGO? How effective are those services, and are there any barriers to accessing those services?

NISMA ARSIS: We have very good models of rehabilitation that are being developed and piloted by NGOs, very good ones. I can share that. Toward employment, toward recovery, toward community integration. So we have very good models. But I will respond with only one sentence. If a child or a woman is in South Albania, they need to come to Tirana or another specific city to

get that services. So they have limited access, especially in rural areas, to have dedicated services. They need to change their settlement or their place of living in order to get the right services. There are some services. There are good models, but the accessibility is limited due to long distances; maybe even limitations on these programs.

Asylos: And how possible, in your opinion, would it be for somebody to relocate from a rural area in order to get rehabilitation services?

NISMA ARSIS: They need to move. If you are a victim, you should be supported where you are with the needed service. If they want to change the location it's okay. It's their interest. It's confirmed their selection or their choice. But if not, because they have all the other family members there, we should find a way on how to bring the services to them. And this is costing you should provide, for sure, but needs more money, more engagement, professionals on that field. And we have this situation now that we have a lot of migration, especially from small municipalities to bigger municipalities. And this movement of people makes the small municipalities lack dedicated professionals. They don't have doctors. They don't have social workers, psychologists. Individuals who have been trafficked need to move to other cities in order to get these professional service.

Asylos: Thank you for that. And are you aware of the exact numbers of the capacity of the shelters for girls, boys, women?

NISMA ARSIS: No, I can say that in my shelter, we have-- in our emergency shelter, we have capacity for 20 people per night because it's an emergency shelter.

Asylos: Is that boys and girls and--?

NISMA ARSIS: This is for boys and girls, with dedicated spaces for boys and dedicated spaces for girls. There is no gender somehow segregation on that, but also for mothers with children. But for the other shelters, to be sincere, I'm not informed on their capacity.

Asylos: No problem. And I just have a few questions on funding. We've already talked about funding a bit. But I had a question about how the NGO shelters were funded. So how are they funded?

NISMA ARSIS: I will start from my NGO. Like 100% of our services are covered by foreign donors, not Albanian authorities at all. We have applied but never get funds on that. If you want to get public funds, you should apply at the county level, and we have not been supported up to now. But for example, the three other organizations like VATRA, D&E, and Tjeter Vizion for years now are being supported with public funds, at least for the main staff, and this is very good because it helps them to have some sustainability. As I mentioned, they have very good models on working with victims of trafficking, and somehow this helps them to be sustainable and providing support.

Asylos: And then just thinking about funding for support services, is the funding time-limited or permanent, and if it's time-limited, what affects the interruption in funding, and what happens when funding ceases? How does it impact service provision?

NISMA ARSIS: Yeah. I will say from my point of view-- I have been the director of NISMA ARSIS organization for seven years now, but before I have been an employee in ARSIS, and for 13 years, I can say that I have never been stopped applying. Up to now, I've been successful on generating incomes for the organizations to be sustainable of service provision. But if not, I have been not successful. So for me, it's a struggle in itself to find resources and to apply for funds for providing supportive services. If I don't find the funds, I could have to close the center tomorrow. And this is the only emergency shelter in Albania. You can imagine. So this is the only one who opens the door if the police calls or if the state services call or when citizens call. And until the state institution decides to bring the child to the shelter or to a public shelter or to family, or to decide

what to do with the child, we provide support. So if I close the center tomorrow because I have no funding, the child will be on the street until they decide because no one gets decision to provide support if they have all the papers right or follow up the procedures, to be so sincere. And if the funds get reduced, as it happened after COVID especially and the Ukrainian war, we are struggling a lot of generating funds and identifying potential support or donors or partners. We are just struggling more to identify that, but it's not easy. There are organizations who have three-year programs who are more sustainable, but there are organizations who are very short-term. And this makes the process more difficult.

Asylos: Thank you for your answer on that. Moving on a little bit then and just thinking about stigma. This is a bit of a different topic. To what extent do trafficked men and boys experience - and your experience is probably more on boys - experiencing stigma as a result of having been trafficked, and is that stigma particularly associated with certain types of trafficking?

NISMA ARSIS: I think stigma for boys is present not only in professional networks or in state authorities, but especially in community level in terms of families, in terms of schools, in terms of community, local communities. So it's not easy. Stigma is present, and prevention and informing is part of how we can work on that. And as I mentioned, it's not that we are very well present in all the local communities. So I think it's present and it needs a lot of efforts to fight against it .

Asylos: Yeah. Thank you. And thinking about employment, I don't know how relevant this will be to your services. Obviously you work with children but some of them will be of an age where they may be able to start thinking about employment. What barriers, if any, do you think they face in finding employment in Albania?

NISMA ARSIS: Toward employment, I think is just part of the reintegration services. I don't think that the state authorities make an exception for trafficking victims or for another victims. I think that unemployment rate in Albania is high, and this is officially-- you can find in Instat reports and other reports. And if it's high, this is high not only for all the citizens who are job seekers, but also for victims of trafficking. So I don't think they make an exception on that. I think that the organizations who are working with the victims of trafficking are making more efforts to identify from their own potential companies, businesses, employment opportunities for them, and this makes the process more struggling and difficult. But it's difficult because, as I mentioned, especially the victims of trafficking usually do not come back to their country of origin or to their city of origin. They especially want to change the place where they have lived before, and this makes it more difficult to be potentially integrated in a new area and a new community with a new job. It's done, but it needs a lot of effort, and there are cases when they are turning back in the situation where they were because they can't afford all these changes. This is where I say this is a process that needs a lot of support in long term because this is the reason the victims become victims again.

Addendum – written responses to questions by Ana Majko, Executive Director of Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, received 26 June 2023

Asylos: What support is available in finding employment? Does it include professional training or job placements?

NISMA ARSIS: The package of employment services is provided by the labor offices including also VET training in the Center for Professional Training. In the majority of the cases, the on-job training is provided by the programs of NGOs, even though in the last two years the National Agency for Employment and Skills has implemented employment in the community for the provision of support to job seekers with a limited amount of money (As a salary) for pushing them to learn a profession and to be paid.

Asylos: What kinds of employment are they able to find, if any? And how do their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

NISMA ARSIS: Most of cases employment opportunities are identified based on their knowledge, interest, and skills for this reason before employment a lot of effort is put to push them toward learning some skills. The professions can be listed: hairdresser, cooking, cleaning, reception, etc

Please refer to the following report on economic reintegration of victims of trafficking:

<https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/5366/file/Riintegrimi%20ekonomik%20i%20t%C3%AB%20mbijetuarve%20t%C3%AB%20trafikimit%20n%C3%AB%20shqip%C3%ABri.pdf>

Asylos: What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

NISMA ARSIS: Please refer to INSTAT: <https://www.instat.gov.al/al/statistikat-n%C3%AB-shkolla/papun%C3%ABsia-n%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABri/>

Asylos: What social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

NISMA ARSIS: In order to protect victims of trafficking and to give them concrete assistance, a State center was created in Albania called the National Reception Center for Victims of Trafficking (NRCVT). Based on the action plan and the national strategy for the fight against the trafficking of human beings 2005-2007, this center pays special attention to rehabilitation.

Assistance to victims of trafficking / potential victims of trafficking has been provided in the shelters and as well as in the community. 4 residential centers, 3 NGOs, and the National Reception Center as members of NCATS have provided long-term reintegration services (residential and community services) for domestic and foreign victims of trafficking.

Asylos: What housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

NISMA ARSIS: There are no specific facilities for VT/PVT they apply for social housing as all the other vulnerable groups are in need of housing.

Asylos: Does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

NISMA ARSIS: There is a need for more specialized and dedicated services in long term.

Asylos: What mental healthcare services are available to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

NISMA ARSIS: There are no differences between girls and boys or adults. But there is a lack of specialised mental health services in Albania.

Asylos: What physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? Are these adequate to meet their needs?

NISMA ARSIS: There are only a few mental health centers public ones in Albania and access to these services is limited due to long distances from the center and limited capacities in professionals.

Tjeter Vizion

Tjeter Vizion is an Albanian-based not-for-profit organisation, established in Elbasan in 2002. It provides services for women, minors and disadvantaged youth. Tjeter Vizion operates a shelter in Albania for minors who are victims and potential victims of trafficking. Adriana Kasa, Program Manager at Tjeter Vizion, submitted written responses to questions provided by Asylos for the purposes of this report. Adriana Kasa's full CV can be found in [Annex 5](#) on p.147.

Written contribution shared by Tjeter Vizion – received 20 June 2023

Asylos: What are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: According to the National coalition of antitrafficking shelters of which Tjeter Vision NGO is part of, Albania is significantly affected by, and remains primarily a source country for, human trafficking. Of the non-European Union (EU) trafficking victims identified in the EU, Albanians are the second largest group (after Nigerians). Among these victims, there is a high proportion of children and youth. Girls of age 14–18 years are most likely to be targeted for sex trafficking.

Age:

According to National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelter [NCATS] statistics, 78 of the victims' or 66 % of the new cases entered in the program during 2022 were minors, while 34 are adults.

VoT/PVoTs accompanied by their children

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

As regards to country of destination/ exploitation

According to NCATS information and statistics, the places where they have been trafficked to are mostly Albania, Kosovo, Italy, Greece, Montenegro, Belgium, France.

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

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

As regards to country of origin:

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

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

Asylos: What factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked?

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

Asylos: What are the profiles of traffickers in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: We conducted interviews with victims of trafficking in contribution to a study published by UNICEF in May 2022. In that study, it was reported that their trafficker(s) "primary motivation for trafficking was financial gain. According to them, the traffickers were either very wealthy, or very poor. Those described as wealthy were also reported as engaged in other criminal activities. Those described as poor were also often described as having debts accrued through gambling or alcohol or drug addiction, which they attempted to repay through the exploitation of victims."⁷

During their first interviews the victims (above 70%) identified their trafficker(s) as male, and only 20% recognise that their trafficker(s) were female. Almost in all interviewed cases, the female trafficker(s) were a friend or friends of the victim. Based on information provided to the aforementioned UNICEF study by the NCATS, including Tjeter Vizion, the cases of trafficking included criminal activities and begging. Usually the traffickers appear to have limited education. The traffickers usually are engaged in drug trafficking, in theft or robbery. As reported over the past five years human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Albania, and traffickers exploit victims from Albania abroad. Traffickers exploit Albanian women and children in sex trafficking and forced labour within the country, especially during tourist season. Traffickers use false promises such as marriage or employment offers to exploit victims in sex trafficking. Traffickers commonly force children to beg or perform other types of compelled labour, such as selling small items, and also force children into criminality, including burglary and narcotics distribution. Traffickers exploit Albanian children, mainly from the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, for seasonal work and forced begging. Isolated reports stated that traffickers exploit children through forced labour in cannabis fields in Albania, and some traffickers are likely involved in drug trafficking. Traffickers exploit Albanian victims in sex trafficking in countries across Europe, particularly Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (UK). Albanian migrants who seek employment in Western Europe are vulnerable to exploitation in forced labour and forced criminality, particularly in the UK. Unaccompanied minors as illegal migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees travelling, being smuggled, or voluntarily resettled in Albania, particularly women and unaccompanied children, are vulnerable to trafficking.

For further information on the profiles of traffickers, refer to the May 2022 UNICEF study, pages 12 – 13.⁸

⁷ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, "[Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania](#)", May 2022, p.10

⁸ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, "[Trafficked by Someone I Know: A qualitative study of the relationships between trafficking victims and human traffickers in Albania](#)", May 2022, p.12-13

Asylos: What are methods of recruitment into trafficking in Albania?

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

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

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking of boys and men in Albania? What is the prevalence of trafficking of women and girls in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: Based on NCATS statistics, 84 of the victims or 73% of the new cases assisted during 2022 were females and 31 of the victims or 27% were males. Males were exploited mostly for forced criminal activities (drug distribution and stealing); begging and forced labour.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking among Roma, Egyptian and other ethnic minorities in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion:

Minority communities:

Based on NCATS statistics, 42 of the victims or 37 % of the new cases referred in 2022 were from Roma and Egyptian community.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking among LGBTQI+ persons?

Tjeter Vizion: During 2022 the shelters of NCATS provided shelter for Roma and Egyptian VoTs/PVoTs and also for foreign VoTs/PVoTs. There is one case of LGBTQI+ referred for services to one of the NCATS centres.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking among persons with disabilities?

Tjeter Vizion:

Cases with mental health problems/disabilities:

There were some cases within the NCATS with mental health problems who have been exploited mostly for sexual purposes. Women and girls with mental health problems have been targeted by the traffickers because it is easier to manipulate them because of their mental state. 18 of the victims or 16% of those referred during 2022 had mental health problems.

Asylos: What is the prevalence of sex trafficking in Albania? Are certain groups disproportionately affected by sex trafficking (men, women, boys, girls, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minority persons,

persons with disabilities)?

Tjeter Vizion: (look at the info to the methods of recruitment)

Asylos: If a person has been recognised as a trafficking victim by the UK NRM, will they be recognised as a trafficking victim and able to access support in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: The UK and Albania announced a Joint Communiqué on [enhancing bilateral cooperation in areas of common interest](#) on 13 December 2022. Refer to the Joint Communiqué for further detail.

Asylos: What is the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

Tjeter Vizion: In Albania there is not a special law dedicated to the Trafficking in Human Beings. We are working on it. Refer to a response by Different & Equal to a call for input from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on “The Nexus between Forced Displacement and Contemporary Forms of Slavery”.⁹

For all the victims supported by NCATS, legal assistance and counselling are provided by professional lawyers of shelters staff.

Asylos: How effective is the legislation that exists?

Tjeter Vizion: Despite the legal improvements, the practical implementation of new law no. 111/2017 "On legal aid guaranteed by the state", addressing victims of trafficking remains a challenge. Along with other members of the NCATS, we have identified the following issues:

- The law requires the completion of a procedure with certain requests for documents, which is difficult to be provided by victims of trafficking, both for primary legal aid and secondary legal aid.
- Secondary assistance is mainly in judicial and administrative processes.
- NGOs authorized to provide free legal aid will benefit from the state scheme only for providing primary legal aid and not for the secondary legal aid that a trafficking victim needs most.
- The list of lawyers engaged in providing secondary legal aid does not represent a group of lawyers specialized in representing and protecting the interests of the victims of trafficking.
- The recent changes (law no 35/2017) to the Criminal Procedure Code related to the competence of dealing with cases of trafficking, which has passed to the Prosecutor's Offices and District Courts, has made the work of providing free legal assistance difficult because there is a lack of specialized capacities and structures at the district level to guarantee such service;
- Justice institutions, including the Courts, the Prosecutor's Office and the Police, continue to have a mentality and behaviour oriented towards the perpetrator and less towards the victim.

We noted that primary legal aid assistance is only related to counselling, document drafting, legal guidance to claim rights in the administration, as well as preparation of files for deposition in court. Secondary legal aid is very necessary, especially for minors to be represented in the court or in the prosecution office from the beginning according to the law. But it is also very important for adults as well to benefit from the secondary legal aid as by themselves they are not able financially and morally to afford the process;

⁹ Publisher: OHCHR, Author: Different & Equal, “[Call for Input: The Nexus between Forced Displacement and Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#)”, undated

According to their rights provided in the Code of Criminal Procedure, the victim can give his testimony through video/audio, but there is lack of the means in the district level courts to realize this.

Asylos: Is there an 'implementation gap' between legislation and what happens in reality?

Tjeter Vizion: The NCATS has made the following recommendations for access to justice and legal assistance for victims of trafficking:

- Legal aid for VoTs should be provided free of charge through professional lawyers;
- VoTs must receive legal aid from the same lawyer at all stages of the judicial process;
- Criminal proceedings must be oriented by the interests of the VoT, cooperating with the victims themselves, unconditionally and in a context that offers them protection and security;
- NGOs should be supported with funds for providing the entire package of free legal aid (primary and secondary legal aid);
- Drafting and approval of a special law for the protection of victims of trafficking, a measure which is included in the National Anti-trafficking Action Plan 2021-2023. A special law for the protection of victims of trafficking serves as a good basis for filling those legal gaps that also guarantee the right to free and effective legal aid for VoT/PVoT, including arrangements for compensation and other rights that have not been effectively met.

Asylos: Is there a witness protection programme? If yes, how effective is it?

Tjeter Vizion: Yes there is a witness protection programme

Asylos: How effective are the following institutions at providing protection to victims of trafficking:

- a) police
- b) judiciary
- c) other state authorities

Tjeter Vizion: Identification and referral was made based on the Standard Operating Procedures for protection of Victims/potential victims of trafficking (SOPs). The law enforcement institution are the main and first one who are providing the protection of the VTs in Albania. After categorisation of the cases through the formal interview conducted jointly by police and the state social service they decide where to refer and which are the responsible authorities for the follow up of the cases together with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, part of the national referral mechanism.

Asylos: What is the conviction rate for trafficking?

Tjeter Vizion: Articles 110(a) and 128(b) of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking and prescribed penalties of eight to 15 years' imprisonment for a trafficking offense involving an adult victim, and 10 to 20 years' imprisonment for an offense involving a child victim.

Asylos: What State measures are in place to prevent trafficking of men, women and children?

Tjeter Vizion: Refer to the 2022 US Department of State TiP report.¹⁰

Asylos: Is there a child protection system? How effective is the child protection system in protecting children from trafficking or re-trafficking? Are there adequate provisions, particularly accommodation and social care, for children who do not have parental care?

¹⁰ US Department of State, "[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Albania](#)", 29 July 2022

Tjeter Vizion: Yes, there are adequate local provisions, particularly accommodation and social care, for children who do not have parental care. Refer to UNICEF Albania for further details regarding the child protection system.¹¹

Asylos: Do victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted?

Tjeter Vizion: We have worked with another NGO on the issue of compensation of victims of trafficking, and the situation remains the same as we reported the last year. Albanian legislation provides for two forms of compensation for victims of trafficking, through the judicial process and the state scheme.

- Compensation through the judicial process is regulated in the Criminal Procedure Code - - Article 61 of the CPC regulates the filing of a civil lawsuit in the criminal process, while Articles 625 and 644 of the Civil Code regulate the procedure for filing a civil lawsuit after the end of the criminal process.
- Compensation through the state scheme is regulated in the law no. 10192, dated 3.12.2009 "On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against property", changed. The law, also provides for the establishment of a Special Fund¹² as a source for the compensation of victims of trafficking, but which has not yet been implemented in practice.

Unfortunately, both of these forms have not yet become effective.

Asylos: What is the current capacity of state-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support (whether inside or outside shelters) to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

Tjeter Vizion: There are 4 shelters run by four National Coalition of Anti Trafficking Centers. The capacity of four shelters is 61 cases and 10 places for the children of VoTs/PVoTs.

Three shelters run by Different & Equal, Vatra and National reception center provide specialized services for women and girls VoT/PVoT of all ages.

The shelter of Tjeter Vizion accommodates children VoT/PVoT, both females and males' children from age 6 to 18 years old.

The services offered by the shelter of TVO NGO [Tjeter Vizion] are dedicated to PVoTs/ VoTs as minors in a mixed group, composed of male and females of age 6 to 18 years old. The facilities within the shelter are divided for both target groups.

For the time being, the beneficiaries accommodated in National Reception Center are receiving these services in a building with limited physical spaces, for this reason the current capacity of the shelter is 12 cases. They are waiting for the start of the work for the construction of the new building, which will offer maximum quality and standards services for VoT/PVoT.

Vatra and Different & Equal provide as well as for adult men and boys VoTs/PvOTs rented apartments and all the rehabilitation and reintegration services same as the cases accommodated in shelters.

TVO NGO based on the projects and donation provides high autonomy apartments for minors who are aged 18 years and up for both targets of males and females.

¹¹ UNICEF, "[Child Protection System](#)", undated

¹² Article 37 of the law 9284, dated 30.09.2004 "On preventing and combating organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes through preventive measures against property", changed.

Asylos: How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

Tjeter Vizion: The three NGOs of NCATS (Vatra Psycho – Social Center, Different & Equal and Another Vision) offers a full package of reintegration services.

In a joint document developed by the NCATS, we provide an overview of the services available for victims of trafficking throughout three phases of rehabilitation and reintegration.

“The reintegration services include: accommodation, security and reintegration plan; medical assistance; psychological assistance; psycho-social assistance; intermediation/facilitation with the family of origin; assistance to education and attending school; legal assistance; vocational training; coaching for employment, counseling and support for employment; social activities, mentoring; services for economic empowerment including grants for microbusiness; assistance to children of victims of trafficking; financial support and long term accommodation; information on available services in the community and respective contact information; monitoring and ongoing supervision of the beneficiaries of the program.

The reintegration program is divided into three phases, including emergency services, rehabilitation services and long-term services and monitoring during the process of social inclusion:

Phase #1: Crisis intervention and Accommodation

The initial assistance for VoT deal primarily with accommodation of victims of trafficking in the residential center where beneficiaries are provided with basic needs and crisis services - e.g. accommodation, housing, clothing, feeding, medical assistance, psychological assistance, professional trainings, protection and security 24 hours, family mediation, as well as preparation for the next stages of reintegration. In this phase beneficiaries, together with the staff (multidisciplinary team), design and following their individual reintegration plans.

Phase #2: Transition phase including semi-independent living

Most of the beneficiaries are unable to go home because of the mentality and social stigma, security reason or they are rejected by the families so they are therefore provided with a full range of in house assistance in preparation for independent living. The three NGOs provide rented apartments for beneficiaries who have begun to make the important transition into ‘normal’ life. Adults are supported toward their economic independence - e.g. after completing vocational trainings and maintaining a job for some time, they move out of the shelter and into rented apartments, subsidized by the center. For minors, placements into families of origin and alternative care settings are facilitated. Staff of the center monitors beneficiaries’ progress in these half-way houses and families, providing regular psycho-social assistance.

Phase #3: Re/integration and social inclusion

The support given to cases in this phase is to empower them and gradually leave the program. This support consists in: offering reintegration assistance to the family and community where the beneficiary resides; information on resources and services available in the community, assistance to the beneficiaries in strengthening relationships with the support institutions in the community in which they live; and regular case monitoring and follow-up. The services provided for victims of trafficking are not conditional upon victims' cooperation with law enforcement on prosecution.”

National Reception Center has provided rehabilitation services in shelter. The final goal of these services is rehabilitation and preparation for an independent life. The quality of services that VoT/PVoT receive at the National Shelter is maximum, always based on the needs and the highest interest of the case. Every adult case identified as VoT/PVoT has full access to choose services in the shelter or in the community. For the cases that have security problems and issues in the community are oriented to be accommodated in shelters in order to be physically and psychologically safe. In cases where the victim of trafficking is a minor there are only two choices, whether turning back and being assisted into the family of origin or assisted in the shelter after psycho-social assessment”

Asylos: What are the barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services?

Tjeter Vizion: Based on NCATS information: “The government operates one specialized shelter and supports three specialized NGO-run shelters. Although the government increased resources to NGO-run shelters in 2022, NGO-run shelters continued to operate under financial constraints and relied on outside sources for operating costs.” NGO-run shelters are forced to write and submit various project proposal to different donors in order to raise additional funds for fulfilment of the reintegration programs of the victims.

Asylos: What is the current capacity of NGO-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support (whether inside or outside shelters) to:

- (a) trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

Tjeter Vizion: (please look at the above info)

Asylos: To what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? Is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking (sex trafficking, forced labour, forced criminality, forced begging)?

Tjeter Vizion: Yes there is a stigma, especially for the girls, who after the rehabilitation process in the shelters are not accepted from their families of origin in the suburb areas or in villages. We did have cases of minors from the LGBT communities who are stigmatised from their families and are not accepted in the family. The cases are independently reintegrated finding alternative ways from our NGO.

Asylos: What barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face to finding employment in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: For information on employment, refer to a July 2022 report by UNICEF Albania on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors.¹³ Usually the VoTs, except the ones that are assisted in the shelters do not possess information on vocational training options and are able to make decisions regarding the training that they wish to undertake. When they are registered as jobseekers at the employment office they are treated like the rest of the job seekers without revealing their information as survivors of trafficking, except the cases when they are accompanied from the staff of the shelters. VoTs who are minors are usually accompanied to the employment office by shelter staff. Usually the options presented to survivors of trafficking are not those that will lead to decent employment and business opportunities. Sometimes these options do not match as far as possible the survivors’ level of education and the employment and business opportunities. They are employed where ever the need of the business are such as “Fasonery –factories where are used the human resources to produce in series products” [“Fasonery factors” refers to factories where brands rely on cheap labour to produce their goods, including fashion]. Sometimes they lose their jobs as they are not able to find decent employment following completion of vocational training.

¹³ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, [“Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support”](#), July 2022

Asylos: What support is available in finding employment? Does it include professional training or job placements?

Tjeter Vizion: The 4 shelters operating in Albania do offer reintegration programme based on the donation from the international donors through project proposal they submit to them. They offer enrolment to VET [Vocational Education Training] centres or paid internships directly to the business in order to learn the profession and find a possibility for employment in these business. TVO NGO offers for free 5 typology of VET course as it licensed from the ministry of health and welfare. These 5 VET courses include tailoring, cooking, training to become a coffee machine repair technician, babysitter or caring for older people, and training to become waiters. These courses are offered for free for marginalised target groups, including the VoTs. We also cooperate closely with regional employment office. More than 300 VoTs have been trained in two years by TVO NGO. For more information on employment, refer to a July 2022 report by UNICEF Albania on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors.¹⁴

Asylos: What kinds of employment are they able to find, if any? And how do their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: The minors of age 16- to 18 and above that we are assisting and monitoring after they leave the program usually are employed in the industry of services such big factories, restaurants working as cooking assistant, bakeries, assistant hairdresser, baby sitters, shop managers, assistants in big supermarkets, tailors, or boys working ad assistant in mechanic workshops or waiters. The minimum wage of the salary in Albania is about 350 euro per month, but usually they are pay for less money, which makes difficult their economic survival.

Asylos: What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: See Statista, “The unemployment rate in Albania declined to 11.81 percent in 2022. This means a decline of 0.9 percentage points in comparison to the previous year.”¹⁵

Asylos: What social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Tjeter Vizion: Psycho-social support for VoTs is usually provided from the shelters psychologist and in specific cases it is supported form clinics experts through funds provided from the projects.

Asylos: What housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Asylos: Does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Tjeter Vizion: Housing is emphasised somehow as one of the most important support services for survivors’ economic reintegration. Without adequate and stable housing, survivors feel very unsettled and find it difficult to access and maintain employment. For more information on economic

¹⁴ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, “[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)”, July 2022, p.15 - 16

¹⁵ Statista, “[Albania: Unemployment rate from 2003 to 2022](#)”, 12 May 2023

reintegration of survivors, refer to a July 2022 report by UNICEF Albania on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors.¹⁶

Asylos: What mental healthcare services are available to:

- (a) Trafficked girls,
- (b) trafficked boys,
- (c) trafficked adult women, and
- (d) trafficked adult men?

Tjeter Vizion: For information on mental health services, refer to a July 2022 report by UNICEF Albania on the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors.¹⁷ Regarding the mental health care services for children despite the lack of the proper experts, TVO NGO are facing difficulty in representing the minor to the mental health care without the parent present. Sometimes parents are involved in the minor's exploitation and are not present in their assistance.

Asylos: What physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? Are these adequate to meet their needs?

Tjeter Vizion: The minors as Victims of trafficking benefit from the free public health care system and in the moment they are categorised as VoTs / Potential VoTs they entered into the reintegration program. They are registered to the primary health care system (Family doctors), entering the system as well. So far the public health system has supported us with minors' cases but for specific needs, such as tests or analysis, we are forced to contact private health care system.

As noted by a Key Informant interview participant in the July 2022 UNICEF Albania report on economic reintegration, *"There are no specialised services of mental health for children. There are no supportive therapies with methadone, for example. Just imagine what a staff person could do in the middle of the night with such cases. But this is how almost all the cases that are referred to us turn out to be. They come with traumas or post-trauma conditions."*

Asylos: What problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

Tjeter Vizion: When cases of VOTs/PVOTs are relocated in Albania and Albanian national coordinator coordinates the action with all anti-trafficking actors to offer the proper assistance after a deep evaluation of the case from central and local structure we see that mostly the cases have difficulties to be adapt with the new restricted life of the shelters and the re-integration programme we are offering. Some of them are accompanied with mental health problems, some are not accepted from the families of origin, and some need specific assistance and reintegration far from their living place where the perpetrators are too from. When the cases are categorised as high risk cases they are placed in national reception centre which is offering high state protection and are under the witness protection programme in case they are involved in the reporting process of the trafficking. Adaption is one of the most challengeable process for all the VoTs/ PVoTs re-entering Albania.

Asylos: Are trafficking victims able to avoid their traffickers by relocating to another part of Albania?

¹⁶ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, "[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)", July 2022, p.16, 46, 47

¹⁷ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, "[Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support](#)", July 2022, p.45

Tjeter Vizion: In some case they are able to avoid in some cases not. Albania is a small country and sometime there is information flow.

Asylos: What issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

Tjeter Vizion: VOTs/ PVots, especially the ones from rural areas face a number of challenges in accessing quality vocational training, lack of employment, including lack of access to free childcare, difficulties accessing vocational training in rural areas of the country and the short duration and low quality of some trainings provided in vocational training centers (see the July 2022 UNICEF Albania study on economic reintegration of survivors¹⁸). Their families are in a very poor condition socio economically condition and all these reason make them prey of the traffickers.

Dr Klea Ramaj

Dr Klea Ramaj, a recent PhD graduate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and author of the research article "[*The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges*](#)", published in May 2021. Dr Klea Ramaj submitted written responses to questions provided by Asylos for the purposes of this report. Dr Klea Ramaj's CV is attached to [Annex 5](#) at p.158.

Written Contribution by Klea Ramaj - received 15 June 2023

Klea Ramaj: Please note that the answers to these questions are mainly based on the study I conducted in 2019 (see: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2021.1920823>) and partially on the research I have conducted independently, consulting online sources. If I have not cited the source of my answers, it means that my sources are the transcripts of the interviews I conducted in 2019.

Asylos: What are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

Klea Ramaj: Please see my published research (Ramaj, 2021). Based on my 2019 study, the age of girls and women trafficked for sexual purposes ranged from 11 to 56 years old, however all the interviewees claimed that the sex trafficking age has decreased, with most recent referred victims being adolescents.

Asylos: What factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked?

Klea Ramaj: Based on my 2019 study, familial poverty, domestic violence, a dysfunctional family, lack of parental supervision, lack of familial support, lack of social support, low educational attainment, lack of professional skills, involvement with risky peers.

Asylos: If a person has been recognised as a trafficking victim by the UK NRM, will they be recognised as a trafficking victim and able to access support in Albania?

Klea Ramaj: Yes. Based on my 2019 study, the interviewees noted that the process of making the connections between the relevant foreign offices and the rehabilitations centres in Albania was long and involved many mechanisms and different parties both abroad and in Albania. However, once the

¹⁸ Publisher: UNICEF Albania, Author: Davy, D, "[*Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania: A qualitative study of the experiences of survivors in accessing and frontline professionals in providing economic reintegration support*](#)", July 2022

victims arrived in Albania, they were welcomed in the airport by the relevant Albanian anti-trafficking governmental and organisational representatives.

Asylos: What is the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

Klea Ramaj: The definition of human trafficking both for adults and minors is enshrined in Articles 110/a and 128/b of the Albanian Criminal Code (2017) and reflects that of the Palermo Protocol. Since 2005, the Albanian government has undertaken several important steps for the prevention and fight against human trafficking, including the creation of the National Referral Mechanism and that of the Standard Acts of Procedure (Ministria e Brendshme, 2016). Major legal changes took place particularly in 2017, with the most important advancement being the addition of Article 58b in the Albanian Code of Criminal Procedure (Simoni, Anastasi, & Imeraj, 2017). For the first time, this article listed specific procedural rights particularly for victims of human trafficking (Ligji nr. 35/ 2017).

Asylos: How effective is the legislation that exists?

Klea Ramaj: See my published research (Ramaj, 2021).

Asylos: Is there judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked? Is there an 'implementation gap' between legislation and what happens in reality?

Klea Ramaj: See my research, Ramaj (2021). Even though the European Commission (2004) suggests that trafficking victims have the right to protection despite their willingness to testify and that their penalisation should be avoided at any cost, evidence from my study conducted in 2019 showed that Albanian victims were prosecuted for their reluctance to cooperate with authorities: "We have had many cases where victims have been unfortunately convicted for having given false testimonies or for refusing to provide information about the traffickers" (LAW2) (Ramaj, 2021). The victims' reluctance was related to: 1) psychological avoidance; 2) fear of retaliation from the trafficker; 3) lack of trust in the Albanian police.

Asylos: How, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking?

Klea Ramaj: The post-communist transition has been characterised by low levels of capacity and functionality for the Albanian state (Cepiku & Mititelu, 2010). There is a lack of efficiency and responsibility among governing institutions as well as a "chronic inability to provide even the most basic public goods and services" (Ruli, 2003, p. 151). The employment of civil servants who work for the government is not always based on merit and competence, but rather on personal connections and political beliefs.

Regarding this question, I would also point to the following passages from my published research article "[The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges](#)" (Ramaj 2021):

"Economic stability was the first aspect of trafficking victims' reintegration negatively impacted by Albania's poor bureaucratic performance. The interviews revealed that unemployed trafficking victims had the right to register as job seekers at the Albanian National Employment Service, a government agency which is responsible for assisting Albanian citizens searching for employment. Nevertheless, ten professionals claimed that accessing such service was a time-consuming and demotivating process for trafficking victims: 'Victims need to wait three months until their documents are processed and

then normally another five months until a job is made available for them. This gap causes financial instability, destroys their spirit, and makes them depressed' (SW1).

According to the law on social housing (Ligji nr. 22, 2018), Albanian trafficking victims are among the prioritised categories of vulnerable individuals in the application for government rent subsidy following their stay in a shelter. However, more than half of the practitioners argued that applying for affordable housing schemes was a tiring and long process, which required numerous documents that victims were unable to secure due to their vulnerability as well as to matters that went beyond their control: 'One of the required documents is a notarised rental contract. However, most landlords don't provide this contract...the real estate system in Albania tends to be informal in the sense that people want to rent their apartments, but they don't want to pay income tax' (SW3). The difficulties experienced by trafficking victims in gaining social housing endured even after submitting their application: 'The waiting list is too long. Victims have to wait for years, without any guarantee that their application will be successful. It largely depends on the will of the Mayor. From our experience, it's mostly an impossible mission' (SW7)'

Based on unpublished interview transcripts from the study I conducted back in 2019, the second reintegration factor adversely influenced by weak bureaucracy relates to trafficking victims' physical and psychological wellbeing. In order to access public medical service, trafficking victims had to register in lengthy waiting lists: *"There is a long waiting list, which needs to be respected. There are also several bureaucracies in producing the health card...this then constrains other medical procedures, such as examinations or blood tests. Hence, the dissatisfaction and frustration among victims"* (MD). Additionally, seven interviewees stated that state reintegration services for victims with mental health problems were inexistent: *'After our sheltered assistance, reintegration for trafficking victims with mental disorders is often impossible. State agencies are non-collaborative because they tend to think: 'these are lost cases, there's no point in trying.'* (PSY1)."

I would further point to the following passage from my aforementioned research article, which sets out how the collaboration of anti-trafficking organisations with state agencies was further impeded by institutional barriers:

"There are challenges in sending requests and in receiving responses from public institutions. They normally should respond within ten working days, but that is not always the case. A delayed response also precludes us from giving the right legal assistance' (LAW1).

The hurdles imposed upon trafficking victims by the Albanian state did not only hinder the reintegration process, but they also made the victims more prone to re-trafficking: 'There are various problems on a systemic and structural level. If victims don't receive the required support from the state after leaving our shelter, they can regress and return to the same vulnerable position before trafficking' (SW1). Reflecting on the scarcity of state social services and non-functional bureaucracies under the theoretical umbrella of critical victimology, the Albanian state can be perceived as a harmful agent in the victims' reintegration process (see Spencer & Walklate, 2016). Data from the interviews imply that the weakness of the Albanian state and its failure to adequately assist trafficking victims during their reintegration have a conducive role 'in the continued production of victims' (Mawby & Walklate, 1994, p. 14). Consequently, the Albanian state itself can be understood to be directly responsible for the victims' re-victimisation and re-trafficking experiences following their release from organisations' shelter"

Addressing such structural challenges would require an improvement of the Albanian governance by increasing transparency, enhancing the legislation on social security, strengthening public institutions, and reforming the civil administration.

Asylos: Is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

Klea Ramaj: See my published research, (Ramaj, 2021)

Asylos: Are trafficked persons in state-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

Klea Ramaj: Yes, they are. There is one state-run shelter based in Tirana, entitled 'National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims' (Albanian: 'Qendra Kombëtare Pritëse e Viktimave të Trafikimit').

Asylos: How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

Klea Ramaj: My understanding from the interviews conducted during my 2019 field research was that the 'National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims' (NRCTV) deals more with acute rehabilitation (such as food, shelter, short-term legal support, short-term psycho-social support, short-term medical support), while long-term reintegration (such as help in finding a job) is a task for which other organisations are responsible. The NRCTV would ensure the collaboration with these other organisations so that the victims would then access the reintegration services upon their release from the NRCTV. The victims would spend 6 months to 1 year in this NRCTV. However, there were cases where the victims would spend more time in the NRCTV, particularly when they lacked familial support. During the time in the NRCTV, the interviewees cited that the victims receive all the necessary psycho-social, emotional, medical, and legal support. The only issue according to them was the fact that the victims could not go to school while in the NRCTV, given that this is a high-security centre (protected by special security forces) and nobody other than the employees could know where the NRCTV was located. The NRCTV was trying to hire a teacher at the time to come and give lessons to the victims in the NRCTV, however the interviewees believed that this was not enough and that they would prefer for the victims to go to a local school instead. The psycho-emotional impact that the isolation and constant monitoring had on the victims while in the NRCTV was also cited as an issue. Another problem cited was the dependency that the victims created on the institution. Limited staff members/ human resources as well as a lack of specialised training and a supervisor for the current psycho-social staff was further cited as an issue.

Asylos: What are the barriers to accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services?

Klea Ramaj: Based on my 2019 study, the main barriers to accessing services cited by the employees of the 'National Reception Centre for Trafficking Victims' were the procedures related to victim identification. There were also cases where the victims were not even part of the civil register (they had not been registered as citizens when they were born), and thus were not eligible to access state services – this was particularly the case among children of the Roma community who had been trafficked for begging purposes.

Asylos: Are trafficked persons in NGO-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

Klea Ramaj: Yes, they are. There are three main anti-trafficking NGOs in Albania: NGO Different and Equal (Albanian: Të Ndryshëm dhe të Barabartë), NGO Vatra Psycho-Social Center (Albanian: Qendra Psiko-Sociale Vatra), NGO Another Vision (Albanian: Tjetër Vizion).

Asylos: How are NGO shelters funded?

Klea Ramaj: Based on the interviews I conducted in 2019, the NGOs were funded partially by the state (which covered the staff members' salaries as well as the victims' food) and mainly by private donors.

Asylos: Is funding for support services permanent or time-limited?

Klea Ramaj: Based on the responses of participants of my 2019 study, funding was not stable/ guaranteed/ continuous/ sustainable. The interviewees mentioned that they had to constantly lobby and apply for funding.

Asylos: To what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? Is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking (sex trafficking, forced labour, forced criminality, forced begging)?

Klea Ramaj: I am not entirely sure about the stigma that men and boys experience as most interviewees in my study were referring to female victims trafficked for sexual purposes and to children trafficked for begging purposes. Trafficking victims were overall stigmatised by employers, landlords, medical doctors, family members, the community, police officers, and even other members of the judicial system. See also my published research, (Ramaj, 2021).

Asylos: What barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face to finding employment in Albania?

Klea Ramaj: Based on my 2019 study, these include stigma, lack of professional skills, lack of education.

Asylos: What support is available in finding employment? Does it include professional training or job placements?

Klea Ramaj: The NGOs offer professional training courses that can help trafficking victims develop professional skills. See my published research (Ramaj, 2021).

Asylos: What kinds of employment are they able to find, if any? And how do their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

Klea Ramaj: Based on some of my unpublished research, vocational training helped victims develop skills in cooking, tailoring, babysitting, hairdressing, or coffee machine repairing. Nevertheless, the income generated in these sectors is equal to Albania's minimum wage, which, according to most practitioners, is insufficient to cover basic living costs without external support. Ergo, the economic situation for trafficking victims who were not accommodated or financially supported by their families after leaving the shelter was particularly challenging: "Let's make a quick calculation. The salary of someone who has finished a professional training course is €200. The rent of an apartment is at the minimum €150. How are victims supposed to feed themselves with €50 per month?" (SW4). The cost of living in Albania is much higher when compared to what one earns through a minimal wage.

Asylos: What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

Klea Ramaj: Data from the International Labour Organisation (2019) indicate that the unemployment rate in Albania is relatively high (14%), with youth unemployment reaching 26%. Furthermore, these data suggest that 42% of the workforce is employed in low-skilled jobs, which are likely to generate a low monthly income. According to Eurostat (2019), Albania has the lowest minimum wage in Europe (US\$230 per month).

Asylos: What social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Klea Ramaj: Based on my unpublished research, all professionals claimed that this amount is insignificant and does not allow one to live a dignified life: “No human being can survive with 3,000 Lek per month.... So, what does the Albanian state offer to trafficking victims following their stay in our shelter? Let us say...nothing!” (SW6).

Asylos: What housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Klea Ramaj: See my published research (Ramaj, 2021).

Asylos: Does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Klea Ramaj: Evidence from the interviews [conducted during my 2019 study] suggests that it is not helpful in all cases, particularly when victims lack other sources of support such as from their family.

Asylos: What issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

Klea Ramaj: Based on my 2019 study, lack of economic stability (including lack of employment or low salary), lack of familial support, stigma, lack of accommodation/ shelter, lack of access to justice, unwillingness from the victims’ side to engage in the rehabilitation/ reintegration process.

Terre des hommes - Albania

[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. Information for this report was provided by a representative of Terre des hommes - Albania in an interview with Asylos.

Interview transcript – interview conducted 6 June 2023

Asylos: Are there any further questions before starting the interview?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: No specific questions, but maybe it's good that I give you a little bit of background of what is Terre des hommes work in the trafficking field in Albania so that then when I reference where the information comes from, you have a clear picture. So the main chunk of the work in the trafficking was conducted by Terre des hommes through the TACT project. It's Transnational Action Against Trafficking, which started sometime in 2003 and continued for 10 years to 2012 more or less, and encompassed on exactly the transnational issue of the trafficking of minors, Albanian children, mainly, to Greece. At the time, that was the main country of destination for Albanian minors to be exploited in Greece for trafficking mainly from Roma community. So in that light, we not only provided services to children and families in Albania, but helped with the development of the bilateral agreement between Albania and Greece to protect children from trafficking, and protection of the unaccompanied children. At that time, Terre des hommes also helped for the drafting and conceptualizing of the bilateral agreement between the Republic of Albania and the UK. So later on, we have kept actually within, let's say, the environment of the anti-trafficking work

conducted in Albania. There are local organizations which provide shelters, which provide services to victims of trafficking. So we have not interfered, let's say, or added to the work that they do by replicating the same. We kept our focus on transnational cooperation. From 2018 to after November last year, we worked on original project which involved Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia, who implement the unified standard operating procedures for the identification, referral and management of cases of trafficking, like victims of trafficking or potential victims of trafficking, from one of the countries of the region-- of these four, sorry, countries which were found in the territory of the other country. Like even an Albanian national was found being exploited in Montenegro, then the two governments knew how to identify and how to refer and organize the first emergency assistance and then the assisted return the victim of trafficking to the country of origin, in this case, Albania. So our focus for the last five years has been this transnational cooperation.

And then we have worked in this field also through two local organizations in Albania, two in Kosovo, one in Montenegro, and one in North Macedonia, which are the ones who have provided direct services to the identified victims, but we have supported them through sub-granting from the funding that we have received. Presently, it is big project. Also, in Parelia for the last two years, we have worked with part of a consortium led by UNICEF in Albania, where we covered the prevention work for families or communities at risk of trafficking. In this consortium that is lead by UNICEF, there are the shelters which provide direct services to victims. We do the awareness work at the community level. So in the other side, it's part of the migration of work that we do-- I mean, we work on immigration as we do. In Albania, we have worked for the last six years for integration of return minor migrant and prevention of unsafe migration. We do this work in cooperation with local institutions, but also we have established multifunctional community centers, which are centers open and deliver services too, either if they're minor migrants or for vulnerable groups. So through these centers and because they are open to the community, we have come into contact also with cases of trafficking that have been managed. So this is the area where we operate. We are a member of National Referral Mechanism, as well as participating in policy tracking initiatives when there are such, like the National Action Plan 2018, 2019, 2020. It actually expires this year. We have reported in, so it will be planned and the whole exercise comes back, what does it show?

Asylos: And I'm going to jump on straight on the first one, which is profiles of victim of trafficking and risk factors. According to your expertise, what are the profiles of victim of trafficking in Albania?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Victims of trafficking in Albania come from vulnerable families. What I mean, vulnerable? I do not mean only economically for risk. This is one factors, but not the predominant factor, I would say, because poverty is everywhere, but not everybody is a victim of trafficking. So we have found other elements that accompany these cases, especially in our work for prevention, but also considering what is being the profile of the victims identified, we can say that they come from vulnerable families, meaning either war, but also dysfunctional families, families having other members of the family like adults - I'm especially talking about children here - who have mental health issues and therefore not capable to properly take care of their children, families with a severe presence of violence and abuse in the family, families, of course, the ones who have members of the family were abusers of alcohol and drugs. So mainly, let's say dysfunctional families. Also, the victims of trafficking, if you see the figures, different report would say that they are half-and-half, let's say, in percentage, in terms of age. But even when they are identified in an adult age, speaking of trafficking, their experience of trafficking started when they were minors, so. Whereas in the country, the three main forms of abuse and exploitation, which also then profile their victims as well, are the sexual exploitation, mainly minor girls and young women. For small children from Roma community, mainly begging purposes or selling small crafts in the street or collecting or reusable materials

from the trash bins which are then collected and sold by the traffickers, so either for labor purposes or begging, or when they are in a bit older age, like 10 to 14 years old, they're used also for criminal acts such as theft, mainly. In these ones, they come from Roma minority.

Now, there is what we have noticed especially during summer times, it is that the children from the majority population, they are bound, and in this case, I'd say involved, in trafficking of drugs like selling cannabis hashish in the touristic area of the country, especially, I mean, during summer season, once-- in summer season, these are the areas that are more populated like night clubs and 24-hours open bars, and you can find also children staying there up to 1:00 AM selling these drugs. So yeah, we have had reports from the organization that we have financed through the sub-granting, they report also for there are not many cases identified as in numbers, but they mentioned also sexual exploitation of male, but they don't mention evidence of that. And the young boys, being they're mainly exploited, at this age that I mentioned, from 14, 15 to 17 for small crimes. So this is the problem for the in-country victims of trafficking and for, as we call it, domestic exploitation in the country. For the ones that are exploited again, as declared from the partner organizations, they report that they are mainly victims of the-- I mean, used for sexual purposes women used for sexual exploitation. Mainly countries like Germany and Italy.

Asylos: Thanks for this comprehensive overview. And before moving to the next question, you just mentioned a couple of reports. Do you think it would be possible for us to access them or to provide with the names or their internal reports?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I mean, what's in reports-- I mean, the reporting that the recipient of the grant have provided to us like databases of cases when they describe the specific profile and the specific assistance that they have provided, but these are the best we can say right now.

Asylos: All right. Thanks for the clarification. And you partially answered to this question, but what are the factors associated with the risk of being trafficked in Albania?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Factors, as I mentioned, well, there are multiple layers of. It can come either from a lack of information on the risks of the unsafe migration. I mean, you are based in UK, so you have heard this times all the facts, I'd call it because it's everywhere. And I don't know for what reason it's everywhere, talking about only being a criminal and coming to the UK. Well, there are two things related to that when you talk about, yes, there is a boom of 17 to 35 year old male traveling through the illegal boats to the UK. And yes, it is true that not much of them know, actually, what expecting there. In many cases, this is an organized and people know they are public in Instagram and social media, the organizers of this trafficking groups. Well, we cannot say at this point how much of that is the smuggling and how much is trafficking, but for sure, when people leave from Albania, they are not leaving with the intention to go there and be involved in criminal gangs and conduct a criminal life. I mean, in its past history, Albania has had these waves of migration in the 1992 period, in the '97 of the civil unrest. In 2015, mainly Germany and Italy, asylum seeking for economic reasons, they were going to the UK time before this boom that exploded now, but time before through smuggling in the back of the lorries for 25 to 30,000 pound as a fee for doing that. Now with the, let's say, discovery of this new route through France, because most of these people, when they go to Germany or to France, they apply for asylum. They are denied asylum, because they have no grounds for that, and they are sent back to Albania. So they tried for Germany 2015, 2017 mainly, then they tried France 2018, '19, '20 was pandemic, 2021, boom, new rule, UK, it's good there.

So it's a bit difficult to really say what is it that they are going for and how they are going there, are we talking here about smuggling or are we talking here about trafficking as well? The truth is that they end up being exploited by criminal gangs, but this is as reports from UK say, local organizations there. But here, we don't hear-- I mean, the local communities, you don't hear

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

I mentioned the Roma community, which is involved in this too. It's long time that whoever can support, has supported. The Roma community wants to establish, but still their internal rules of functioning makes it a bit difficult. You can work with children, but makes it a bit difficult to change the minds and the attitudes of the adults. So this frequent moving and commuting from one side to the other side makes it a bit difficult for the entire social protection system to really follow each case individually because they move from the, let's say, the area responsibility of one local administration, which is [entitled to?] provide services and protection to the area of another municipality. They don't, of course, notify anybody, only when they are identified on the street begging or working, then there you can identify all those poor and provide assistance to them. So this wandering of the Roma community makes it a bit difficult to really prevent it from happening. You cannot identify children, mainly I'm talking about, at risk and work with the family before it has happened. To provide the social and economic empowerment for the family before it has happened rather than identify when it has happened, and prevent it from happening.

Asylos: Thank you. That's great. Should we move on to the next question? Next topic is traffickers profiles and recruitment methods. What are, according to you, the profiles of traffickers in Albania? And you may wish to answer at the same time the next question which is, what are the recruitment methods by traffickers?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: It actually goes together, the form of exploitation, the profile of the victim, and the profile of the trafficker are like plasters that draw together. As I mentioned, for the children in such situation, mainly Roma, they are exploited either by their parents or by kinship or by the head of a clan who manages the whole settlement. The crime of trafficking actually is not a crime that is happening, like the criminals who commit this crime do only trafficking. It's more part of the organized crime. So the same gang that has this business of sexual exploitation, probably has the same business of drug dealing, and there they have other youngsters that they exploit. So the problem here, that-- okay. Once upon a time there was a lover boy, and it remains as one of the of the methods of recruitment, especially with the new social media now, we hear more and more cases like that. Once upon a time, it was arranged marriages, actually, let's call it. So the lover boy, he'd come back to you and even visit you in the family, would marry you in the traditional marriage and take you abroad, his local wife. Nowadays they don't even need to conduct a marriage-- I mean, not a formal, meaning legal-- not a traditional ceremony anymore because what happens is brainwash of young victims, and this is how they recruit nowadays. The other way is everybody's talking about online, actually, exploitation. I'm saying everybody's talking because of more of the facts that we have is comes from investigations abroad. We don't have much investigation conducted in Albania. There's a problem. But if it is happening in North Macedonia, I'm sure it's happening in Albania as well.

So the fake jobs for recruitment, like for work abroad as waiters, or not even waiters, as a babysitter or take care for elderly people. These are the two enticements now, not even working in the tourism industry or whatever. They advertise this profile of jobs that, as we have heard as this cyber crime and exploitation online is not investigated -- we have not heard any. As I'm saying, we sit in the National Referral Mechanism and no comment, no data is provided. It's not that they share cases, but even as discussed as a phenomenon, let's say, it's not being discussed either from prosecution office nor from the police representatives that sit there in that meeting. Labor exploitation in neighboring countries for adult males, like mainly in agriculture and construction sectors in Montenegro and in Macedonia, predominantly because there have been this shift of migrant workers that went from Montenegro down to work in Croatia. The north of Croatia being part of the EU, the government working the EU member countries. So the migration pattern, people following job opportunities, has feeded also the trafficking. The problem here is the people do not identify it as trafficking, the fact that they are living all together very bad conditions, not having job contracts, receiving much less that what has been the oral agreement, and living a horrible conditions, remove their identity documents. They call it just work in black. Not legal work, but they don't see it as an exploitation, but it is happening, especially in the cross border areas. And the recruiters in this case are people from the area who do the business, let's say, between the two countries.

Again, if it is for sexual exploitation of young girls and women in Albania, this is mostly part of the organized gangs around the brothels-- I mean, prostitution is illegal in Albania, but that are around the hotels and the nightclubs and the business and where they exploit the girls afterwards.

Asylos: And you partially replied to it and you touched upon the next subject also in your previous answer, which is trafficking prevalence. And in particular, I would like to know about trafficking prevalence across different groups, boys and men on one side, and women and girls on the other, and how those compare. As well as members of ethnic minorities, Roma and Egyptians in Albania, LGBTQI persons, and persons with disabilities.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Persons with disabilities and Roma community is target for trafficking activities. Majority women, girls exploited for sexual purposes. Men exploited mainly abroad for forced labor, and young men, mainly for criminality and a few cases of sexual exploitation, and these cases of sexual exploitation are mainly from the LGBTI community. Well, it's not that we have-- I mean, we have at Terre des hommes worked directly with victims of trafficking, but this is the information from exchanging with the LGBTI shelter here in Albania. They have reported before coming to the shelter-- members of community, after they have been kicked out of home, in order to survive they have had this experience before joining, the people coming to the shelter. I'm not confident to say how many.

Asylos: And thanks once again. And you already touched upon how certain groups are more affected by trafficking for certain specific purposes and in particular forced labor, forced criminality, forced backing and sex trafficking. But there's anything else you would like to add on this area?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, one phenomenon that is still continuing that maybe you might be seeing in the UK is arranged marriages of young girls. Because the remote areas, once they are at the age of 16, 17, they are engaged with men which have migrated. So that's why it is when the families arranged them, the girl is said, "You are promised to this guy who lives in very good economic circumstances in UK, you go there." blah, blah, so that they are brainwashed. Usually they are brainwashed, promised what a good life they were-- can imagine from some young girl coming from very remote areas so they don't know much about life, has been all her life home and school would have heard about wonderful love stories for years. As I

said, social media doesn't show the reality, actually shows a nice picture of wonderful lives people are conducting and spreading happiness everywhere. So they are promised a marriage, the marriage is arranged. They just know that this is the son of a friend of a friend who is very well looking for a wife in Albania because they don't like foreigners. They're like Albanian wives because Albanian wives know their traditions. This is how it is told. And yes, there have been cases that our staff in the field has come-- in their prevention work in the awareness raising sessions that they have had in the field, they have come across these cases, and we've done our part in explanation and sessions in awareness raising about what is trafficking and how to identify signs of trafficking, either in the victims or in the discussions that are brought forward to marriage proposals. And arranged marriage is a phenomenon that is still happening.

Asylos: And it seems through your answer that migration and trafficking are quite interlinked, which leads us to my next set of question, which is the recognition as a victim of trafficking. We would like to know if a person has been recognized as trafficking victim in the UK by the National Referral Mechanism, Will they be also recognized as trafficking victim by the Albania NRM and will they be able to access to support in country?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Yes.

Asylos: Is it automatic?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I'm not quite sure about if it is automatic or reevaluated, because as I said, I don't do case management by myself. I know that it is automated for the ones who are identified in the three countries that I mentioned with whom we have bilateral agreements that once the status is given in also North Macedonia or Montenegro, it is immediately recognized. I'll have to check that. I'm not sure, but what is sure is that whatever victim of trafficking is identified, especially if it is given the status of victim of trafficking in the UK or EU countries or wherever the victim is found, she's repatriated by state authorities, which link to Albanian state authorities in specifically with the directorate for migration and the trafficking at the ministry of interior because the National Referral Mechanism is appointed at the ministry of interior in Albania, and it has a special unit like the anti-trafficking coordination unit, which itself includes also the responsible authority, which is the authority registering the case and conducting the, it's called, I forgot it, the multidisciplinary team of experts, which do the evaluation of the case and then draft the plan of the intervention. In Albania, there are four shelters. One is a state run shelter, and it's a semi-closed shelter for the victims which present security safety issues like maybe still at risk of their life. And there are three other NGO shelters, which are, let's say, supported, meaning part of their costs like staff or living allowance for the survivors of trafficking is paid by the state and the other part of the funding that they need for reintegration programs, they do fundraise themselves.

These three shelters are part of the-- the four shelters, actually, form the network of shelters and work very closely with each other and with state institutions as well. Two of them are open for adults and one is open for minors, it receives only minor victims of trafficking. What the shelters always highlight, there are two moments that they are continuously seeking support also raising the issue within the interim, but have not found any solution yet, it is for the separate shelter for male victims of trafficking because to now there is no shelter for that. Usually, they accommodate the male victims in rental apartments, which is not that good because there might be cases that need 24-hours assistance rather than living separately. And the other problem that everybody is highlighting is victims of trafficking with the mental health issues. In physical health, yes, you can register the health referral system. And then, okay, it takes a little bit of time, as for each of us, actually, because the system is a bit slow, but at the end of the day, you do receive this physical health, let's call it this assistance, while for the mental health, it's very difficult. Referral is not working.

Asylos: Can I just ask a quick clarifying question? You mentioned that one shelter only takes children victims of trafficking. Can I ask which--?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: It's Tjeter Vizion, Another Vision. It's in Elbasan, and it takes only children. The other shelter, they accommodate victims of trafficking together and they are children, but not--

Asylos: And maybe we can move to the next topic, which is trafficking related legislation. And I would like to know what's the legal framework in Albania related to trafficking, and in particular in relation to child protection.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, regarding the child protection, that's an area where Terre des hommes has worked hard and we are one of the main contributors of setting up a child protection system in Albania. Now, I'm not the competent person within Terre des hommes because we have a child protection officer that really knows the system details. So if ever you need more technical and specific information, he'll give you. But for sure, first, there is a law on child rights and protection of the child, and we have insisted that protection of the child is given in the name. The law because it is important, and there are all of the steps there described also for the case management for children at risk of abuse and how it is identified, referred, assisted, how the meetings are organized, what are the specific roles of each of the members with the technical working group? So that's a system that we have supported, actually, and it works. It is run, let's say, as a mechanism, the whole of it from the Ministry of Health and social protection. And the state agency, that's the ministry which is responsible for the implementation of the specific law. There is the National Strategy child Agenda 2030, actually is a 7-year strategy for which they collect information and report on around six-monthly basis.

There is the state agency for the rights and protection of the child, which is attached to the ministry and which works directly with the local level at the municipality level, not only to collect data and track strategies, but also to monitor, supervise, coordinate assistance. If it is for children, which are repatriated, and they're probably minors, for example, that are repatriated from abroad or cases, as I mentioned, that they move from one geographical area to the other geographical area in order to track the case management and they also link to the child protection units, which are composed of child protection workers established within the municipality social services directorate, and there again, you have a whole very detailed case management and the protocol which describes how it should function. The thing is, well, fine, child is identified and a plan of intervention is stipulated. Thing is that the state is still very reliant on the NGO support to provide for services for the child and for the family because usually, I mean, you can not do much with a child in terms of, okay, fine, you can provide the emergency service and take a child under custody if there is need for protection, but there is not much that you can do for the specific child. Okay, offer help, technological assistance and everything, but part of the work is related to the family itself and there you need strengthening of the family, both personal aspect, financial aspect, and when the government comes to ask for support.

Asylos: So it seems there is a legal framework in place, but how effective is the legislation that exists?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: As I said, as a system, it works. It works because immediately you identify even by yourself walking on the street and you call the toll free number and say, I saw that child here, immediately social workers from the municipality would come and contact the child and in that moment the child enters a system and is recognized as a beneficiary from the system and technical working groups are meeting together. The problem is the state cannot provide much of the services that this child needs. That's the gap. Not the fact that is the law known or are the roles known or do people know their job and how to do their job and whom to call, and how to report and how to collect information and how to refer to the other

institutions. Everybody knows, because they're in a lot of, as I said, not only technical support from ourselves, but also a lot of organizations have provided trainings, and explain the things and contributed to set up very clear structures about it. The thing is, the fact that the services are not there. Meaning the social department at the municipality level, yeah, all they can do is provide food to the family, and that's it.

Yeah. Housing, no. Labor, they don't know much about it.

They can report to the employment office, but they don't follow anymore. So this referral, like I identified, I tell you, "This is your part to do," this part works. For the victim to receive actually the service, that's where it is lacking.

Asylos: But just to clarify if I understand, so you have highlighted implementation gaps. So--

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: We can call it like that. Yeah.

Asylos: Would you like to add anything else more specifically about that?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I'd call it like availability of services in background to--

Asylos: All right. So--

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: --better support the reintegration plan or the personal development plan of the victim or whoever is in need of services. As for the inter-trafficking work, there, again, well, what we have in place is, of course, they will tell you on the piece of paper that there is this-- as an issue, let's say, each topic has a leading ministry at the central level which is responsible for to complete the work on that field. And for the trafficking, it is the ministry of interior. And the highest body there, let's say, in the governance of the trafficking work, is the National Commission on Inter-trafficking, which could be composed of deputy level ministers from each line ministry to participate in the six monthly meetings that they have to discuss major issues, political issues, let's say, but it rarely happens or even if it happens, we are not aware of what's being discussed in those meetings. The other party is the National Referral Mechanism, which by law should collect on a quarterly basis. Sometimes it does gather on quarterly basis, sometimes it doesn't, but it is actually the party that it is composed again from not technical people, but let's say middle level management, administrative level, territories of specific ministries. We're part of this mechanism as well as the representatives from the prosecution office, from the police, and from NGO sector as well. The main actors in the field of anti-trafficking are part of the National Referral Mechanism. And it has both roles. It's a bit more policymaking body, which defines, as I said, the National Action Plan or highlights topic that need emergency follow-up and what needs to be done in the coordination in between the line ministries.

And also, it is the body where the responsible authority response to about the number of cases that they have managed, what have been the issues, and if they need any kind of support from any peer institution. We don't have a specific strategy for the trafficking in Albania. And while we were designing, actually, the National Action Plan, the first thinking, etc., in planning it, was around four Ps, like prevention, protection, partnering, and prosecution. But then we needed to change that organizing, and when you plan according to this logic, although you don't have a national strategy, you have just an action plan, still you can put the logic inside because you say, "Okay, prevention, I need this and for prosecution, I need this because I need to protect this and that." So you can still instill the logic inside. But what happened if we don't have a strategy and under the trafficking, we have included everything under strategy for organized crime. So we have--

So we do have a National Action Plan now, which has all of the measures that we have identified as necessary but rearranged and adapted to the national strategy against organized crimes, so. But the trafficking is something like it's not just-- yeah, it is under the ministry of interior, but it is not relationship like the same, but the rights-based approach and the victim-centered approach actually that should instill and then guide every kind of intervention, it's not like leading intervention. But still because the organizations and the institutions who which need to implement this action plan are working in the inter-trafficking sector for a long time now. Okay. In our day-to-day work, we can instill this victim-centered approach. But the National Action Plan itself has lasted, and we don't have a specific law for trafficking, so we are discussing these times to push for a law. I mean, it's an initiative that is a civil society sector.

Asylos: So think that there's not specific law as you mentioned and there's this particular architecture, let's call it provisionally like that because I cannot phrase it in any better way. Are you aware if there's any traditional punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Punishment, do you mean-- sorry.

Asylos: So in certain countries - how do you say? - you get kind of criminalized for being a victim or survival of trafficking. Say for example, if someone was forced to commit criminal acts, would the victim be punished in the criminal justice system?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Okay. Lately, I don't know. Not aware of any case like this because, unfortunately, lately, also the trials against-- I mean, the prosecution of the crimes and the criminals for trafficking has not been many, actually, cases investigated not even too much and concluded, but in the past, yes, there have been very few cases that the NGOs have highlighted. If you've spoken to shelters already then because in that case, they heard from them. The trafficker is condemned for the crime of trafficking exploitation for sexual purposes. The victim is convicted then for exercising prostitution. But I think it has been something like five to seven years ago. Nowadays, we don't have much of this because also we have had judiciary system reform going on. It's six years now it's been started implementation, but it's not yet concluded, meaning that before the crime of trafficking was under severe crimes court, which dealt with crimes of organized crime, and as I explained, because trafficking is usually happening by the organized crime rather than individual voters, it was under the competency of this court. Now, it is no longer considered an organized-- I mean, as a specific organized crime, so it is investigated at the local district prosecution level, and there again, we need prosecutors to be trained from the beginning to understand.

First of all, to understand because the best mean the best-- the main problem here is to distinguish a victim of trafficking exploited for sexual exploitation. And to tell it from a victim of trafficking-- from somebody who is exercising prostitution as a way of believing because you do have both realities, actually, to be honest. You do have both realities, and in the eyes of the police, of the prosecutors, 99%, they're all prostitutes rather than potential victims of trafficking for exploitation. So they need a training, the prosecutors themselves. They are not aware of the of how the organized crime and trafficking works, and they might also need training the judges of organized crime very much at the district level, what I'm seeing. So there is a big chance that when somebody declares that they are victims of trafficking, declares. I mean, if it is the social protection of it, like being recognized as a victim of trafficking, based on the standard operating procedures that are in place. In Albania, very well stipulated, very clear. It's a document to read and to implement. The victim might be assigned a status of victim of trafficking or potential victim of trafficking, but the way, I mean, from here to go to the court and be recognized by the court and investigated as a victim of trafficking and being then entitled of compensations, this is a long way to go.

Asylos: Can I ask you the last question about the broader legal framework? Is there any provision to protect witnesses like protection program and if yes, how effective it is?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: No, but on paper there is. There is the free legal aid on paper that the victims are entitled of. There is the witness protection program as well. And how well they are working, I'm not sure because we don't do placement, it depends on court, so I don't have firsthand experience.

Asylos: No, that's fine. No worries at all. And maybe we can now move on state protection from trafficking, we would like to know how effective are institutions in providing protection for victims of trafficking and in particular, the police, the judiciary, which you partially mentioned in just according to the previous question, and perhaps other state authorities.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Out of the 100, let's say, average cases each year that are identified in Albania as victim or potential victim of trafficking, only 20% might be identified by the police. Police is there usually only one human NGO through your mobile units, fieldwork, or referrals it might have had from peer organizations abroad. Police is there only when you call them. I mean, this was not like that in the future. We had much more identification from the police. Nowadays, the majority of identifications come from the NGOs. Police is there only when you call them, and sometimes even we don't take denunciations seriously because as I said, they have to take all this in telling prosecution from trafficking. Other instances, because of, as I mentioned, trafficking here is exercised by organized crime, which is unfortunately very potential in Albania. Also this is what we have been told by our colleagues in the field. There have been cases when mother together with the social worker approached the police to say that, "My underage daughter is missing." And the answer from the police was, "You know, I'm sure where she is. Go and pick her up yourself."

So the power of the organized crime in Albania is if you don't have the police to follow the case, to collect the facts, then the investigation assessments are very, very poor. You'll have one case brought to the court for the last two to three years. There is not much the business institutions do. Businesses on one side, because we have worked, and I mentioned before, we have had more cases identified and prosecuted because there was a specific judiciary system from the police to the court. Now with the reform, we are so many years now longing to see implemented brought a change in how this crime is classified and how the system works, and it is withdraw in numbers. But not only numbers, but in the understanding first, that these people that are in the system need to know what is trafficking and how it works in order to be able to identify and investigate it and move forward. No, this is very disappointing, actually.

Asylos: And are you aware what is the rate conviction for trafficking since the police have some trouble actually investigating and engaging with this type of cases?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I don't have this figures by myself because they don't report to us, but in the TIP report, the US State Department TIP report, here you'll find it goes year by year. And I refer to them, actually, because they are the ones who can collect the figures from the state institutions. But to us, they don't give us these figures.

Asylos: No, no. That's fine. We are familiar with this report. So thank you. Thank you so much for pointing this out.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: There's a source for us as well. If we want to know exactly what part of the state is doing, we have to see these international reports because either TIP report or GRETA report. Albania is a member of the European Council, so it has the obligation to report to GRETA and to give figures and data. It's where we get our data as well.

Asylos: And moving slightly to a different topic. And we touched upon some of these things already. What are the state measures in place to prevent trafficking, both for men, women and children?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Rely on NGOs to conduct awareness raising. I forgot to mention, you have the system international-- okay, National Commission Against Trafficking, then the National Referral Mechanism, then the responsible authority, then you have the Regional Technical Committees Against Trafficking, which are at the regional-- the whole country's divided in 12 regions in Albania, so you have 12 of these units, which might cover urban and rural areas in more than two or three municipalities, that's a lot of coverage. And it stops there in terms of practical-- it doesn't go really at the municipality of the locality level. It's the middle, let's say, government here doesn't go really to the local government. And the work at the local level is mainly conducted by the NGOs who are present there and do whatever they can. Okay, during the month of October, the 30 days of activism, the ministry tries to organize awareness raising activities. That's all that happens.

Asylos: I see. I would like to focus on children, which I understand is also your area of expertise. I would like to know if there is a protection system specifically for children, how it is affecting and is it protecting children from re-trafficking. Also, you mentioned that there is one shelter specified for children, but if there's any other type of accommodation that can be available for those that don't have parental care. We're specifically interested in social care arrangements for children who may be returned back to Albania and they don't have any parental care.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: From the little information provided to us, where the state institutions are what we have identified from ourselves. The cases of the, okay, unaccompanied minors, I'm talking about in general, not unaccompanied minors that are identified as victims of trafficking, but for the unaccompanied minors for being repatriated, the system works, because it is stipulated on paper if it doesn't work or if something happens, whoever has responsibility within that task list to do and has not done it is in big troubles. So people do it either because they're feared of any consequences of not doing or because they are devoted social workers and part of the system either. So because there is this very clear-- it is a decision of council of ministers, we call it, like in the hierarchy of law, you have a constitution, you have the laws, and then you have the decision and the council's ministers. Which number? One one one, 111, updated, I don't know, of 2019, and it very clearly describe the process of when an unaccompanied Albanian minor is identified in the territory of a foreign country. Very much defines who is responsible for identifying whom to contact, how long the time of response will take, what are the steps to prepare to conduct the family evaluation before the child is repatriated, what are the steps to take to work with the family to prepare for repatriation of the child, and how to organize the assisted return of the child up to the moment he reaches the family, and what is the plan for the family reintegration work once the child is back? So in terms of protocols, everything is very, very clear in terms of-- and for what we know, actually, we are about to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of this GCM where it's going by the end of June beginning-- I mean, by the middle of July, I hope we'll have the results of the evaluation. But for what we know so far, there have been no cases where the family has denied or has rejected from welcoming the child.

Asylos: So just kind of clarify, are you saying you haven't seen cases where there are children without parental care?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Not that the families have refused to welcome the unaccompanied minors when they are returned from abroad. Again, for many years now, there is the institutionalization process from children from institutions going on, but I'm not involved in that process. There are organizations that have worked that know more about how it's going. But

that, again, is some reform that is going on for 10 years now, how not to put children in institutions but to put them in foster care or kinship in care. I don't know how much it is progressing, but still the orphanages are open and running, so. But usually children do not end up in orphanages unless they are in—these family ties are still strong in Albania. So strong that they force children to arranged marriage. So strong that it might send their children to serve criminal gangs because they approached them. So you rarely see a child without parental care, unless the parents are dead, either one of the grandparents will take them or even if the parents are living, even within the Roma community, you'll see it much, you have many, many, many cases when a grandmother is taking care of the children because parents are immigrated and have left them behind. So I'm not saying that these children are living in the very best conditions, but not left in the street.

Asylos: Thank you. So next is, are there any limitations in respect of the prevention measures that we've just been talking about?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, on prevention, I would say two main aspects. One is awareness raising. Making people either in the system or the wider population or the specific target groups that are, I mean, according to the profile, are more prone to or at risk being trafficked. Everybody needs to know because trafficking's something that happens to the other people. I mean, never to themselves. It's something outside to their existence until it happens. So awareness raising is one of the things that needs to be conducted really in a structured way, not just sends some messages and some leaflets and collect five people and explain what is trafficking and what are signs of trafficking. I think it really need to be targeted by sector, the health sector has very, very big potential to help in prevention of trafficking and identification, and zero cases are coming from the health system in Albania, or the school system is the same. They're the ones who are popular in the community. Not to mention the specific pathways that we mentioned before. One thing is, awareness. The other thing is being able to provide services for family strengthening, as I mentioned, before the trafficking has happened. And when you have the mapping of the social factors that might lead to trafficking and you can identify and spot vulnerable groups, then you need to really work with them in order not only to raise their-- in this case, raising awareness of them is not as important as to build their resilience to the risk factor that won't lead them to trafficking. And that's what we do, actually, through the community centers that we have established throughout the country.

Asylos: Thank you. The next question you have actually already answered, I think, which is about whether victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted. And I think you said that the implementation of that is not really --

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Is not happening from what we have learned of things.

Asylos: And then just turning to the next topic, which is around corruption, how, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking? Yeah.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Zero cases identified and condemned, means I have no facts to tell you based and that happened. The example that I mentioned before, like in the plains sight in Gora region, everybody knows where the brothel is and even goes and visits it, there are underaged girls down there. And because the pimp running the brothel is part of the big extended family running multiple illegal activities in the same region, I very much doubt that the police doesn't know. It might be corruption, it might not be corruption in terms of bribing and money involved. For sure, it is power involved.

Asylos: Thank you.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: These are people with, with guns. These are people with guns. These are people with money. If they don't buy you, they can kill you. And they are present and running the whole region and running many municipalities. And like that, you have it all over the country. In most of the main cities, you'll have it like that.

The specific criminal bands that are known by the whole population. And it's becoming worse and worse every day. That's the sad side of it. That's why so many Albanians are fleeing the country, really fleeing the country. It's not just for economic reasons like low income country and whatsoever and better income opportunities, it's about also the safety in the country. And with the race, the program is fine. I cannot point you to any study, any statistics, anything like that because they do not exist. This is what we live every day.

Asylos: I understand. Thank you for your answer. And then there's one last question just on the corruption point. I know you're saying that basically there's no evidence really available, but the question is basically, are you aware of any evidence between trafficking crimes and politicians or public officials? Links between public officials, politicians and trafficking gangs.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Not officially.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then just moving on. So the next set of questions is about assistance for victims of trafficking. And if it's possible, when you're answering the question, to differentiate between whether you're talking about state assistance or NGO assistance, that would be really helpful. And the first question is around capacity. So what's the capacity of, on the one hand, the state-run shelter and on the other hand, the NGO shelters to provide accommodation and financial support for trafficked girls, trafficked boys, adult women, adult men. You've touched on this already, so if you have anything to add, then yeah.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: No, I don't want to confuse you anymore because I don't know exactly how many beds one or the other one has. I know what I mentioned before, that the state is running one shelter with 30 employees and only two victims inside. And then in total, the state is supporting the three NGOs with the salaries for 29 staff. All in all, the three of them. And they are the ones doing the majority of the work, and also leaving allowance, something like, say, I found a day or something like that. Only for the victim of trafficking, not for the child that accompanies the mother in the shelter. That's the funny thing. If I compare, because I did this exercise a bit of time ago, what the Albanian government provides by the shelters through the neighboring countries-- I mean, to the region, actually, to the Balkans, it's more than what other governments are supporting, actually, with the funding of the services. The thing is, is that enough? I criticized my government along all our talk, but I have to recognize this. Yes. Compared to the other countries in the region, they do provide more financial support to the shelters so that the shelters can run long reintegration services because the state-run one provides only, as I mentioned, is a semi-open shelter and accommodates victims who are either in court processes or at high risk of personal safety. So the reintegration services are provided from the local NGOs, oftentimes, part of the funding from the state, part of the funding are from fundraising program first.

Asylos: Thank you. And it's--

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: [crosstalk] provide services to a very wide extent, but like the emergency phase and the reintegration phase of 6 to 12 months goes very well. The part that needs long-term integration and support because it's a process that takes time is the one that they suffer more for fundraising, the long-term reintegration.

Asylos: Okay. And is that on the NGO shelter side? You mean, based on--

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Yeah, that part of the work is done only by NGOs.

Asylos: Okay. And you mentioned you're not too sure about the capacity, as in how many people each shelter supports. Is that correct?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I have never taken count of what the number of beds are.

Asylos: No problem. So the next question is basically can trafficked persons access rehabilitation and reintegration services from the state run shelter and the NGOs shelters? So that's the kind of immediate rehabilitation and then longer term reintegration. Can you say that they can?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: The can. They can. I mean, the shelter, and I mentioned, the numbers. So far are 100 cases. Identified a year. And this number can be accommodated. I mean, I haven't heard from shelters complaining of running out of capacities. If the numbers increase, then for sure they have problems.

Asylos: Thank you for the answer to that. And how effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services? So on the one hand within the state-run shelter, and on the other in the NGO shelters?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: In the state-run shelter, I cannot talk much about rehabilitation because the setup itself does not provide much for rehabilitation psychological and, although, the cases can go out of the shelter, can go to school, can go to work, but they always need to be accompanied by the police. And it is not really a rehabilitation when you have to move around under security. So the real rehabilitation happens when they are in the NGO-run shelters. And we have a previous project as I've mentioned, the five-year regional project we have developed, or better say because they are there, but collected all of the practices and locally and internationally for the community-based reintegration services and the whole cycle of what services victims, not are entitled, but are in need of and which professional from professionals to semi-professionals who can conduct mentoring of the cases as well, apart from the professionals that are social workers who do the case manager, the psychologist, sometimes they have doctors also included in the shelters, and lawyers who all help the victims to follow either in the worst cases or whatever is legal work or even in the court. So the range of services that the shelter provides is very wide, just that it--

Asylos: Can I ask is that referring specifically to the NGO shelter?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So the three of the NGO shelters. The range of services and the professionalism is there. It's just that they need to be funded, the services, and the NGOs fundraised most of them by themselves. As I mentioned, I mean, their budget is half-and-half. If they can provide, they have. Also, I mean, they have, first, the shelter for the first period of recovery. Then they have some independent living in rented apartments until the case is ready to, I mean, mentally physically and employed so that they can live independently. There is the three stages that-- the shelters do provide services in all of these three stages.

Asylos: Thank you. And in terms of from the victim's side, are there any barriers that they experience in accessing rehabilitation and reintegration services that exist?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Only when they have those systems of the case manager and the whole of the staff of the NGO, they can't make it. Even that I mentioned 100 cases, maybe only 20 are identified as victims of trafficking because, okay, you might have all of the signs-- indicators. Sorry, not signs, but indicators that you are a victim of trafficking, but then it is up to the individual itself to declare him or herself a victim of trafficking because of the status, and only 20% or less than 20% of that are willing to be recognized as a victim of trafficking. Most of the cases are identified as potential victim of trafficking, which is another

status, let's say, given. There is no difference between the one and the other because in both cases, you display the indicators because in both cases, you receive the same support-- you are entitled to the same benefits and support. The only difference is if you are a victim of trafficking, you will receive an allowance of £20 a month, which is practically nothing and no one, but in order to receive this, you need to go to the state offices. If you go to the state offices and say, "I have the status." then everybody knows that you have been trafficked and the stigma is extremely strong. So yes, victims can access the services only through the NGOs because, otherwise, they need to go and scream it out and nobody wants this. Like, "I'm a victim of trafficking. May I have this status, please?"

Asylos: Okay. Okay. So I've got a couple of follow-up questions. One is that kind of figure you mentioned of 20% of potential victims of trafficking are recognized because they disclose that. Is that your overall impression or is that based on a published statistic that I can find?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: No, it's in a TIP [US Department of State Trafficking in Persons] report. When they say the -- Yeah. When they say, this is the number of potential and victims of trafficking, usually it is the same for of trafficking. It is not a study.

Asylos: And you also mentioned that-- well, you expressed that people tend to be reluctant to say that they're victims of trafficking. Do you have anything to say about why that might be the case?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Because of the prejudice. Like myself, I have supported six organizations in the last project. All of them, okay, four of them, not all of them. Four of them have filters for victims of trafficking, and I have visited only one. I have not been to the physical premises of the other shelters because I don't want to give them-- and it's not advisable to go and visit the shelter to see what. I mean, not to make them feel like they are in the zoo, people are coming to visit. That will give them their privacy, and they have a relationship with their case managers or the staff of shelters and that's enough for the audience around to know about them. They are people benefitting some services. Other people are representing them, and they feel empowered enough to go out and face the society, then it's up to them to either take or not. But they are victims of trafficking, but as I said, if you are a victim of trafficking and say that you are a victim of trafficking, in the eyes of the public, "Oh, you are a prostitute." It's very difficult to make this distinction between a prostitute and somebody exploited so that people don't say it.

Asylos: Thank you for your answer. Then I've just got a few questions about the NGOs side. So you mentioned NGOs are funded half-and-half, so half state funding and half funds that they raise themselves. Is that correct?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: These are the two sources. How accurate I am about half-and-half, I don't know because I know they were doing this late, but, yeah, maybe more fundraised than supported by the state.

Asylos: Okay. And can I just ask on that side of things, do you know whether the funding for services is permanent or time limited?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: The funding for services, the one provided by the government, it is permanent. The one that they need to fundraise is project-based for the funding.

Asylos: And in terms of what factors affect that funding being interrupted, so, yeah, are there factors that affect the funding being interrupted on the fundraising side? And if funding ceases or is interrupted, do you know what the impact is on the service provision?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, they'll be limited only to keep the number of the staffs that they can afford through the state funding and, of course, much of the reintegration processes will be disrupted very much. It will be just shelter people staying and receiving-- because the biggest success of this NGOs is that they return people back in the community to conduct their own independent life and to restart living. If you have shortage of funding, the don't have any more services, and it will stop only to now. Psychological support for the moment and that's it, which is bare minimum, you cannot. I mean, somebody that has had such a strong trauma, you cannot rehabilitate only through food and shelter, and that's why the survivors are not staying at the state-run shelter.

Asylos: Right. Okay. Because the state runs shelter is only providing that kind of immediate-

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Yeah. It's focused on security, and immediate assistance and security, not a reintegration process outside.

Asylos: Thank you. And then just you've mentioned a bit about the kind of shame associated with being a victim of trafficking. Thinking specifically about men and boys, to what extent do trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked, and is it associated to different types of trafficking, for example, sex trafficking, forced labor, forced criminality, etc.?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I haven't had very personal contact with victims of trafficking to have come to a conclusion myself on how they perceive it, but.

Asylos: No problem.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Going on speculation, knowing the general attitude of, "Okay, labor trafficking. Oh, I mean, it's not that big deal. Okay, you were fooled. That's not a big shame." Or you're a loser, okay, but that's not a big shame like if you are exploited for sexual exploitation. For men, even worse than women.

Asylos: You mean if they were exploited for sexual exploitation, you're saying there'd be more--?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: They'd never say that. They'd never, ever, ever say that.

Asylos: But just to clarify, are there are cases of men and boys being trafficked for sexual purposes?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I have to recall now, where I have heard stories of that, but, I mean, from LGBTI community. Well, I've been in the hotel elevator with an elderly man and a very poorly dressed and very poorly looking Albanian man going up the hotel. Yeah, not for business, I'm sure. So there are sporadic brief moments like this that I've either heard of any story or seen one like that for myself. Or story of any of those criminal area in Tirana, where members of LGBTI community are being sexually used by people, one of them being killed a few years back by the client.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you for the information you're able to share on that. Moving on to a different area. Thinking about employment, what barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face in finding employment in Albania?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, first of all, you cannot go and-- okay, let's say most of the NGOs are opting for self-employment rather than employment. And this self-employment is a better option because it is where the victim itself explores their potentials and they can start doing something and being independent and run an economic activity. And that's the preferred option. The other option is the seek employment. It is based on the very long

relationships that this NGOs have established with specific businesses, and in this case, the NGO knows the business and the business knows the NGO, they know beforehand that this is the case, that the person that they are hiring is a former victim of trafficking. And that the moment to come to this point that the business is open to welcome somebody who has trafficking experience, that's the most [difficult?] thing for no other reasons than that security reasons. The businesses would not like to have to deal with somebody that might bring trouble to their-- the trafficker might feel fear and might be trouble too. It's not stigma against the person himself, even in this case, rather than security reasons.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And what support is available to former victims of trafficking in finding employment, for example, do they have any professional or job training or job placements?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Yeah. I mean, when I say NGOs, I think I have it. I have it for Albania, maybe it's a bit old. I have not updated the document for the last two to three years if anything has changed. But there are legal provisions in different documents which stipulate the assistance provided to the victims of trafficking, free schooling for children of free-- being categorized as an advantaged group for employment, for shelter - I mean, provided by the state, not to shelter to a classical home - provided by the state and many other things. The thing is that you have to-- first, if the services are available. Second, if you have the status of the victim assigned to you, and the moment from when you apply to when you receive the service is very long usually. But I know that in big cities like Tirana, which is a bigger municipality with more means, the NGOs have managed, for example, to get the accommodation bonus, I don't know what the term is, but the subsidy of the rent for the victim of trafficking. The rent is paid by the municipality. Free housing, let's call it like this, or that the employment office has collaborated in finding employment for the victim of trafficking. In smaller cities, it is more difficult to get the services. So the legal basis is there. NGOs are starting to make use of what is available, let's say, from the state services. And in big cities, it works. In smaller, then it's very difficult to say.

Asylos: Thank you. And you already mentioned that self-employment is an option for former victims of trafficking, or if the NGO has a link to a particular business. I just wondered what kinds of employment former victims of trafficking tend to be able to find and also how their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: It's a usually aesthetician, or a cook, tailoring, these typical-- women generate the businesses, these are the main ones.

Asylos: And in terms of their earnings, how would they compare to the cost of--?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: The same as the rest of the population, which are at the limit of survival.

Asylos: And do you know what the level of unemployment is among the general population in Albania currently?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I know for the youth, unemployment-- I mean, youth that are neither in the education nor in the employment system, it is 26% while the European average is 13%. So it's double. The same is for unemployment. We don't have a census in Albania since 2011 and with all these waves of migration can we honestly rely on the data from the Institute of Statistics. So--

Asylos: Sorry, just to clarify, you said you're relying on data from the Institute of Statistics. Is that correct?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Yeah. So there it says 10%, 8%, 9%, which in my view should be at least double.

Asylos: You think that they're underestimating?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: They're underestimating because we don't have a census of how many Albanians are living today in Albania. The census was due three years ago. It didn't happen, we don't know exactly how many Albanians are living in Albania in order to know how many of them are employed.

Asylos: I see. Okay. Thank you. So in terms of social assistance, do you know what social assistance trafficking former trafficking victims are eligible for and what are the barriers they might experience in accessing broader social assistance?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: As I mentioned, I'll share all these legal provisions that I said because just one page are saying what they are entitled of, but of course their children receive free school books, have no fees for the school books there. They are advantage category in terms of employment. In terms of health assistance, they benefit as everybody else. So because we have free healthcare for everyone employed, unemployed, insured, uninsured, we've been government providing free healthcare for everyone. Housing as well, and if they cannot find a job or anything, they are entitled as everybody to the social aid.

Asylos: Thank you. You've already mentioned about housing assistance, so I won't ask the same question again. I'm just thinking then about homelessness and destitution. Does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, I don't know this thing exactly, but I don't think that the status of a victim of trafficking is something that has an expiry date, so even the assistance provided by the law should not have an expiry date. Once you are provided with assistance, it should continue. But I can not guarantee this fact. It needs to be checked better.

Asylos: Thank you. And then just thinking about healthcare, I'd like to know what mental healthcare services are available to trafficked persons, and breaking that down by trafficked girls and traffic boys, so thinking about children specifically, and then also adult women and adult men.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: As I mentioned, we have the free health care system in Albania. So as soon as you are in an age you have your ID card which has your social insurance number, and with that social insurance number, you have also-- of course, if you live in the country, you might have any kind of residency and at the location that you have the residency, you'd go and register and have the family doctor, which is just the health card, and with that health card and according to the referral system, then you need to follow the steps and go and receive the service. So it might take a little bit. Why is it in every referral? Because you need to go. There are attendance times, but this is the same for oneself or my mother, which I spent my two weeks of holidays in order to get all the services for her, same as for victim of trafficking. So the thing is if I had the persistence and the insurance system, victim of trafficking doesn't have it. I mean, the main job that the NGOs do is to their legal identity papers so that they can benefit the health card and enter the system and the accompany them to receive the services.

That's where the assistance has been-- it's part of the reintegration process when you also socially reinforce their ability. It might make them stronger to know how to go, where to go, and what to ask for themselves. The mental healthcare is not covered for what I know, either free health system or something that needs to be paid by the individuals, it seems. As for the mental healthcare, it's something that NGOs are highlighting all the time, that they have difficulties in managing the cases of the victims of mental healthcare problems, and the difficult thing is that it's not that they cannot access the service, there are psychiatrists, there are hospitals, but the

foreign NGO, I mean, which has only social workers inside as case managers, it's very difficult to manage a person with mental health issues. So it's more case management rather than lack of services. And of course, the fact that they all stay in one shelter, people with mental health problem. All of them have had very strong traumas, being through, so the environment they stay in is not very healthy. And as I mentioned, case managers are not rested. They have to take a rest too, but manage the person. But the system itself has addressed-- the health system has psychiatrists included as a specialty in the health clinics and hospitals.

Asylos: So it sounds like you're saying that the assistance or the mental healthcare provision does exist. Is there a problem with referral or getting into that healthcare system?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: And also manage the person with the mental health because there are no separate locations where to host. Do you host the person with the mental health case in the same shelter with the other person? So managing the person is difficult because in the hospitals, they admit only very, very, very extreme severe cases of stages of mental disability. The rest need to be treated in the community, and how to manage someone having mental health problems with someone who has very strong trauma in the same environment, in the same kitchen, in the same living room? That's the problem.

Asylos: Yeah. And are there any differences that you know of in terms of women, children, men accessing those services or some finding more challenges than others in accessing mental health help or services?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: If they are accompanied by the social workers of the shelters, of the NGOs, they will receive the assistance because they have somebody to speak out for them. If they are not accompanied, if they go by themselves, it depends on what reintegration stage they are. If they are very vulnerable or they are timid and they might be neglected by the service providers. If they are in an advanced stage of reintegration where they empower themselves, then they can go and access the services. It's everybody else. The fact that they are victim of trafficking they're now having the social worker. I mean, for the rest of the society, they are treated the same as everybody else. But it is the vulnerability that they have. In terms of social, it doesn't hinder them from really going and asking for what they're entitled to.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And you've already touched on the physical healthcare side. You indicated that it's the same provision as for the rest of society. There anything you'd like to add in terms of how adequate the physical healthcare provision is?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Well, as I mentioned, the difficulty is to get to really receive the service because of the many steps that you need to take on the way until you really get the service. And then even if you get diagnosed and you get your prescription, then you have to go to the pharmacy and sometimes-- I mean, it's a health system problem, actually, in Albania. It's not particularly problematic for victims of trafficking. It's about the same hassle to get the proper medicine that is reimbursed by the state, which is very low quality, while something that might could do better for your some other indication, it is very expensive if you want to buy it for yourself, so you'd rather go for what is offered by the health system, which is not very effective and might have side effects. So if you can afford to buy them from your own pocket, a better quality, you can do it and you'll get better sooner.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then moving on completely, we are almost at the end. I just have a few questions, if that's okay, on internal relocation and re-trafficking. So firstly is, what problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to different parts of Albania?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Most of them want to come to Tirana even if they are from the north, the shelter services they do receive in the south where the shelter is located. And when it comes to getting out of the shelter and start an independent life, all of them want to

come to relocate in Tirana because of two reasons. First, because they are unknown. It's a much bigger territory, meaning they can be hidden from the sight of the people that might know them, and because of the employment possibility that are bigger in the bigger cities. So the good thing is that the organizations refer the cases to each other, and the ones that are followed by one organization up to a certain point can be taken over by the other one covering the territory. So the referral system works also with it, but it's not like with, for example, what we see for the return migrants who have had failed asylum seeking applications in the new countries when they return, they want to go where their support network is, like where the family member, whoever can support them, they seek their safety net, let's call it like this, but for the victims of trafficking, they want to be away from circles that might be familiar to them.

Asylos: Thinking then about victims of trafficking, are victims able to avoid their traffickers by relocating to a different part of Albania, like you were saying, away from their previous networks?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I don't know that. I'm trying to remember what I have information from NGOs, but I don't have information.

Asylos: No problem. We can move on. And then, the last question about internal relocation. Do traffickers find victims who internally relocate, and what methods do they use?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I know that answer because, okay, what I know is that there is the risk of re-trafficking if the victims are not empowered enough to conduct a separate and independent life, but is it because of-- I mean, re-trafficking, is it because they are vulnerable and they continue seeking external support in order to have this protection and they go back to the same traffickers or they fall victims of new traffickers that reside in that part of the world. But there are instances that they might fall back from re-trafficking? Yes.

Asylos: And that is related to the next question. So my next question was what issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked? So you've talked about empowerment. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: What I've received as an information from NGOs is the data talk more about the quality of integration and the longitudinal integration as a process that should accompany them for a longer time, like usually it should from three to five years in order to really have somebody are empowered and the recovered because shorter time may not enable them to be fully in command of their life.

Asylos: Thank you. And the final question is, what issues affect the likelihood of reprisals?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: Of what?

Asylos: The likelihood of reprisal. So I think in this instance, it would be potentially a victim of trafficking being targeted by the former trafficker again, for example, for potentially speaking out about their experience of trafficking. It might lead to a reprisal.

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: I would, again, lend this to security issues in my opinion. Not based on facts, but in my opinion, and I base this on security issues and how safe the information about the case is, like we know NGOs have their data protection systems, but then if the victim is assisted by many stakeholders, I'm saying, then the safety of the information is very crucial in this case. And the leaking of the information-- traffickers know these NGOs, they have secure shelters that are not known to the public. Out of the three that I've mentioned, I've visited only one here in Albania and the other locations are unknown even to me, but for traffickers as well. There are risks, I would say, for also because even while they are committed in the shelters, the victims, they are put in contact with their family members. I mean, what's the term? Like the NGO helps them to reestablish contact and communication and relationship and

health of the victims are returned to their family, and the communication is kept online or at the field visits to the cases. So, yes, there is the potential that the victim is being identified by the trafficker.

Asylos: And are you-- are you aware of any data leaks that have occurred in that sense that you mentioned?

Terre des hommes – Albania representative: No. No, because, as I mentioned, I don't work directly with the cases.

UNICEF Child Protection Specialist

[UNICEF Albania](#) describes its work as follows: “UNICEF Albania supports government reforms, civil society initiatives and research that help all children to enjoy their human rights.” A Child Protection Specialist from UNICEF Albania (referred to throughout the report as “UNICEF Child Protection Specialist”) was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report.

Interview transcript – interview conducted 6 June 2023

Asylos: Shall we start with the first question then?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Sure. Sure.

Asylos: So the first set of questions are about profiles of victims of trafficking and risk factors. And the very first question is, what are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: So in 2022, last year, we did an evaluation of the first three years of the program. And in the introduction and the first chapters of the study of the evaluation, there is a good summary of this phenomenon in Albania, including the profiles and the risk factors and so on. So based on the report, we know that-- you want to know about the profiles, right?

Asylos: Yeah, that's right.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Right. So the profiles are-- what we know is that it's mostly children and women. Nonetheless, they are not the only ones, but they're counted as the majority of the cases that they have been identified that they have been provided with services. So we know that especially women and girls are used for sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse. And we also know not only women and girls, in some cases also young boys. And we also know that boys and young boys have been trafficked in order to be used or exploited in criminal activities abroad. So it's mostly, yeah, women and girls and young boys.

Yeah. Yeah. And we have also-- we also have another report called Trafficked by Someone I Know that is focusing about traffickers, the profile of the traffickers. But in the case, it's a case study, and also through the elaboration of the report, we came across most of the cases that were selected and they're accepted also to be part of the report, the study were mostly women and girls.

Asylos: Okay. I see. Great. We'll get to the profiles of traffickers in the moment as well. But first, let me ask you what factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked in Albania.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Right. So we know that the risk factors are but not limited to poverty, low educational enrolment, lack of opportunities for higher education, especially after high school. We also know gender inequality and violence against women, including domestic violence and family breakdown. We also know that lack of income, scarce

livelihood opportunities are risk factors. Poverty, in general, is one of the main reasons. And as I was saying before, women and children are the most victims of human trafficking, but also men have been identified as victims. And also going back to the question on the profile, we also know that children from Roma and Egyptian minorities are also reportedly at high risk of child trafficking, due to a combination of the above factors. They have always been a marginalized community. The lack of housing. And especially for the Roma communities, we know that the specially Roma and Egyptian children, often live or work in the streets, therefore they are considered as a high risk and vulnerable group due to the particularities of their working and family conditions.

Asylos: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. And then let's talk about the trafficker profiles and their recruitment methods. What are the profile of traffickers in Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: year as well called Trafficked by Someone I Know, where we have a really good summary of cases. It's based on study cases, but really these cases, they really summarize the situation and really reflect the situation on the ground. So we know that most of the girls, 18-- sorry, so this reports, for the elaboration of the report, we went through the analysis in a study of 99 cases of human trafficking, and it showed that 60% of the traffickers were either close family members or had very close social ties with the victims. Out of the 99 cases, 31% were reported to be cases in which boyfriends had exploited victims, and also 25% were friends of the victim, and 12% involved family members. And 19% of the cases, victims were exploited by people they had met on social media. So this is really, yeah, people that are very close to the victim. It's not people that they're meeting random, met online or abroad, which is only like 2%, but most is really people who have really close ties with the victims.

Asylos: Okay. And what are the methods of recruitment that these traffickers use?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. I mean, they're always-- it's people who are likely to exploit their relationship with the victims. They are close to the victims, so they know what are their vulnerabilities -- they know the dynamics in the relationship and also what are the needs of the person, how they can manipulate, control and exploit the victims.

Asylos: Yeah. Okay. Let's talk a little bit more about the prevalence of trafficking. This question is about trafficking of boys and men, so I'm not sure this falls within your expertise, but let me just check. What of the prevalence of trafficking of boys and men in Albania, can you say anything about that?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. We know that it also happens. It's not the majority. We know that a high proportion are children and youth, especially girls between 14 to 18, which is the age group of girls that are mostly targeted for sex trafficking. But we know that also boys and men are being trafficked, especially in order to-- I mean, what we know about boys and men is that in many cases, the use of bonded labor when the trafficker, they offer them how to illegally take them to especially EU countries and once they get there, they are requested to pay the cost of their trip. And in many occasions, as far as we know, there are linked to criminal organizations or criminal activities in the foreign country where as documented in some of the cases they have been used to either sell drugs in the streets or harvesting cannabis among other illegal criminal activities.

Asylos: Okay. And you already touched upon women and girls as well. Is there anything you'd like to add on the prevalence of trafficking among women and girls?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: No. As I mentioned, it's mostly girls aged 14 to 18 and very young women, 20 up to 24, in most of the cases are related to sex trafficking.

Asylos: Okay. Great. Can you tell us anything about the prevalence of trafficking among Roma, Egyptian, and other ethnic minorities? You've also already touched upon that, but just if you have something to add.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. We have another study that is a survey on knowledge, attitudes, and practice of youth regarding human trafficking in Albania. So we have one report that focus in the four regions of the program that we're currently implementing in Albania. I mean, our program is not targeting the whole of the country. For some activities like prevention awareness, we do. But when we are talking about specific services, it's only focusing in four areas. So we did this survey, a knowledge, attitudes, and practice survey last year. And so we have the report. We have one that talks about the four regions. Then we have one for each of the different regions, additional reports focusing on each of the regions. And we have another report that is focusing on findings for the Roma community specifically. So I will share the link. And in that report, you will have some findings that are very specific to the Roma community. But as I mentioned before, they're a high risk because of the vulnerability of these minority group, historic vulnerabilities and exclusion of these minority groups, and because of the conditions and where they live and work as well.

Asylos: Yeah. What is the prevalence of trafficking among LGBTQI+ persons?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. For this one, we don't have any information. It didn't come across on any of our research, but is something that we're considering to look more into the detail in the near future.

Asylos: All right. And how about the prevalence of trafficking among persons with disabilities?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: The same as above. The same as with the LGBTI, we don't have any evidence or concrete information about specific, yeah, programs.

Asylos: Thank you. And then we've already talked a little bit about sex trafficking in Albania. Do you have anything to add about certain groups being more affected by sex trafficking than others?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. We know that women and girls are the ones. And I mean, children in general. Yeah.

Asylos: Okay. How about trafficking for the purpose of forced labor in Albania? What kind of profiles are specifically prevalent there?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. We have some evidence in these cases in Albania. We know that especially babies or very young children are used for child begging in the streets. So that is category of children, young children are used in some areas in the country, especially where there is a high number of tourists. And we see and we have identified some cases of children being exploited or used for begging.

Asylos: Okay. How about trafficking for the purposes of forced criminality in Albania? Are there certain groups that are disproportionately affected by it?

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

Asylos: Okay. And then the next question is about forced begging. We've already touched upon that, so I assume it's fine to move on. Okay.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah.

Asylos: So let's talk about recognition as a victim of trafficking. Our question is that if a person has been recognized as a trafficking victim by the UK National Referral Mechanism, will they also automatically be recognized as a trafficking victim by the Albanian national referral mechanism and would they be able to access support in Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: This is something that we have been discussing. We haven't come across cases, but what we know from the existing framework in Albania, the only way to be recognized as a victim of trafficking in Albania is to go through the National Referral Mechanism in Albania and this is the only authority or actual instance where they get this status and recognition. I'm not 100% sure, but we believe it's not possible that when they get identified as a victim in the UK, they will automatically be recognized as such in Albania. But what we know is that in December 2022, there was a joint communique between the two countries and they have a new agreement, but as for UNICEF, we haven't come across any specific case that can provide any exceptions or that says something different from what is available in the national framework.

Asylos: Okay. I see. Thank you. Talking about trafficking-related legislation in Albania, what is the legal framework in relation to trafficking?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. In the research that we did of the evaluation program for the first three years, there is a very detailed section on the legal framework; what is in place, what works, what doesn't work, what is some of the gaps and challenges, and so on. So my advice will be that you can refer to the specific questions on our report, if it's okay.

Asylos: Yeah, of course. Which report is that? What is the title?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: So it's 2022 evaluation report of the UNICEF trafficking program in Albania.

Asylos: Okay. Great. The next questions may--

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Sorry. I'm sorry. I can also share with you in this regard, that is one of our partners is one of our shelters that we will talk about this later, but one of our partners, also, they did a specific report, a study on the compliance of the Albanian legal framework with the acquis community of the European Union in the area of the fight against trafficking of human beings. So it's a very exclusive study on the legal framework, the Albanian legal framework. Very interesting. So I can also share the link with you of the study.

Asylos: Yeah. Which shelter published this?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: The name of the shelter is an NGO called [inaudible]. And they'd have done this study in 2021.

Asylos: Okay. Great. Thank you. So just looking at the next questions on legislation, are there any questions that you can respond to directly? So, for example, legislation in relation to child protection, how effective the legislation is.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I mean, everything regarding to the legislation and the legal framework is very well-detailed, but we know in general, what I can tell you beyond what is included in the evaluation report is that-- I mean, in general, not only for trafficking in Albania, as you know, the country has been issuing laws and the entire legal framework is very recent. Furthermore, there have been many legal amendments the country has undergone, especially since 2014, when they were giving the status of candidate country to enter the EU. In general terms, most of the existing legislation in Albania, faces more or less the same challenge,

which is the implementation of the law. I mean, they have a good legal framework, with many provisions in place, but the challenge remain with the implementation of these provisions. And for human trafficking, it is the same challenge. Even though there are some things that are in place, whatever is included in the law and related to child protection is the same, when it comes to quality and expansion of services and covering not only the main urban areas but also ensuring services in rural and remote areas.

Asylos: Yeah. I see. Do you have any more information on how the legislation is implemented in practice and where the gaps are?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: As I say this, the gaps are also related to availability of sustainable financial resources and institutionalized capacities of the different service providers. In the social services area, including response for trafficking, so far, the government relies heavily on external funding, especially from international organizations. So a lot of the services that exist today are relying on external funding. So for example, if there are some services that are established, after a few years if the donor changes priority or believes that now it's time for the state to continue to take the financial burden of specific services, there is some disruption or the quality of the service is compromised. So this is very much related to the funding and the source of the funding.

Asylos: Yeah. I see. And what provisions exist to protect witnesses? Is there, for example, witness protection program, and if yes, how effective is it?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. For us, I mean, we don't have that information in the sense that our intervention in Albania has been more on the prevention and response for survivors of trafficking. And there is another organization that has been leading all the areas related to prosecution and dealing more with the perpetrators and the legal and criminal provisions, which is the OSCE.

Asylos: OSCE. Okay. Let's continue with questions about state protection from trafficking. Our next question is how effective the following institutions are at providing protection to victims of trafficking: the police, the judiciary, and other state authorities.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. The police, I could say is very active. This is one of the main institutions providing protection to victims. There is a lot of work that has been done by training and collaborating with the police. And this is the one that, we as UNICEF, we're also more in charge of. I mean, we are more involved in working with the police as one of the main institutions when it comes to protecting, but also by identifying cases of victims of trafficking. For the judiciary, as I say, we don't work very closely with the judiciary because it's another institution who has been taking the law, taking the role of working with the Judiciary, which is the OSC. But what we know is that it's very slow to process. And as you can also see from the US State Department report from 2022, we can see that there has been a train of a very-- I mean, I think in 2022 there were only two cases who were like to [inaudible].

So the trend has been that less and less cases have been treated by the judiciary and convicted and so on. So I think that's-- but you can also check this information from the US State Department report that's available online. And about other authorities, I would say that the competent authority, which is the Ministry of Interior or the National Referral Mechanism has been very active as well and very committed to preventing or responding to human trafficking. But as well, Albania is going through this decentralization of various services. And at the municipal level, there have been a lot of roles and responsibilities that have been attributed to the social services department And they also have been very much engaged in responding to and protecting victims of trafficking. So I think that it will be important also to note the role of the municipalities and social services at the sub national level in order to prevent or respond to trafficking.

Asylos: Okay. And what is the conviction rate for trafficking?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I don't have this information, but I think it's very low. What we know is very low, but the exact number is very low. But as I said, if you refer to the US State Department report, then you have some data on this regard. I think for 2022, they already have it. I think there are only two cases. Yeah.

Asylos: Yeah. Okay. And what state measures are in place to prevent trafficking of men, women, and children?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. So Albania - I would also share this with you - they have a National Action Plan to fight human trafficking, which was supported by UNICEF, the development of the plan. And it covers 2021 to 2023. And UNICEF is currently also supporting the Ministry of Interior, the National Authority to review the progress of that plan and supports the development of a new National Action Plan from 2024 to 2026.

Asylos: Okay. And is there a child protection system? How effective is the child protection system in protecting children from trafficking or re-trafficking?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yes. There is a child protection system in place that is very much involved. And this is something that UNICEF also has been-- the priority of UNICEF has been how to support the existing national child protection system to include this phenomenon of trafficking. Since 2019, we have been supporting a lot of capacity building of the child protection actors to better identify and respond to cases of child trafficking. Yeah.

Asylos: And how effective is the system?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Still, there are some remaining challenges, especially in some areas of the country where there is absence of social services, especially in some rural areas and where there is a lack of human resources as well from the child protection system. So, of course, there have been a lot of progress, but there's still a lot of challenges as well.

Asylos: Yeah. Okay. And are there--

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Sorry. In the evaluation report also, we have a section on how the child protection system has been strengthened and how has been linked to-- how we have been using human trafficking in order to strengthen the child protection system.

Asylos: Okay. That's good to know. Are there adequate provisions, particularly accommodation and social care for children who do not have parental care?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. So there are a number of institutions that UNICEF also has been working with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, where they are used as alternative care models where children without parents or children that they don't have parental care, they can be supported in these institutions. So far-- I mean, UNICEF has been supporting the ministry on how to unify a lot of these children. We call it the Institutionalization of Children Program, and there is a lot of work that UNICEF has been doing with the ministry in order to identify the children who are really in need of these services that are not just there because it's easier due to economic vulnerabilities of the families. But there are some last resort cases that-- I mean, the government has in place together with the Civil Society Organization where they have these alternative care services in place. Yeah. But what was the question for it again?

Asylos: So are there adequate provisions, particularly accommodation and social care for children who don't have parental care? So no parents--

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. So, yeah, they exist. I mean, it's a less resource and a very specific situations. But there are some-- yeah, there are some organizations that provide these kinds of services.

Asylos: And do you know which organizations those are?

UNICEF Specialist UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: mostly--

Yeah. Yeah. Some of them are institutions that depend on the municipal state social services. You have some that also depend from the National Authority at the central level, especially in Tirana and the capital. And then you have also some civil society organizations that they provide some emergency services or services that are provided for specific categories of vulnerable children. In some cases, migrants or children, and accompany of separated children.

Asylos: Okay. I see. And what limitations are there in respect of existing prevention measures?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Well, there is a lot of awareness raising and dissemination of information in the last five years. However, we believe that there has been a challenge to reach out to some vulnerable communities, especially in rural areas. Social media, for example, or the use of internet is less accessible in these specific communities. So these are some of the limitations But I mean, it has been-- I mean, have been improved a lot, the awareness and so on. And again, for this information about the knowledge, attitudes, and practice, we have the reports. But again, this report, they focus only four regions, so they don't represent the situation in Albania as a whole. But these are considered four of the most vulnerable regions, so.

Asylos: Okay. I see. And do victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: We only are aware of one or two cases in the past. I think one or two cases maximum. So I would say it's very limited. Yeah.

Asylos: One or two cases in which the victims received compensation, or one or two cases in general that were--?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: One or two cases that have received compensation.

Furthermore, what we know is that it takes years. It's very complicated. It's costly and it's very difficult.

Asylos: So my next question is on corruption. And it's how, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affects their ability to protect victims of trafficking? When we say state institutions, we're talking both, obviously government institutions, but it could be extended to, for example, healthcare, state-run refugees, education, etc.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. I mean, we don't have any evidence or any information about this. I mean, we know that-- I mean, the main organizations who provide services, a response to a victim of trafficking, in some cases, they receive state funding. And in many cases-- I mean, there is some political affiliation or there have been working for several years and so on. So I mean, we know in general there have been some reports and some evidence gathered, especially by EU, the US and other foreign governments that tend to say that there is some corruption [in Albania], especially in some areas of the government or ministries. But whether this is really linked to human trafficking or affecting the ability to protect victims is very difficult to say. I would say it's very difficult. We don't have any information or evidence about this.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And you mentioned some EU reports. Do you know the names of those reports?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yes. It is the-- I mean, I can't share them as well, but we have one. When they're doing the acquis-- I mean in the one that-- in the report done by Vatra, also there is some links and some quotes to some of these reports that you have done in the previous years.

Asylos: Right. Thank you.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: But I know that there is nothing they're related to human trafficking specifically. More about judiciary. Justice. More about other areas and not really linked to human trafficking.

Asylos: Great. Thank you. In which case, my next question we might be able to skip is, is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: No evidence.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. Thanks. So my next group of questions is about state assistance for victims of trafficking, and I know we've touched on a few elements of this. So question one is, what is the current capacity of state-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support that's whether inside or outside shelters to the following four categories: so we have trafficked girls, trafficked boys, trafficked adult women, and trafficked adult men.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Right. So right now, in Albania, there are four shelters that exist. One out of the four is 100% run by the state. It can accommodate families with children with dependents, men, and women. So basically, all types of cases. Well, what we know-- I mean, even thought that they-- I mean, they're allowed to support or to host some of the men. The approach that has been followed by, not only by the shelter but by the other children, is that men are mostly supported outside the shelters. So accommodation is provided, for example, renting or-- yeah, renting accommodation outside the shelter. And men are supported by them financially, supported by the shelter itself, but they're not hosted within the shelter. So as I said, there's one that is 100% run by the state in Tirana, and then we have three other shelters that are run by three NGOs called Vatra. Tjeter Vizion. I mean, I can chart all the addresses and it's because it's not easy. And the other one is Different and Equal.

So we know that-- and we, as UNICEF, we work with these three shelters and they also receive some funding from the state. So they are NGOs that receive external funding from donors and international organizations such as UNICEF, but they also receive a small amount or some amount of funding from the state. So the state can refer some of these cases also to these three shelters. So the three shelters that I was mentioning, one is specifically for women and girls, then we have another one that is specifically for minors, children, and then you have another one where they can accommodate families with dependent children and including men, some boys. But the tendency is that most-- the case is when you have a male, without family dependent, without either a partner or dependent children, they are supported by the shelter, but they're not supported inside the shelter.

Asylos: Okay. Great. Thank you. And how many people can these state-run shelters can they support in each of these categories and how long can they provide the support for?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. So for the three that are supported by UNICEF, they can support up to 140. All combined. And then the one that is run by the state is up to 20, 20%. So let's say, yeah, it's 140 plus 20-- oh, sorry, 180.

Asylos: Thank you.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: 160. Sorry. 160.

Asylos: Yes. Yeah. It's okay. It's okay. And do you know how long this support can be provided for?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: It ranges from three to nine months on average..

Asylos: Okay. Great. Thank you. And are trafficked persons in the state-run shelters, are they able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yes.

Asylos: Okay. And how effective are these services that they may be able to access?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I mean they are somewhat effective, but I mean, at least from the ones that UNICEF has been supporting, there are reviews that we are doing every six months where we check the relevance, how efficient it has been if they're accompanied by some market assessments, and also collect feedback from the beneficiaries themselves in order to align them with emerging needs or new trends, or especially when we're talking about vocational training or internships or job opportunities and coaching and so on.

Asylos: Okay. Great. And what are the barriers to accessing these services in rehabilitation and reintegration?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I would say that the identification of cases themselves is a big barrier. It's not very easy. It's very difficult actually to identify cases in the first place. So by the fact that there are very limited cases that are identified, so it's very difficult to rehabilitate and reintegrate people who have been affected by this phenomenon.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. So my next group of questions are basically the same questions but for NGO-run shelters. So we've obviously kind of answered most of them. I guess, is there a difference between-- so the three NGO shelters and the one state-run shelter, are there differences in those services around rehabilitation and reintegration, for example?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: No. They are very similar because the National Referral Mechanism and the National Action Plan, they have set some standards for the services that are provided in Albania for victims or potential victims of human trafficking. And the state-run shelter and the three other CSOs, NGOs who are running these shelters, they are within these two frameworks and so are very similar.

Asylos: Great. Okay. So is the funding for the support services, this is for the NGO-run shelters, is that funding permanent or is it time limited?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: It's very time limited. And I would say that this is one of the big challenges. A big challenge is also, yeah, that there's a lot of interruption of services due to the instability of the funding, but I also say it's not really-- I don't know if it's relevant for this question, but it made me think also transparency is also a challenge in the sense that some of these three organizations, they not only receive money from the state and from UNICEF, but in many cases, they also receive funding from external or different donors. So some challenges that we have been facing is to some transparency from these shelters to really disclose or share what kind of funding and what amount of funding they're also receiving from external or different organizations.

Asylos: Yeah. Yeah. That's helpful. Thank you. You mentioned that the funding can be interrupted. What factors tend to affect that funding being interrupted?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I would say there is a very limited number of donors, maybe like one or two donors only who have been really involved in this phenomenon. So, yeah, not everybody is-- yeah, this is not appealing to many donors who are currently supporting the government of Albania.

Asylos: And when that funding is interrupted or when it ceases, what impact does this have on the ability for these places to provide their services?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: A lot. Because in many cases, the service are completely shut down, uninterrupted. And it happened during COVID. During COVID time, whenever everything stopped and fundings stopped coming in, the shelters were basically shut down or they were not able to support any persons beyond the people who were already there. And in many cases, most of the services were interrupted and only very minimum services were provided.

Asylos: Okay. And just so looking back at that whole section, then looking at the kind of state-run shelters and the NGO-run shelters, what would be the best place for us to get sort of evidence from what you've been discussing? Would that be one of the reports you've already mentioned?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. It could be in the economic reintegration report. You would have some information related to that. But also, in case you would like to also interview the shelters or have a conversation with the shelters, we'll be happy also to provide you some contact details. And you can say that UNICEF has provided their context, that you would like to know more about their services and their approach, and so on. And, yeah, they might be able to provide additional information.

Asylos: Great. Thank you, that sounds really helpful. So my next question is around stigma. So to what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys-- I know we've discussed that that's more of a minority, but to what extent do they experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? And is that stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking? So sex trafficking, forced labor, forced criminality, forced begging, etc.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yes. We know that stigma is a big issue. And also for that, you can refer to the capital survey, the knowledge, attitudes, and practices that I will share with you. There is some information regarding stigma at specific sections on stigma. And as well in the economic reintegration reporting has been identified by some of the barriers for people willing to receive some of these support services. They don't want to be associated, especially women and girls have been evicted of sex trafficking.

Asylos: Yeah. My next few questions are about employment. So what barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face to finding employment in Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. We have to identify lack of information as some of the main barriers. And we also have some specific section on the reintegration report survey that we have to and that you can-- yeah, you can have some specific information in the report.

Asylos: Okay. Brilliant. The report may also help with the following questions, but I'll go through them anyway. What support is available in finding employment and does it include professional training or job placement?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. I think it is very much related to-- you have also a specific section for that. Yeah. Basically, in some cases, especially regarding support provided by the state, we believe that some of these opportunities were not very relevant to the

market. Especially at the beginning, a few years ago, so this was an issue like, "How to keep these services updated and relevant to the current needs of the market?" And so on.

Asylos: Right. Thank you. So what kind of employment are they able to find, if any? And how does their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. I mean, I would say that it is very difficult to generalize. I think you need to go case by case. What we know from the report that we did at the time, around 55% of the people who received a training-- or, yeah, there was some kind of training or education in a specific area. They were working in that area where they were trained or received training on. But again, I think it depends on the case.

Asylos: Thank you. Last question, unemployment. What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I just checked this last night from the official government site. And for the first quarter of 2023, it's 11.3%. This includes from 15 years and above.

Asylos: 15 and above. Okay. So my next section is on social assistance, and I know we've touched on this a little bit, but again, just to reiterate. What social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for and what are the barriers to accessing it?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I mean, there is a range of services that are included in the National Action Plan and the National Referral Mechanism, including health, education, and employment, and so on. But beyond what is available, what we have-- but we have noticed-- I mean this maybe goes to the next question, is that there are many challenges in order to access these services. There is a lot of bureaucracy, but also you have the issue of stigma and confidentiality in a small country like Albania, and so on. And I mean, the feedback we got is that - and also you will find this in the economic integration report - a lot of people who tried to access that assistance, didn't go until the end of the process because it was very long, complicated and costly. So, yeah, they needed a lot of papers, a lot of certificates, come here, get to a place. So, yeah, it's very complicated. Very lengthy process.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. Onto housing assistance. And so what housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for? And again, what are the barriers to accessing it? Maybe the barriers are very similar.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. That was very similar. Exactly. Because not only social-- I mean, housing is one of the social services, social assistance, so it's pretty much the same.

Asylos: Okay. Great. And then my last question in this section. So does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: They do. In this case, yes, they do. Especially if they don't have a job or any other income or not enough income, the response that is in place in the response framework, it provides accommodation. So either in the shelters or outside the shelters. But, in any case, they do. They provide protection against this.

Asylos: Great. Thank you. Okay. So looking to healthcare and rehabilitation services. So again, with those four categories of people, so we've got trafficked girls, trafficked boys, trafficked adult women, and trafficked adult men, what mental healthcare services are available to those four groups?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. I mean, mental response, mental healthcare response, psychosocial mental health response. It doesn't make any difference between the

different target groups. So I would say it's the same for all of them. And all of the four shelters and the state social services, they all are equipped with psychologists and mental health specialists and this is part of the case management response. So unpackage. So I would say that, yeah, everybody who has been identified and approached by any of the service providers, it's a service that is part of the-- is one of the basic core services provided by all the shelters and organizations providing any support to victims and survivors of human trafficking. And then, we as UNICEF, are supporting online platform. I can also share with you the link--

Asylos: Thank you.

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: --of this organization that provides online support. So currently, they have their website where anyone can go and schedule an appointment with a professional and they will have online sessions regarding mental health and related to cases at personal risk or survivals of human trafficking. And now, we are currently supporting this organization to develop a mobile application where you don't need only a laptop to access these services, but you can also do it from your phone. And we also have a lot of data that not only people living in Albania are using this service, but also Albanians living especially in the UK or in Germany or in other countries that they also reach by these services. So, yeah, we know that people abroad also use this service.

Asylos: Thank you. So very similar question, but on physical healthcare. So what physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? And are these services adequate to meet their needs?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yes. This is part of the full and basic package service package. So either they receive these services through the state services in the shelter run by the state, but also in the other three shelters this full package is included in the whole response. Healthcare response is very much covered.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. So we have just five questions, so we're getting to the end. My next group of questions is on internal relocation. What problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: The limited information we have about this shows that-- I mean, Albania is a very small country and everybody knows everyone. So I think it's very difficult for someone to be relocated in a place where nobody else would know where they are, basically. It's very small country and a place where everybody knows everyone, or everybody knows someone who knows someone.

Asylos: Thank you. This probably feeds into your point, actually, but are trafficking victims able to avoid their traffickers by relocating to another part of Albania?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I mean, without having any evidence, I would say, it's very difficult. It would be very difficult. Yeah.

Asylos: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. All right. Next question. Well, I think that your response probably fits with this one as well, but do traffickers find victims of trafficking who internally relocate? What methods do they use?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I mean, we don't have also a lot of information on internal relocation, but the few cases or evidence that we have may-- I mean, we have some cases of re-trafficked persons, people who returned to Albania and they moved to a different location or near a city and they were re-trafficked. Most of the cases that we have documented from re-trafficking fit a little bit into this. Most of them, they fit into this category. Yeah.

Asylos: Thank you. And those cases, are they outlined in some of the reports you've previously mentioned?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yes, Trafficked By Someone I know. We know that there must be one or two cases there, and illustrate a little bit.

Asylos: Thank you. Okay. So directly related then, looking at re-trafficking, what issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: I mean, the same issues, that also affect the likelihood of trafficking in the first place: economic vulnerabilities, and especially the profile of the traffickers, that is 68% people that are very close to victims and are very close family members.

Asylos: Thank you. Okay. Last question. What issues affect the likelihood of reprisals or retaliation of traffickers?

UNICEF Albania Child Protection Specialist: Yeah. We don't have also information.

Vatra

["Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre](#) is an Albanian non-profit organisation, which provides services and expertise for the prevention and protection of victims of trafficking, and domestic and community violence. "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. A representative of Vatra Psycho-Social Centre was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report. Further information can be found about Vatra in [Annex 5](#) p.157.

Interview transcript – conducted 5 June 2023

Asylos: Perfect. Thank you very much. And so we can just go right into it, and we'll start off with questions on the profiles of victims of trafficking and risk factors. So the first question is what are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

Vatra: Okay. So that was better to introduce a little bit background. So the context of where we work in order to go through the questions then. Vatra is a nonprofit organization that it is funded started to the work in 1999. And it is so an organization that work on a national basis. So we cover with services the victims that comes from different regions of Albania even victims that come from different countries if they are identified here in Albania. Vatra is working in four directions on activities to prevent human trafficking and gender-based violence through activities such as learning campaigns and so information sessions, especially to youths and to vulnerable groups in Albania. The second program is the direct assistance program. So the long-term reintegration program that we have set up for supporting victims of human trafficking, victims of gender-based violence, mostly women and girls and their children. So that depends if they are accompanied by their children. And then we have a fourth program that is capacity building. We offer and provide capacity building for state and non-state employers that work in the field of anti trafficking field and gender-based violence. And fourth it is so lobbying and advocacy because as nonprofit organization, civil society organization, we provide and we work a lot to improve legislation and policies in Albania for supporting the rights of victims of human trafficking. So this is a short introduction of Vatra Center.

And the other thing that I wanted to say because all the data that I will provide further, they are based on all the organizations that work in Albania in anti-trafficking fields. So Vatra is a member of National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters in Albania. There are four members of this

coalition, and all these members have the same responsibility, duty, and activities that Vatra has. So they are supporting victims of human trafficking coming from different regions of Albania. So three of the members are NGOs such as Vatra. One it is in Tirana, Different & Equal. The other one, it is in Elbasan. It is Other Vision, the name. And the other member is a state center. It is National Reception Center for victims of human trafficking. All these centers, of course, members of this coalition, works together in networking and coalition in order to improve legislation, policies, and to advocate and lobby for this. And so we refer to each other cases that depends where the cases can stay. And as well, we provide data regarding human trafficking. And we refer this data to responsible authority in the Ministry of Interior in Albania.

And we are obligated to refer all the data that we had in order to have a national database for victims. And we provide as well as coalition data for other international reports such as TIP Reports. That is every year. So at the end of the year, we provide data for our activity. And we give inputs to TIP Report or to EU progress reports. So that depends on the reports that want our researcher that are asking us or requesting for data for human trafficking. So that's why the data that I will provide, most of the data, it is national data because in this way, it is better to understand so the situation, human trafficking, the profile of victims, etc. So the data that we have provided is not published because it is gathered and from all the centers. Each of the members have their own reports of the data. And so some of the reports are published; some are not yet published. So Vatra has not yet published 2022 reports. And it is under preparation, and we publish this report in our websites of the organization. So full reports of our activities and we provide data and profiles. If you want some data on profiles of victims of human trafficking and other data, you can check so different reports that we have on our website. Probably, I will provide you with a website later of written if you like to. So that is the--

Asylos: Not a problem. What we could do for now is-- thank you so much. And what we could do because I'm conscious of time, I'm afraid, is probably just to ask you the direct questions for now. And then we can refer to the reports, right? And so going back to just the first question of the profiles, what are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

Vatra: Okay. If we can talk about profile and regarding the data that we have, so I can refer to 2022 because we have completed data regarding this. During 2022, all the coalition center for the first time. So for the first time, so during this year, 118 new cases of victims and potential victims of human trafficking. All these victims have been identified based on standard operating procedures in Albania. And they have referred for services to our shelters, so the shelters of the coalition. The source of referral are different from local state and on-state institutions and organizations that refer to us the victims that are identified. 73% of the cases as stated were females and 27% were males. So the provided mostly by women and girls. 66% from this has been minors. So the most part of the victims are minors. 37% of the cases have been from Roma community and Egyptian communities that are small community here Albania. And the other part from larger Albanian community. 16% of them have been identified with mental health problems that have been before or during involving in trafficking. And 16% of them have been accompanied by children. So have been mothers and accompanied by children. 89% of the victims identified have been trafficked within Albania. So the internal trafficking, it is mostly pervasive. So in Albania. And only the 2% have been identified as trafficked abroad so in other countries.*

The countries that identified have been exploited in different regions of Albania and mostly to big cities such as Tirana, Vlorë, and touristic cities. If mostly percent, I don't have that. I don't know why, but mostly percent of them has been exploited for sexual exploitation. So if we talk about exploitation, probably I would find some data regarding the percentage of them and sent you with I don't have here because I printed some data, and I don't know if I don't have here. But mostly, it's been sexual abuse-- sorry, exploited. And the other parts percentage, it is for forced

labor as mostly this for forced labor, we have considered mostly minors that has been involved in forced begging. We have a small percentage of young people involved in criminal activities. So exploited for force criminal activities such as selling drugs-- or narcotics, sorry, and then so stealing. So these are the most ways. So more of them if you have any questions regarding the profile.

*[*In further written clarifications on 19 December 2023 following the interview, Asyllos asked the interlocutor to clarify whether all the statistics referred to in the paragraph related to Vatra's service statistics, or statistics for the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Centres. The interlocutor confirmed that all the statistics referred to in the paragraph relate to service statistics for the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Centres.]*

Asyllos: Thank you so much. What factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked in Albania?

Vatra: So the factors, mostly of the factors are related to the poverty and income. So low incomes and poverty and lack of employment and possibilities for employment here in Albania because most of most part of the victims are looking for a better life is we can say and for possibilities of working. And these are some so vulnerabilities that the traffickers exploit to the victims in order for them to be exploited then after. And there is as well over 80% of the victims so have been victims of domestic violence before.* So domestic violence, it is a pervasive factor that influence the victims to leave so their houses and to find some better so places and some protection for the people that recruit victims of human trafficking. So these are mostly the pervasive factors. So it is the economic and poverty and this is the domestic violence and based mostly on gender-based violence because mostly the part of the victims that are violated has been women and girls. And for this reason, it is a risk factor.

And a big factor as well, it is irregular migration. If we say regular migration, we know because we have regional reports and we have collaboration with our partners in Europe as well, and there are a lot of immigrants, so people from Albania, that are moving from Albania to other countries. And one of the countries that is most so affected by this is UK as you know probably. But other countries of Europe, for example, France and Scandinavian countries as well, Netherlands, Italy, and Greece remain the biggest country for having Albanian migrants. And this regular migration that it is mostly undergone through smuggling so it is a risk factor for the people that are migrating. One of the problems that we have related to this, it is that we just know from the reports that there are a lot of people that are identified as victims of human trafficking in this countries, but we don't have any referral from this countries for supporting victims that have been identified and to refer in Albania or to come to Albania and to be supported by us. These are very few referrals that not justify.** So what can we say so the trafficking of Albanian people outside the country. So we don't have cases of this. So this is more or less [inaudible].

*[*In further written clarifications following the interview, Asyllos asked the following question: Does the 80% refer to the people that Vatra assists? Or everyone identified and assisted by the NCATS?*

The interlocutor responded as follows:

“This is based on Vatra's data only.”

Source: Vatra, written clarifications, 19 December 2023]

*[**In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos also asked the following question:*

Does this mean that although the numbers of VoTs and PVoTs formally identified in other countries are high, you do not see many of these being referred to Vatra / the NCATS? Or did you mean something else?

The interlocutor responded as follows:

“We can add as well that not only from international reports, but as well from victims that we assist, there are other Albanian victims in European Countries, but the problem is that they apply for Asylum in these countries and the process takes too long. From other agencies or organizations that support victims of trafficking in Europe countries including UK, we do not have many referrals of cases that return in Albania, in order for us to support them in Albania in reintegration process. It has been very few in recent years, from Sweden, UK, or Netherlands, number that not justify the number of Albanian cases reported in international reports as victims of human trafficking. Probably they stay in these countries, or when they return, do not approach to the services in Albania.”

Source: Vatra, written clarifications, 19 December 2023]

Asylos: Okay. Thank you very much. And what would you say are the methods of recruitment into trafficking?

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

Asylos: Thank you very much. And moving on to the prevalence of trafficking, which you have covered on a number of profiles already, namely, women and girls and you've also touched on boys and men. I think you also mentioned Roma, could I also ask about what is the prevalence of trafficking among Egyptian and other ethnic minorities in Albania?

Vatra: So the first profile of the traffickers in Albania-- so the profile of trafficker, it is mostly of an individual now at the moment, individual trafficker or exploiter or recruiter. But we all know that there are criminal groups behind this because they cannot act alone. So these are boyfriends or these are relatives that recruit and then exploit the victims or give or refer them to other people that are inside or outside Albania. So mostly, this is not very well evidenced in Albania

because there are no so many convictions or we don't know exactly what is behind all these profiles of the traffickers. But mostly of the traffickers are individuals and few are groups that are acting together. So we know the existing are free forms of profiles of traffickers that are individuals, there are groups, and there are criminal groups so it is more high. But this criminal groups are mostly for transnational trafficking so not into Albania. In Albania, there individuals and groups that collaborate together. And mostly of the victims that are exploited for sexual exploitation, for example, are exploited in the hotels, on motels in the country. And for example, for the youth that are involved in criminal activity or begging there are groups of relatives or friends groups that are-- so doubts and recruits these young people and exploit them into trafficking.

Regarding the groups, so ethnic groups, I mentioned it before, but I can retell again that 37% of the new cases identified during 2022 has been from Roma ethnic group that lives in Albania and Egyptian community that lives in Albania. So these are people that probably are stigmatized and are judged by other national ethnic for having such a culture of movement, and so they are always at risk of this movement. Probably, they are into marriage earlier than the others, and so probably the false marriages and forced marriages sometimes at young age are typical for Roma groups. So this is the percentage.

Asylos: Thank you very much. And just while we're on minorities, if I can also ask about what the prevalence of trafficking among LGBTQI persons are?

Vatra: So in the data we have, we don't have this data regarding LGBT persons involving human trafficking, but so we know that they are at risk of being exploited, but we don't have cases of people that have been identified. But in Albania and in other countries, they are at risk of being exploited for anything, and they are people that report high violence from the others between their groups. So we don't have any-- so we are open to all these ethnic groups and to this-- not ethnic but LGBT and other, for example, people that have disabilities so we are open to support them if they are identified for being traffic. But we didn't have cases. If the question--

Asylos: Sorry. Just to clarify, I believe that there is no data documented for persons with disabilities, and none on -- LGBTI persons, correct?

Vatra: Yes. So we don't have data here in our work that we are doing as a coalitions, but probably if we see national reports - I don't know - probably other organizations that work locally probably must have been identified some. But in our reports, so our common report, we didn't provide data regarding LGBTQI people or persons, but I can say regarding disabilities, for example, because I've mentioned before that 70% of the people that have been identified for the first time have suffered from mental health problems, not necessarily to say that has been disabled, for example, for mental disability or other physic disabilities but here, it is such a misunderstood data and identification, I can say, because sometimes people with mental disability are mixed together with people that have mental health problems. So it is a question of identification and diagnosis, I think. It is not question of having or not people involved with disabilities. I think we have because in our center, for example, we have supported during the next-- so past year and now, actually, we have two people that are with mental disability, but they are as well accompanied by some mental health problems as well. But they are two girls that living in the shelter, and so we are supporting them with all necessary--- so if we can say this is 60% of these people that we support. Yeah.

Asylos: Great. And all of that information is within the kind of report that you're writing, right, the 2022 report?

Vatra: Yes. Yes.

Asylos: Great. Thank you. And then in that case, we can now move on to questions about recognition as a victim of trafficking. If a person has been recognized as a trafficking victim by the UK National Referral Mechanism, will they be automatically recognized as a trafficking victim by the Albanian NRM and able to access support in Albania?

Vatra: Yes, definitely. So in a definite way, yes because we have been a few cases but very few in the past. So if they have been identified in the United Kingdom, for example, and referred to Albania so it is definite that there is such international protocols that we are rely on and we have ratified as well so we use the same definitions and the same identification tools probably for a victim. And these victims are accompanied by information. And from our part, some of these cases are provided with information regarding our services. So before coming to our shelters or to other centers and we provide them with information and they choose where to go, which program to follow so, yeah.

Asylos: Thank you. Okay. And then we can also now move on to trafficking related legislation. And the first question is, what is the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

Vatra: Albania doesn't have unique or a framework law regarding human trafficking, anti-trafficking. But there is a framework legislation framework that it is organized in different laws. And so we have the law in the penal code and criminal code as well. So criminal code it is procedural penal codes so the penal and procedural penal code. So we have so some articles regarding identification trafficking in persons for adults and minors we recognize through legislation, internal and external transnational human trafficking, as well we have some legislation regarding the social-- the rights of the victims. It is provided in the procedural penal code such as the victims have the rights of being supported with immediate psychological medical, social support through programs in Albania provided by state and non-state actors. And we have so the rights of the victims in this penal code.

We have a criminal code for minors, and we have a framework so law for protection of the children as well, and there is some provision for children that are trafficked as well into this legislation. We have social law for the social support of the victims as well. And we provide different articles and different law for the rights of victims of human trafficking. We have some bylaws that are related to this law. For example, for identification and support for victims of human trafficking, there is a standard operating procedure for identification and protection of victims and potential victims of human trafficking where are designed all the steps and prosecutors since the beginning. So since the identification and to final rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims. So this is more or less the legal framework. And now in the framework of our advocacy, we are working as a coalition for drafting a framework law so to have a law in anti-trafficking. And all this law that are separate and are in different laws and bylaw to derive and to have this law as a reference. We'll see. I don't know if it will be possible by the end of this year.

The institutional framework, it is composed by National mechanism-- or Referral Mechanism in Albania and the draft together with the centers that I've mentioned before are members of this National Referral Mechanism. And we have regional mechanism as well that are so supported by the national one. And we have responsible authority in the ministry of interior in the office of national coordinator and trafficking coordinator that are recording and are so have all the data and our supporting all the institutions. We have to deal with some serious problems regarding referral and support of victims of human trafficking. So we have a good legislation and a good legal-- sorry, institutional framework in Albania for supporting the teams of human trafficking but.

Asylos: Yeah. Thank you very much. And can I also ask how effective is the legislation that exists?

Vatra: And this is a question even for us, and so we have this good legislation and we do a lot of training, for example, as a center and coalition to other employees that work in order to improve their knowledge regarding legislation because there is a problem in the implementation of legislation. It is a problem in Albania as it is related to the law capacities that the human and financial resources are in Albania because the law, it is not based on a strong infrastructure and structure to being implemented as being efficient and efficacy. So this is a problem. There are a lot of problems related, for example, to access justice for the victim. I didn't mention but we have a law for provision of free legal aid to all the victims, including human trafficking, victims of crime in general, and victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

But so what is this problem? In 2017, at the procedural penal code, it changed. It has some improvement, as I mentioned before, for putting the rights of the victims on it and for putting some coordinators for informing victims in the prosecution offices in all the regional of Albania, but they did something that they didn't realize that the criminalization or the conviction or so, I think, the procedural-- how can I say? It's a little difficult for me. Before, all the cases that have some legal issues or denunciation, they went through the central criminal court and prosecutor in Tirana. But then through the changes in this law, they say that all the cases of people that are trafficked can be judged in the regional courts. So only the criminal cases that so have been organized by organized crime have the right to be judged to this criminal court in Tirana. And all the other cases for individual traffickers has been to judged by the local courts. So this has been very difficult for us, for the victims, and for access to justice for the victims because the judges and prosecutors that work in the local field, they don't have the training capacity how to deal with cases of human trafficking. And so this has made a lot of postponement of the cases and sometimes not right identification of the cases so if the case has been involved by an individual or a criminal group, etc. So this has been a problem, but now it is moving better forward because most of the judges and prosecutors are trained and are going to be trained regarding to treat these cases in the local courts. So this was just the problem, but I think that it will be it will be okay in the future.

Asylos: Thank you very much. And what provisions exist to protect witnesses? So for example, is there a witness protection program? If yes, how effective is it?

Vatra: Yes, there is a witness protection program and law. Before 2004, there was a protection program that supported by international agencies in Albania such as OSC or some agencies such as USAID or international embassies. And all the victims that have been identified as at risk for life so has been involved through this program. After 2004, there is a law in Albania, the law for protection for witness protection and collaborator of justice, but few victims have been so benefited from this law. For example, we have only one case that has been supported by Vatra that has benefited by this Albanian law and program. And the 10 former victims that have been supported before has been supported by this international body, so organizations that have been supported this program and the victims because during all this time, Vatra has been supported 11 victims of human trafficking that has been involved in this witness programs. 10 has been before the law and then 1 has been from the programs set up by Albanian governments.

Asylos: And just to clarify, you mentioned the international NGO was that who dealt with it?

Vatra: NGOs. So--

Asylos: Or was it the coalition?

Vatra: Agencies such as-- because the state agencies, for example, US embassy, OSC, or these agencies that are not international organizations. Yeah.

Asylos: Thank you. And okay. In that case, we will move on to the next question, which you have already touched on. So how effective are the following institutions at providing protection of

victims of trafficking? So we touched mainly on the judiciary, but what about the police or any other states authorities that you're aware of?

Vatra: Okay. One thing that is not very effective it is a lack of identification of victims of human trafficking by the state institution even though we have standard operating procedures. And there are nine institutions that are involved in this state so procedures such as police, social agencies in Albania, and other education health institutions, etc, but there is not so much effective identification. For identification of victims, all of our centers have set up some mobile units that are supported by our organizations. And this mobile unit act to identify potential victims of human trafficking among vulnerable groups in Albania. And they collaborate with police and social structures in order to identify and refer these cases for services because so even we have so much, so we have standard operating procedures indicator for identifying the victims, we have lack of identification. There is very low identification. For example, during 2022, Vatra has identified, so we have supported, 53 new victims. So about 50% of the victims that have been supported in national covering has been supported by Vatra. And from this cases, more than 80% of the cases have been identified through mobile units that collaborate with state institutions. And 20% of them have been identified by other local institutions that are responsible for identification.

And as I told you regarding the access to justice for the victims, there are some prolongation of victims of the processes in the courts as well. Albania, during the recent times, have been as well - so other than this reform to justice and then all the judges and prosecutors have been so under testing and clarification of their figure during this time that has been a few judges that supported the cases of victims of human trafficking. And for this reason, the access is not very well granted in the right time and with the right time for the victims. And probably victims that follow this case is in the court and prosecutor so sometimes that are psychologically and emotionally very-- so they are not well and have been supported by our organizations to be mediated or to be supported so through these things.

The other thing it is the financial support for provision of services for victims of human trafficking. There is another problem because, okay, we have shelters and the states provide us so NGOs that have shelters that are mentioned before regard about 30% of the total budget of the organization to provide services for victims that live in the shelter mostly, but there are a lack of financial resources and services for the reintegration of victims. So further, when they are go outside to the shelters and for these cases, for this purpose, our organization has the program that it is a very long program. So the first thing, we support them in the shelter, and then we support them in the community with rented apartments, with other services for victims, psychological medical, social, employment, economic programs, etc. because the states doesn't have financial capacities for building up this programs for reintegration. So this is the third problem that we have.

Asylos: Thank you very much. What state measures are in place to prevent trafficking of men and women and children?

Vatra: Okay. Prevention it is one of the fields that we have in our work, but the prevention here it is not complete because preventing, it is not only to take awareness and to have awareness programs. It is one of the programs that we do most. It is the best thing. And in Albania, for example, the month of October, it is called the trafficking month. And all the organizations and state institutions are organized under the national coordinator of anti-trafficking in Albania to organize a month of awareness raising to the population to prevent human trafficking, to prevent irregular migration, etc. So we do this, and it is mostly done by NGOs, but the state is organized and into this. But prevention so must have as well empowerment components, and I see that we have a lack of empowerment components in Albania because there is a lack of employment, there is a high rate of poverty in Albania. So these are not preventing people to leave Albania to

go abroad or to be involved in dangerous situation and exploitation. So this is not so much effective so the prevention.

Asylos: Okay. So I just understood that you've mainly touched on the NGO side of prevention. In terms of the state itself, is there any measures that they have in place in preventing trafficking for women and children now?

Vatra: So they prevent together with us in this component so to raise awareness, and we do a lot of programs together and the state as well. But there are very few programs for people that are vulnerable to have empowerment components such as to have such employment rates. So this is not a good-- this is not good. And for this reason, a lot of people are living or are involving in illegal so activity. So it is not effective. In this part of prevention, it is not effective. But in the other parts, it is. People today in Albania are more aware regarding human trafficking and what does mean involving into human trafficking. A lot of students and children and so youth people are informed regarding human trafficking and to prevent human trafficking about irregular migration so consequences, etc. But the problem it is that actually, there are a lot of people are leaving Albania or involving in other risky situation, and that means that they are not empower[ed], that they don't have means to live and to have the possibilities for living well for wellness, so.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Is there a child protection system? And how effective is the child protection system in protecting children from trafficking or re-trafficking?

Vatra: Yes. This is the child protection system, there is a law. I mentioned before, there is a law for protection of the rights of the children. And in this law, there are some articles that provide support for children victims of human trafficking. And this protection system, it is well organized. It is based on local level. Each local level municipality have protection workers and office near the municipalities. And they have a technical group to support all the cases that are referred that are in danger or suspicions or there are so in the risk for being trafficking or trafficked as well. And these technical group to refer the cases and do case management to all the cases. But if I mentioned before, always and there is this lack of financial resources that not always do effective this system. So in general, the system is set up and work, but mostly our NGO civil society organization that support with services of the children and the victims in general because they so have projects so based on donor project, donors' money, international, that have projects to support the children on that. But in general, so the coordination and the referral system and the support system works well.

Asylos: Thank you. And then one in relation to that, are there adequate provisions, particularly, accommodation and social care for children who do not have parental care?

Vatra: Yes. In Albania, there are some-- so we call it shelters or orphanages so for people that don't have-- for children who don't have parental care. There is only one shelter in this coalition that we have. It is in Elbasan. And it is provide support for children that are identified as potential victims of human trafficking and as well, two other shelters but rush shelter that we have and different and equal in Tirana support. So minors that are girls that are up to 14 years old in the shelters. So these are the possibilities for sheltering victims of human trafficking you know as well as the state center. So all the centers provide support for younger girls that are up to 14 years old in the shelters, and the shelter in Elbasan, in the city of Albania, it provides support for so boys and girls as well possibilities for children that are victims of human trafficking.

Asylos: And just to clarify, that includes children who don't have parents, right?

Vatra: Yes, but they are identified as victims not all the children that don't have parental care because for other categories of children that don't have parental care are other state institutions like orphanages, for example, that support the children. But we do special support for the

children that have or don't have parental care that are identified as victims or potential victims of human traffic.

Asylos: What limits are there in respect of existing prevention measures? You mentioned lack of funding and state measures in particular.

Vatra: For prevention. Yes, so it is a lack of funding regarding the empowerment of these groups. This is one of the so weak points that we have. And for example, there are some measures that the states have do. For example, professional vocational training of people that come from vulnerable groups and then some programs to enhance the employment of these people, but these are very few. They are not so enough for all the vulnerable groups. And we have some measure, for example, from the social law to provide social housing for vulnerable groups, for example, for groups of women and girls that are victims of domestic violence or not victims of domestic violence but live in a vulnerable situation. And then it is very difficult to benefit by this housing scheme because there are a lot of administrative issues that victims needs, victims or vulnerable women and girls must complete and support. We give our support to this vulnerable groups in order to inform them and to support them directly with provision of documentation and application for the social housing. And this is one. It is limitation.

So now in Albania, as well for access to justice to the victims or vulnerable groups, there is a law, I mentioned before, for provision of free legal aid to these groups. And Vatra, for example, has set up a legal clinic in 2018 and through this legal clinic, give access to women and girls that live in vulnerable groups from vulnerable groups or are victims of different crimes such as human trafficking or gender-based violence and domestic violence to give them the possibility to inform them and to access them with services in the court and in prosecutor and law enforcement institutions such as police. And we have been authorized by the Ministry of Justice to give to offer these services. And there are some similar state clinics or states centers that provides this vulnerable groups with support for information and legal counseling to make easier the access to justice. But there are so different limitations doing this. I mentioned some limitation to access to justice because it was related to the long time in the courts etc.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Okay. Then in that case, we can move on to the next set of questions which relate to corruption. So how, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking?

Vatra: So now we don't have in the reports [inaudible] reports that we have in the state reports. Or in our day-to-day work, we didn't have any case of corruption that has been identified or prosecuted in Albania. And we don't have any cases of state employees that are involved through corruption into this. Before, so too many years ago, when the protection system has been very weak and not very well formed, it has been very common this kind of corruption. But now it is getting more and more-- so it is better than before. And we have some cases that say that, "So they don't give me this service or they don't give me this service." And probably they must be corrupted, but they are not based and there isn't any case for an employee at least the past year and this year and the recent years. We don't have cases that are published or public.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you very much.

Vatra: Oh, this kind of corruption, it is that we all know that there is corruption in general in Albania, but we don't have cases, and so we don't so report these cases in the prosecution office or in police and persecution office. So this is the question here in Albania. But as general as victims or citizens say that they are corrupted and so. So they don't give and to do. We don't have cases. We have some provision in the legislation as well to provide and to take in the justice system all the corrupted cases in the official that work with victims and other groups of people in Albania, so.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Okay. And then one more question in terms of corruption, is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

Vatra: No, it's my knowledge and our knowledge to know there [isn't?] any. So before, too many years ago, we had a case that reported a situation like that. But for example, the trafficker that exploited her state that he had some people that works in politics, and the case was convicted. The trafficking group has been convicted, but as I know, not politician. And then the case has been supported by witness program because she has [denounced?] a criminal group. But not now. We don't have any case in our knowledge and our support to have to report such-- or hear such statements relating to the--

For example, we have cases so three or four years ago. One case say that I don't go to the police because I know that the trafficker that exploited me now, for example, the police officers that work in the east district, for example. And she doesn't want-- she doesn't want to make a denouncement, but we supported her together with the state police. And then she denounced. But we didn't have evidence of what was before, but everything went okay. Yeah.

Asylos: Thank you very much. And then in that case, now we can move on to the next set of questions, which relates to your expertise mainly, which is assistance for victims of trafficking-- or sorry, on states. We have covered some of this. So the main question is, what is the current capacity of state-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support whether inside or outside of shelters? So we'll start off with trafficking to girls, and then we can do the other profiles, which is boys, adult women, and adult men.

Vatra: So I can give you now so a profile of our support system here. And then I explained to you before that in Albania, there are legislation framework and social framework and the institutional framework that provides support for victims of human trafficking. And in this system, there are these four shelters and centers that have shelters that is Vatra, Different & Equal, Other Vision, and the state shelter that offer not fully but full package of services for victims of human trafficking. So most part of the support system, it is directed to women and girls because they are mostly-- so as I told you before, the most part of affected people that are involved in human trafficking but as well children. I explained to you that three-- so two of our shelters support victims in the shelters that are only women and girls up to 14 years old. And if they have children, together with children. For example, if they have children that one of the children-- if one of the children, it is a boy under 10 years old, it is okay. They will be accommodated in the shelter. But if the victims have children, boys for example, more than 10 years old, we support them in the community through other phases of the program. For example, we support them with the payment of rented apartments. So if they cannot be accommodated in the shelter, we support them directly in the rented apartment. We support them with financial support and with other services.

The other services that we are providing are basic needs, of course, because we support them with basic needs. They are very vulnerable and beginning. And with medical services and psychological, legal services, educational services with vocational training, and mediation to employment. And these are with mediation to the family members or to family if the family is the risk for a person or for children-- or for children. So we do have all these package with activities to support the victims. And all these programs are divided into three phases. The first phase, it is the immediate and empowerment support. That is in shelter or in community during the first year when the victims enter in a program. And we say first year, it is because some victims stay, for example, one month in the shelter and then go in the community or they stay for six months. That depends in case by case and by their profile. For example, if they are women accompanied by children, so it is more difficult for them to be empowered. And then if the victims are minors, so if the victims are children, it is very difficult for them to find a place for a long-term

accommodation, for example. So for victims, another category is victims that have denunciations. For example, has denunciations in process in the courts or persecution offices. And they go for longer in a shelter because that depends on the situation of the process. So there are different groups and categories of victims and profiles that acquire-- or require more support in the shelter. And there are some other that have, for example, strong family relationships or they have more education, are more educated, and have vocational training and so can be easier being reintegrated into society.

And the second phase of the program, it is when the victims it is moving out and she states that I will go and live in the community, but there is so some criteria to doing this. So it is evaluated by case managers and by themselves as well to be stronger enough to be not at risk to do this risk analysis all the time. And if she has a work, for example, and she can live in the community. This phase is the second phase. We call second phase. It is a transition phase. And we support victims with all the necessary services they need. For example, they continue to be supported with psychological support or legal support. That depends on the cases. But they are more empowered regarding so the professional aspect and the work. And they are don't at risk for life. And for this reason, they can stay and living health monitored by our staff in the community.

So this phase, it is one year. So we give the opportunity to the victim so to live and to try and to see how they are doing in the community and what problems they meet. And so we try to solve or refer their needs to local authorities if they have needs. So in this phase, the mediation of the former victims with local the authorities such as social programs, social institutions, it is higher. It is bigger because they are referred and they collaborate with them for solving problems. And after one year, we do an evaluation as well, another reevaluation and replanning for victims if they have or don't have needs and have needs and if they can be now supported or self sufficient. And this is the third phase of the program when the victims are mostly self sufficient. They can live by themselves or in the society, in the community. But victims of human trafficking and when it is mostly women and girls are still vulnerable even they go through all these services because the vulnerability is related as well to the low wages, lack of sustained employment because they change employment, etc. Psychological vulnerabilities still being accompanied them for a long time, for example, or legal problems, etc., or children. So they have to take care for their children, etc.

So for that reason, we support or they are in our program in the third phase of the program for a period of three years. So we stay in touch with them. We monitor them every six months to see if they are progressing or there is something that doesn't work very well for the victims. So this program, all our program, it is from three to five years so that we have this program of long-term reintegration because it is like this, but we don't want the former victims to be revictimized, so retrafficked again, because of the vulnerability. And we do every time this thing in our reports and we see from monitoring phase we do. And we see that almost every year in our monitoring phases-- we see that, for example, 2 to 5 percent of the victims that we support in our program probably is we-- so we don't know for sure, but we think that are retrafficked again because of this vulnerability.

So this is the program. And this program that I explained it is almost the same for the other two NGO shelters. For the shelter for the center-- the reception center of state center, it is only the first place so of the program. They have this rehabilitation context when they offer and provide psychological, legal, medical, and family support to the victims while so they stay in the shelter. And then after a period of time and services they do in this center, these states center refer victims to our programs because we have a long reintegration programs there. So they refer to us. And we support them in the community in the second and third phase of the program. So this is more or less the program that we have. And almost all of the victims that are identified, I refer to the centers of National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking center. There are as well some NGOs in

local-- so in the regions of Albania that works like the state so that they organization-- or they provide some services for victims of human trafficking as well. And they refer to us for more specialized support for victims of human trafficking to our centers.

Asylos: I see. Thank you very much. And how are NGOs funded?

Vatra: So they are donor funded mostly. So I've explained to you. I don't know from other centers, but probably they have almost the same thing. So Vatra Psychosocial Center is applying to donors. Mostly international donors have securing the funding for 70% of all total budget so organization funding of services. And then 30% of the funding, it is provided by the state. And this is provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection through a regional council in Vlorë because Vatra is based in Vlorë City. Vlorë is in south of Albania. But even we have a national coverage with services, we are based in Vlorë. So the states sent so the funding through the ministry to the regional of Vlorë and they provide for us funding every year.

And then we have some funding again from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection but through the municipality of Vlorë for the food of the victims that stay in the shelter. And as well for this year, the municipality funding is funding Vatra as well to support the rent of the shelter for six months and six months from another donor. And they provide for the center. The municipality as well provides Vatra for paying the rent of the counseling offices that we have. So separated by the shelter, we have other counseling offices. They support us with the payment of the rent and for the communication because we have hotlines or telephone line that works 24 hours for all the victims or other sources that make referrals. So the municipality of Vlorë support with this communication costs. So all together, this funding, it is 30% of the budget that Vatra has for all programs.

Asylos: What factors affect funding being interrupted? So is there anything that gets in the way of you receiving funding? And then the other part has to do with when funding ceases. So for example, if you're funding stops, what impact does that have on you providing services to your clients?

Vatra: When funding ceases or interrupted, what impact does this have on service provision? Okay. So we try as a funding-- so funding mostly of NGOs and for services, it's very hard to gain and to do a wide funding even from international donors because for example, there are some emergencies and the conflicts around. And sometimes the funding go to this conflict. For example, the conflict in Ukraine crisis so doesn't interrupt our funding, but decreasing the possibilities for having more funds for the victims. So that cause that-- so we as organization, should apply to more and more donors to have all the necessary funding. So before, so we applied for a quantity of funding to some donors, to three or four, for example. In the year now, we have to apply for smaller funding to have all the funding capacities, for example, with 10 donors or. So until now, we didn't have any interrupted funding from donors. It's all projects that have a start and an ending without being interrupted or. So this has been but now, we should provide more and more efforts to find this funding opportunities. So this is a question.

And in the other hand, from 2015, the other states has provide more funding for NGOs, mostly for NGOs that works in anti-trafficking fields. It is not the same, for example, for NGOs that works only in domestic violence. We provide as well services for victims, women and girls, of domestic violence. And we see that state doesn't provide funding opportunities such as I mentioned before for victims of human trafficking. So this is a good thing that state provides more funding, but it is not good thing that we have to have more efforts to find that international donors that before has it's been easier for this issue. And we know that so the impact it is of don't having funding, it is directly linked to the victims' well-being and support. And it is not good thing for them. We have seen it during the pandemic time. During the pandemic time, it was very difficult, not for us to getting fund because we had funding before pandemic time. And none of the

donors interrupted fund. So it was well okay. Everything was okay. But because of the vulnerability and the lost of jobs and a medical health issues, etc., we have seen that the victims that have been in the process of reintegration into society has been the first one that has been vulnerable again to this emergency situation. And we needed more funding to support again the needs of the victims that has passed through all the process of reintegration. So that shows us that what an emergency situation or what [crisis?] or loss of funding can represent for victims of human trafficking.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Okay. And so we can move on to the next question regarding stigma. And this question is to what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? And associated is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking, so sex trafficking, forced labor, forced criminality, or forced begging?

Vatra: Okay. So if I go back to that data I provided before, 27% of the victims of human trafficking has been identified last year have been men and boys-- not men. So few have been adults but mostly of them has been boys and so young people that have been through this trafficking experiences, mostly for false criminal acts and for begging. So none of the victims from Vatra Center because I don't have now data regarding in general in Albania has been victim for sexual exploitation. That's identified, I mean, because there are too many children that are not identified and too many that are abroad of Albania without identifying. But before, we have been rare cases of the young people that has been victims of sexual exploitation, young people as well. And the stigma for them, it is very, very high. And one of these victims, for example, too many years ago has been from LGBTQI so group. And stigma has been very high and then say that, okay, stigma, it is people expecting from this group that don't see so much problem from this group because they say that, "Okay, it is their way of living, etc." But this was a problem and the young guy has been very supported for a long time, psychological support, during this period of time. And we have seen shame in the family members of this guy as well and don't acceptance over being LGBTQI and being sex trafficking has been so very hard.

As I mentioned, we don't have too many cases of men are boys that have been through this. But we have identified something that stigma for people that are men or boys that have been trafficked, even for sex trafficking or other that are identified as trafficked person is that they don't go or they don't come so to seek help and support to the organizations or to the institutions because they think that people will stigmatize them, to judge them being so weak to let the others exploit them. So the patriarchal mentality of Albanian men, it is that men should not be involved and shouldn't be exploiting because of the patriarchal mentality as empowerment. But for this reason, there are a few men or young men that go to our psychologists, for example, near the legal clinic because we offer the support for them, the male, in the legal clinic. And it is very difficult for them to be disclosed or to say what happened and to accept the fact because the community doesn't accept these facts yet. Now, more and more, we have seen that we have this data that for us that 27%, for example, is too much compared to other years before where, for example, more than 90% of the victims have been identified as being only females, so girls and women. Now we have more men or young boys that come and seek support to our center.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Okay, then we can move on to the next question, which is about employment. And I have a few questions starting off with what barriers, if any, do trafficking victims face to find an employment in Albania?

Vatra: Yeah, so finding employment is related with the level of education, the level of vocational training and professionalism as well. And the victims of human trafficking are less educated so have a low level of education. Because of the trafficking, they interrupted school and so on. And so they have no-- most part of them, they don't have a profession. So employment for them, it is very difficult. So when they are so involved and supported by our program to increase the level

of education and vocational training, so they can gain something and possibilities for finding job for finding employment. But it's still being very difficult even they have necessary skills because there is a high rate of unemployment. So we don't have so many so places for employment in Albania and industry, for example, or other agriculture, etc. So for that reason, this is very difficult, and victims of human trafficking suffer from finding a sustained place of work so to stay there and to have these possibilities.

Another factor that impacts, it is their psychological situation. For example, they must be supported with a long period with psychological therapy because sometimes it is very difficult for them to have from their personal so psychological limitations. It is not easy for them to maintain a work, so to maintain a work. And this is so another factor. And so this is they don't find jobs. So lack of possibilities for working, and so their situations that go through the therapies and rehabilitation before to go to the employment. And they're still as well the payment is very low because working in such places that the salary is not modest and so they cannot-- it's very difficult for them to afford life, to afford all the expenses they must have for living.

Asylos: Thank you. And just leading off that question in terms of living expenses, how does earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

Vatra: So the victims, what kind? So what is--?

Asylos: Yeah. If you could compare the earnings that someone who is a trafficked person or a re trafficked person, and the money that they earn, how does it compare to the living expenses for a normal person in Albania?

Vatra: No, it is not related to this in Albania because the victims of human trafficking can do the same work according to their capacities with other people that are not trafficked. It is almost the same so situation. So the problem is that the level of education and gained achievements don't allow them to find positions work so that to earn money. So this is a question. It is not that they don't compare to other groups that are not trafficked so they live in the same situation or have the same payment. And the other thing it is that what makes difficult it is that the victims of human trafficking can quit easily a job because of psychological problems perhaps they can have or must continue to have, and so this is the problem. And they are in continuity looking for a job. And the other people that before have the same job, continue in this job. So the sustainability of the work, it is not good. But comparing to the others, so because of working in factories, for example, the payment, it is low. They have the same payment with other women, girls, and boys that works in these factories.

Asylos: Okay. And in terms of employment itself, the ones who do find employment, what kind of employment is it? You mentioned factories as work.

Vatra: Yes. In Albania, there are a few possibilities for working. And before mediating victims for working, so we support them through a cycle of training for work for employment. And we see the possibilities, the capacities, and desires that the victims have for work. And so we try to support them through a cycle of training and vocational training for specific work. And after that, to mediate them through private or state institutions for finding the job. Most of the victims, for example, that want to have more sustained work through, for example, some vocational trainings, for example, kitchen or hairdressing because it is common here in Albania or esthetics, so nailing esthetics or have some skills for tailoring as well. And then the possibilities to finding job, mostly for women and girls here, are these tailoring factories. So the factories that there are people that tailor and as well to work initially as an assistant or being so hair dresser or working in a kitchen in a restaurant and bars because here in Albania, we are mostly touristic cities. We have a lot of touristic cities. So this is most of the work that the victims are looking for. And we are looking for them and mediated for them.

Asylos: Thank you very much. And you've answered this before within your questions, but I just want to ask again in case you want to add something. So what is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

Vatra: So it is high. I don't know how much. I need to check it. So I need to check it. It is very high compared to other countries.

Asylos: Okay. And we can move on to the next question or?

Vatra: Yes. Yes, because I don't know for sure. So I have to report.

Asylos: Not a problem. Thank you very much. And so the next question is regarding social assistance. And so the first question is, what social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for? And what are the barriers of accessing it?

Vatra: Yeah. Social assistance, so victims of human trafficking that are formally identified as victims of human trafficking can be supported by financial assistance monthly. It is up to-- I think it is \$90, I think. It is few. It is very low. It is not enough for them for living or for just for living. But most of the victims, they don't go to get these assistance as victims because they say that for this money, better I can work that can be assisted with financially assisted. And so if this is the policy that all we have, us to find better job and professional and so to be in job than to be assisted by this small amount. Regarding housing and housing for victims, it's difficult. It is victims that don't have access for a sustained housing if they don't have it-- so if they don't have it from the family. So it is very hard to find the possibilities to buy a house for victims of human-- for victims of human trafficking. And most of them, if they live by themselves, it is that they rent house. And rent a house and the payment of houses is getting more and more higher now in our times.

The program that we have supported victims with the-- supporting for rented apartment for six months or one year, that depends on the vulnerability victims have. But many times, the victims should be employed for the further to have some money to pay and to have a sustained payment for the rented apartments. But the victims as well can benefit from the social housing provided by each municipality in Albania. So if we have former victims that it is living in the community, they can apply to benefit the rent of the house so support by the social program in the municipality. This is not always so granted by the municipality because there is a lot of criteria to have it and a lot of administrative documents. We try and we make all our efforts to support victims during this process, but it is not always granted. And the sustained house, it is a problem. It's still being a problem for victims of human trafficking and all kinds of victims of crime and victims of domestic violence in Albania. It's still a problem.

Regarding the children of the victims, we advocate in the municipalities for providing some free kindergarten fees so the children of victims follow kindergarten or crash so free of payment. And we do every year these to the municipalities in Albania. We have the list of victims that have children and list of children to be accept by this payment. As well, children of victims of all kinds of crimes are supported in the education system as well by providing with books, so free books for school. And in our program, we provide some school materials for all children that we have in program. Even they are victims of our children of victims, we support them with necessary material for school programming for one year. So this is the social things-- or social services that victims have.

And regarding the health as well, there is enacted law for providing free medical support for victims and victims of human trafficking. This is not as well always granted because there are some medicines that are not free. And we try through our projects, have funded by donors to find so money for the medical needs of the victims. And as well, the dental care. It is not always

free. It is most of the time is private, and this is another thing that we cover with our programs, so.

Asylos: So thank you very much. And in terms of the social systems, just one last question, which was to do with does the available assistance for victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Vatra: So the health support system in Albania is free. And so must be free but if we can add and hold for corruption, we can say that here in this program, there are a lot of-- the victims that are unprotected and don't have incomes, it is very difficult for them to access health*, to access and to follow--

[In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos also asked the following question:*

Does this mean that victims who are not in the rehabilitation and reintegration program and who don't have incomes would find it difficult to access healthcare for physical and mental health needs? Does this mean that healthcare should be free, but due to corruption, victims who are not in a rehabilitation program and don't have an income would need to pay?

The interlocutor responded as follows:

“Yes I mean for the population in general, and especially for the victims of human trafficking the public health services are free, but as for the population in general, even for the victims, if they don't are in the protection system, there is a lot of corruption and their access to health services it is not granted always for free. When victims are in the system (protected by service providers, including Vatra and NCATS shelters) the access to health support is granted. There are some health services not free, for example stamaticologic one (dental health), or some medicaments that even victims can't access by being reimbursement and we as service providers pay for these, in the framework of the projects.”

Source: Vatra, written clarifications, 19 December 2023]

Asylos: Sorry to interrupt, I think it wasn't to do with health. It's to do with homelessness. So preventing people--

Vatra: Homeless?

Asylos: Yeah. Sorry. I'll just repeat the question again. It's does the available assistance of victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution? Apologies.

Vatra: Yes, I explained a little bit regarding these things of housing sustained. Yes, a victims of human trafficking are at risk of homelessness, yes. And the provision on providing from this risk, the municipalities offer social programs for social housing and payment of rented apartments, but it is not always granted, as I explained before, because there are a lot of administrative criteria to have it. So this is the risk. And we as a civil society organization, we try through our projects to fill some gaps regarding this and to provide victims being without house or being alone with homelessness and without services so in institutions. So we provide support for them during the time that the victims apply for the process of having social house or social rents for their apartment. So there is a risk always.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Okay. And now we can move on to availability of healthcare and rehabilitation services. So, yes, we've already discussed-- or you've already answered some questions in relating to health in general. But these questions are related to what mental health services are available. So the first profile is trafficked girls, then it's boys, and followed by adult women, and trafficked adult men. So starting off with trafficked girls, what mental health services are available?

Vatra: So this is one of the most so aspects of the support in Albania that is lacking for victims in general. So victims with mental health issues so are very-- or I can start from this there are no specialized execution, places, or mental healthcare institution to support victims of human trafficking. What they do? For example, one victim have mental health problems, and we identify the problems, for example, in the shelter or a victim. And we refer them to a mental health institution. They don't have place or programs to support them in the crisis phase and during the, for example, three months for supporting them. At least for three months but we know it is longer. So they have no place. And sometimes people call us and say that people-- it's the institution people call us and say, "We have probably she's a victim, but she has a mental problem. But because of this mental health problem, she probably is a victim." So they don't identify correctly and say that, "Probably it's a victim. Can you get in your shelter?" So they don't have places to put or to support girls, women, boys, and men that have mental health problems in Albania. I think it's one of the most difficult parts that we have.

For the girls, the only so support the girls victims of human trafficking, it is the specialized staff of our centers. So the centers of National Coalition Centers. And for all, I think, for traffic boys, women, and men. So there is only specialized psychological staff, psychotherapies that offer support for victims. For the girls and the women, that stay in the shelter, the support is given in the shelter. And after that, in the community where they live. And for men and boys, it is given to our legal clinic where there is as well a department of psychological support for this category. And in the health system, there are some community day center as well as some [psychiatric?] hospitals for adults, men and women, only for them in Albania that we can refer for emergency cases or acute so mental health patients.

There is as well only one center for children and adults-- sorry, adolescents only in Tirana, in the capital of Albania, where it is very, very difficult to access it. And to where the permission of the family members must be taken. And sometimes the victims don't have parental care or don't have a parent or the parents abandoned them or the parents are risk for them. So even in this case, there is very difficult to refer for further support to the center. And in the municipalities all around the Albania, there is a lack of specialists that support boys and girls that are younger, so minors, with mental health services. For example, some therapies, psychotherapy, and some psychiatrists support, medical support, etc. It is very difficult.

Asylos: Thank you. And what physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? And are these adequate to meet their needs?

Vatra: Yes. Yes. All the services that are for physicals healthcare are available for the victims as well and free of charge and most. There are lots of services for reproducing healthcare and as well all the tests and exams, health tests are free for them even for so infections and everything else. The only thing it is only for dental care that most part it is private. This is one of the things that our projects and programs of our centers try to cover for the victims.

Asylos: Thank you very much. Okay. And then we can move to another section now, which is internal relocation. So what problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

Vatra: So, okay, the relocating, that depends so the reason why they are relocating. And so that depends. People that are from different regions and go for living to a different region because of human trafficking, so for example, victims that we support but we are in south but we have victims that's coming from north of Albania or central, that depends on the cities. So our because they have a risk of their lives, that's the main reason that they are relocated. And so this is the most difficulty because Albania, it is a small country and very small and a lot of people are in [acquaintance?] with each other. We have this common structure of a large sense of community as well. It's stills from the period of communism time, and so a lot of problems that family has,

for example, it is a problem of all the large family or. And victims of human trafficking that live in rural remote areas and suffer from this stigma and patriarchy, for example, are always prejudiced, they are discriminated from the large family, from the community members. And these are most of the region. The second reason that they are relocated.

So the first one is the risk that depends on the traffickers. And second one, it is from this stigma and they go a lot. So a problem for them, it is the problem of being adopted in a new state-- in a new place. And to follow with new place-- not culture because we have the same culture. So we don't have so culture differences. This is not so gap or difficulty. But it is to leave the family and to go in other city, difficulties are because their vulnerability is higher when they relocate. They must have some possibilities and finding possibilities is very difficult. But for this reason, we, in our programs, support victims with a lot of social and social activities such as to being resilient, adapting to have skills in order for them to live independently more and so effective way. For that reason, we have this program of psychosocial support for the victims in order to protect them from this vulnerability of relocating or lacking skills, etc.

Asylos: Do traffickers find victims of trafficking who internally relocate? So if a trafficked person is relocated to another part of Albania, can the traffickers find them? And if they do, how do they do it?

Vatra: So did this happen? Yes. And the possibilities are very high in the first moment when the victims don't go to a program or are not accommodated in a shelter, for example, and they have higher risk for life because they didn't announce, for example, traffickers and they escape. They didn't go to the family and they go-- so the risk is very high. And because they use all the social media, etc. But it is not the victims that are identified. So we don't let the victims going outside the shelter or without protection if we identify victims and we support them. So we make them aware of the risks and we work case by case with the victims because there are some victims that are very-- so they want to speak with the ex-traffickers because they have feelings for them. But we try to make them aware and to educate them regarding themselves, then personality identity, and some of the problems. And if the victims come to one of our programs, she is safe. And if a victim can leave by her will-- because there are victims as well that say, "I don't want. It is enough. I don't want any more to be here." But if we refer them or the victim to a safe place, it is okay. The traffickers cannot find them, but sometimes it's easy. It is easy because it is a small country. Albania, it is a small country. And the victims, without being supported and counseled, etc., are very vulnerable as well to call traffickers again and to tell them where they are. So that depends on the case and the state in which of the state of the reintegration process victim is.

So, yes, this is-- or sometimes it is like this. And I forget this, but it is a risk in themselves to make the victim-- so to find victims, one of the methods used by the traffickers is threatened them by the family members-- by their family members. For example, the victims that have children, and they threat them the traffickers or have the children or try to get close to children of the victims in order that the victims escape. And they call them and say that I have your children, etc. Or through other family members such as brother, sisters, and they say that I will traffic your sister too if you leave or if they go to the families. And they threat and they say to the family members to call the victim to not do something else, to not denounce or find victims through the family members. And these are the most cases of victims that the traffickers find. The most appropriate for them to trap victims, too.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you very much. And we are now at the final set of questions, which is to do with re-trafficking and further exploitations. So it's two questions. The first question is, what issues affect the livelihood of being re-trafficked?

Vatra: Okay. So this is related to the level of vulnerability. So one issue it is the poverty and not finding a sustained job and employment. Second one, it is not to have a family members have

family members that support you or being like, "I have problems," and to resolve together with them. So the lack of family, it is a risk. It is an issue that impacts the victim's life. And the other thing, it is mental health issues. If a victims have mental health issues and not are treated and [inaudible] about it, so the likelihood of being re trafficked, it is high. And as well, it is being so ethnicity group or from other groups, different groups such as LGBTIQ or being with disabilities. So these are all issues of re trafficking people. For us, in our data that we possess, the most likelihood issue it is this mental health issue because we didn't have so many so that come from LGBTIQ groups. So we don't know for sure and so we are not very accurate data with that. But we have data regarding the victims that have mental health issues and how difficult and some of the victims are revictimized. And this is one of the most problems.

The other thing, it is the family members' problems, the second one. For example, if they have family members that push them through risky works and expectation, so risky situations. So for example, we have had some cases of young girls that are pushed by the family members by themselves to work and to find a job immediately or children to beg because the family don't have money or their parents are abusive or they don't work or they are alcoholic. So this is one of the risks. Being at risk after a long period of being treated in a program by the housing-- sorry, poverty issue is still an issue, but it's not still for victim that is treated for a long time because they will find something, they will find a job. They will work for that. But at the beginning of treatment of the victims, so these poverty and lack of employment is a risk as well.

Asylos: What issues affect the likelihood of retaliation?

Vatra: I don't know. I don't understand the word.

Asylos: In terms of retaliation, so for example - I don't know - if someone who was trafficked escapes or something, how would a trafficker retaliate? What issues would affect that?

Vatra: So the issues are still the same. So the family members are-- for example, family members are very weak and they are not supportive, this is an issue. And so if the victims-- and another issue it is the victims that don't go to seek help and support to law enforcement institutions, it is one of that because there are a lot of victims that don't denounce them because they fear that the traffickers will find them or they will punish or they will punish family members and etc. And doing like this, they don't go to seek help or they don't go to enter in the system of protection. This is one of the issues of the victims. Another thing it is-- so I don't know if there are other victims that are very-- or the traffickers and the victims, they are in loved with traffickers. They are not treating-- sorry, because I hold. So the victims are not treated by the health. And then they are not without protection. So this is an issue.

Beneficiary A.B.

An individual with lived experience of trafficking and receiving rehabilitation and reintegration services from Vatra was interviewed for this research. To protect their identity, their real name was not used, and no personal information, beyond that which they chose to disclose in the interview, has been included. The interview was conducted via videoconference by an Asylos staff member. A staff member of Vatra was also present and translated interview responses from the beneficiary into English.

Interview transcript – conducted 19 June 2023

Asylos: Is there anything that you found particularly helpful for you in the period of time that you've been with Vatra, things that have helped you?

Beneficiary A.B.: During the time I have spent with Vatra, I appreciate a lot the help that I have gotten from the services I have received, mainly the shelter, fulfilling of the basic needs, services regarding my health situation, and everything else. And in this relation and aspect, Vatra has helped me a lot.

Asylos: Thank you very much. That's great. And you mentioned about the healthcare. Did you experience any particular challenges in terms of healthcare, or has Vatra helped you access all different types of healthcare you need?

Beneficiary A.B.: Yes. I have had some health issues also before, but also while I was in the shelter, and the doctor and the nurse of the shelter have assisted me. My health issue was related to my kidneys. I can't lift heavy things, etc., and the doctor and the nurse of the shelter have accompanied me to tests, let's say, or to conduct some examinations and ultrasounds, etc., also with my medication and everything. And now my situation is quite stable.

Asylos: Thank you. Moving onto a different topic now. I don't know what stage of life you're at, but I wondered if you've had any support around either employment or education.

Beneficiary A.B.: You mean while I was in the shelter?

Asylos: Yeah, while you were in the shelter or outside of the shelter. It could be either inside or outside of the shelter.

Beneficiary A.B.: Well, my level of education is not that high. I have just had three classes. And during the period I have been in the shelter, I have followed a course of professional training in hairdressing. And that is all that I have done regarding education.

Asylos: And how do you feel about hairdressing? Is that the kind of employment you'd like to eventually find?

Beneficiary A.B.: Yes. I like hairdressing very much. And I wish to practice it maybe in the future. And I think that I have the right skills to do that.

Asylos: That's great. Are there any areas that you feel might be challenging in terms of employment? Do you have any concerns about that at the moment? Or are you just waiting to see what happens in the future?

Beneficiary A.B.: Employment is challenging, because of my health condition, first of all. I can't lift heavy things, and I can't work for many hours because I get tired very easily. And another thing, employment is a challenge because of the shortage of opportunities for work for this category*, let's say. And jobs in here are not quite stable. And this is quite a challenge for me.

*[*In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the following question: During the interview, the beneficiary stated that "employment is a challenge because of the shortage of opportunities for work for this category, let's say" - please could she clarify whether "this category" refers to the category of victim of trafficking? -*

A representative of Vatra responded on the beneficiary's behalf as follows:

"Yes it refers to victims of human trafficking"

Source: Vatra representative on behalf of the beneficiary, written clarifications, 19 December 2023]

Asylos: Thank you. Is there anything else you want to say about your future employment before we move on to a different topic?

Beneficiary A.B.: Regarding the work challenge, let's say, it is going to be difficult for me because I don't have any actual skills besides that of hairdressing. And the market here is not very wide.

And besides that, I also have this health issue with my kidneys, and I can't stay up for too long. I can't lift heavy things, and that makes me-- I tire very, very soon. And this makes it difficult for me to find a stable job. Earlier, I have worked as a cleaner and also in different factories here. And I actually liked a shoe factory here*. I liked to work there. But I got fired in that factory. And I wish to go back but don't have high hopes about that.

[In further written clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the following question: The beneficiary mentioned that she was fired from the shoe factory she worked in. If possible, would the beneficiary be able to clarify why she was fired?]*

A representative of Vatra responded on the beneficiary's behalf as follows:

"She replied that the reason for leaving her job was that due to some health problems she was unable to cope with the type of work process she had to perform and the employer had not given her an easier process or alternative, so she did not continued work."

Source: Vatra representative on behalf of the beneficiary, written clarifications, 19 December 2023]

Asylos: Okay. Thank you very much for that. So just moving on the topic a bit then to think about housing or accommodation. It would be interesting first of all to know what kind of assistance have you received in terms of accommodation. That might be things that are provided through Vatra or things provided through government.

Beneficiary A.B.: Okay. Well, Vatra has offered me shelter and 24 hours protection during the day, and after, maybe when I leave the shelter, Vatra is going to support me with a rented apartment. Until now, from the state, I haven't been offered any sheltering services or housing services besides the services I am receiving from Vatra.

Asylos: And do you think that-- when you move on from Vatra, what do you think will happen in terms of your accommodation, if you've thought about it?

Beneficiary A.B.: I wish to stay a little longer in the shelter with my sister as well. But after I leave the shelter, I think that I will rent an apartment and live there on my own. Of course, after I find a job.

Asylos: I was going to ask whether you see any challenges in finding accommodation.

Beneficiary A.B.: Okay. It is difficult and challenging to find accommodation now because I don't have a permanent job, a stable job. And besides that, the prices of a rented apartment here now are quite high. So that makes it more difficult and challenging.

Asylos: And in terms of assistance with living costs, is there any possibility of gaining assistance with living costs in the future?

Beneficiary A.B.: You mean from the state?

Asylos: Yes. Are you aware of any such assistance?

Beneficiary A.B.: No, I don't have any information regarding this.

Asylos: And then just is there anything else before I move on that you'd like to tell me about accommodation in the future or with cost of living, things like that?

Beneficiary A.B.: No, I don't have an idea about this.

Asylos: Okay. Fine. And then just thinking more generally, what kind of things in the long term do you think will be helpful for your reintegration in society? What kinds of assistance would be most helpful for you?

Beneficiary A.B.: I think that maybe having the cost for a rented apartment covered will maybe help me in the future.

Asylos: And what are the things that you think will be most challenging in the future?

Beneficiary A.B.: Once again? Sorry.

Asylos: What are the things that you think might be the most challenging in terms of the long-term reintegration?

Beneficiary A.B.: Okay. Well, I find it difficult because at first I will be alone. I won't have the support of my family. And besides that, it is the financial aspect because everything now, the prices, I mean, are high. And the salaries are quite low, so. But I think I will afford it.

Asylos: Well, good. Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to tell me or share about your experience of rehabilitation and what has been challenging for you or what has been helpful up to now?

Beneficiary A.B.: Well, in the shelter, I have faced some difficulties, mainly in terms of living in the presence of other beneficiaries who have had the very same issues as well. So adapting to this kind of situation has been a little bit difficult for me. And also, doing things by myself and gaining new life skills has been also difficult during my rehabilitation process.

Asylos: Thank you for sharing that. Is there anything else-- I don't have any more specific questions. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Beneficiary A.B.: Okay. I don't have anything specific to share. I'm just grateful for being part of Vatra because I have been assisted with all kinds of reintegration and rehabilitation services. And I'm quite grateful for myself and my sister living in the shelter.

Dr Anta Brachou

Dr Anta Brachou is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the [Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse](#), and previously worked for a UK-based NGO, providing support and advocacy to women victims of trafficking in the UK. Dr Anta Brachou was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report. Dr Anta Brachou's full Resume is attached to [Annex 5](#) at p.159.

Interview transcript – interview conducted 2 June 2023

Asylos: So then let's start with questions about the profiles of victims of trafficking and the risk factors. Can you tell us what the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania are?

Dr Anta Brachou: So if we're talking about the internal victims, the victims of internal trafficking in Albania, the ones that are mainly supported and hosted in the shelters in Albania are women from different age groups. The most vulnerable population actually in Albania belongs to the marginalized communities like the Roma children, the Roma women, but of course, that is not to say that men are not vulnerable; it's just that it's much more difficult to identify men. Men are less willing to come across and identify as victims of trafficking in Albania. The profile would be slightly different if we're talking about Albanian victims in the UK.

Asylos: What would they be like?

Dr Anta Brachou: So when I worked in practice in the UK, and I'm talking 2017 to 2020, the majority of victims from Albania also, as they appeared in the UK NRM, were women. So Albanian women who reported that they were victims of sexual exploitation. So sexual

exploitation was also the main form of exploitation at the time. From the UK NRM statistics this year and last year, that trend has completely changed because now Albanian men and young boys are the main victims of trafficking that are referred into the UK NRM. And of course, the type of exploitation is forced criminality.

Asylos: Right. Yeah. And what are the kind of factors that are associated with the risk of being trafficked in Albania?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, the majority-- I think for this question, perhaps I need to step back a little bit and just explain the context. Albania at the moment is going through a lot of difficulties in terms of the social welfare and the political and social system that we have in place. So a lot of young people, but not only exclusively young people, feel very much that they cannot build a future in Albania. So they are desperately seeking to leave Albania. So that in itself is a risk because everyone wants to leave Albania, but of course, not everyone has the means, and more importantly, there are very limited legal pathways, especially in relation to the UK. So that, unfortunately, is now being exploited in a sense that this desperation to leave Albania coupled with the fact that there are no legal pathways to enter the UK means that a lot of young people, mainly men if we were to refer to the UK NRM statistics, but also women, are embarking on these precarious journeys, which sometimes means that they are also exploited or they don't know exactly what's going to happen when they reach the UK.

Asylos: Yeah, I see. Are there any other factors in addition to this?

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

Asylos: Yeah. Yeah. And moving to the trafficker profiles and recruitment methods, can you tell us a bit more about the profiles of traffickers in Albania?

So as part of my Ph.D., it was one of the aims to reach out to traffickers, and I did manage to interview three people who were in prison. They were all on-- they had not had their trials, so they were what would be on remand here. One was someone part of a smuggling group, so not labeled as a trafficker but as a smuggler, and then the two other boys because they were young boys, they had the label-- they had been accused of trafficking.* What was surprising is that they kind of depart from this idea of the notorious traffickers that we usually read or see in the media. This very organized, highly structured organized crime groups. The two young boys, for example-- I'm not going to comment on whether they were guilty or not because that's not my expertise, but their circumstances were also very much put in the sense that they came from very poor backgrounds, not highly educated. If I remember correctly in both cases, their girlfriends had worked previously in the sex industry, and then when they met them, they kind of offered to help them out and offer support and protection. And whatever money they made, for example, they used it to pay rent. So it was not money that made them millionaires. Of course, in both those cases, the guys denied the kind of the situation, and they did argue that there were no proof and that the police had actually produced false evidence. But of course, I was not there to assess their case from a legal point of view. When I [inaudible] Albanian traffickers in the UK and I did make an application to the HMPPS to access the prison population, so Albanian men in prison, I was not given permission. From the previous work that I've done and also from conversations with colleagues that work in the home office, for example, I know that the prison

population here representing Albanian men is quite high, but the majority of them, if not all, are in for drug charges and not for trafficking charges or modern slavery charges. So it was very fascinating for me as a researcher that we have had such high numbers of Albanian victims of trafficking in the UK NRM, and this has been constant from 2016 until today. The numbers have grown steadily. And last year, we also overtook British victims of trafficking, which was a first, yet there aren't any known or any really modern slavery prosecuted cases involving Albanian traffickers. When I looked at what was available in the NCA kind of records, sometimes the terms trafficking and smuggling were used interchangeably, which I found in very weird because from law enforcement point of view, you don't-- as academics, of course, we say that there is an overlap, but from the legal point of view, those are two different fences, one against the state and one against the person. So I found it very confusing as to why that was. And in fact, what was depicted in the articles were cases of smuggling. So people making counterfeit documents or enabling smuggling routes rather than people trafficking Albanians and then exploiting them in different forms. So yeah, the trafficker profile is quite a mystery, if you ask me.

*[*In further clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the interlocutor: "Please could you clarify whether they [the individuals she interviewed] were being prosecuted in the UK or Albania? Could you also clarify the year this field research was conducted?" . The interlocutor responded as follows:*

"They were in Albania and prosecuted in Albania (alleged crimes not linked to the UK). The field research was conducted in 2018-2020."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, written clarifications, 19 September]

Asylos: I see. And then you already started touching upon this, but I wonder if you have some more information on the recruitment methods of traffickers and Albania.

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, again, it's very difficult sometimes to differentiate in terms of trafficking and smuggling because I feel how things start is always word of mouth. So if someone wants to come to the UK, this doesn't even happen underground anymore. You say you want to go to the UK, and in the next 10 minutes, you'll have all the information or people will put you in touch with someone who knows someone who can facilitate the journey. So we operate by word of mouth. So that's one thing. And that's also the reason why sometimes it's very difficult to prove and have empirical evidence of how things work. The other thing, again, it might not look as trafficking when you see it, but a lot of recruitment of people to embark on these precarious journeys happens on social media. And when I started the journey, I had a different view. So I was challenged as a researcher because I thought, "No, social media is not very popular in Albania." I kind of made some very wrong assumptions there, but now that I have monitored social media, TikTok is booming with these recruitment pages. And it's not just that; you can also see how people interact. So there is also very much the correspondence that you see of people talking about these journeys, showing how they make these journeys, and also, importantly, what is very dangerous showing when they are rich here. So the message is usually that, "Yes, there is that challenge; yes, there is that precarity, but you will make it. So why not make the sacrifice?"

Asylos: I'm going to ask you a couple of questions related to the prevalence of trafficking. Can you tell us something about the prevalence of trafficking of boys and men in Albania?

Dr Anta Brachou: I will have my-- I would say very little about boys and men. So my focus on human trafficking in general, and my experience mainly was with women in the UK. However, from the interviews and conversations that I've had with practitioners, so the people who run shelters and provide on to trafficking support in Albania, boys, and men, as I said earlier, it's very difficult to identify them and very difficult for them to come and identify themselves as victims. So that doesn't happen as much as we see here. So here people are-- especially what is

happening now that so many Albanian men are going through the UK NRM, that is not the same in Albania. So the short answer is, I don't know. But there are, especially in terms of back to the Roma community, that is what is visible. That's why I'm sharing it. There are a lot of Roma children who beg in the streets, both boys and girls. But with men, they are the invisible victims if something is going on.

Asylos: Yeah. And how about the prevalence of trafficking of women and girls?

Dr Anta Brachou: Well, historically, that's how we think about trafficking in Albania - the exploitation of women and girls - and is usually in the sex industry although I have also heard through the cases that I've shared with my colleagues in Albania that there could be involvement in criminality, although sexual exploitation is the most common one. The majority of people that are hosted in the shelters in Albania are also women. And what I saw here when I was working with them, again, the profile was-- we didn't have an age, actually, because initially, I thought it would be very young women, but then through the UK NRM, I saw women that were even above 50s sometime. But the one thing that was very common was the report on sexual exploitation. So they all reported being exploited, and sexual exploitation.

Asylos: I see. And then you've already touched upon this, but just in case you have something to add to this question, how does the prevalence of trafficking among boys and men and women and girls compare?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, if we're looking at what's happening in the UK, it's quite fascinating at the minute because there are more men and boys going through the UK NRM, and the trends have completely changed because forced criminality appears to be the most prevalent form of trafficking. However, I also know that there is very little research done on the current situation. I know about the research that Asylos published in 2019.

Asylos: Yep, that's right.

Dr Anta Brachou: Yes. So it's quite timely that you're doing it again because there is very little known apart from the crazy figures in the UK NRM, and that men are-- what is fascinating there is also how some of these UK NRM referrals are triggered because it happens that in many cases, the men are caught up by the police and they trigger the Section 45 defense, and then they go through. But I haven't worked with this category lately; I can only read and interpret what I'm seeing on the basis of what I know from my research, so.

Asylos: And what's the prevalence of trafficking among Roma, Egyptian, and other ethnic minorities in Albania?

Dr Anta Brachou: I would say that they are the most vulnerable group, and also people in Albania, practitioners, and civil society, would say the same just because of how marginalized these communities are. They are very much excluded for various reasons from mainstream education; there is a lot of discrimination. There is support from the civil society, there are quite a few good organizations that work specifically with these communities, but of course, that is not enough to save and empower this community's hence, they are very much vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Asylos: Yeah. I understand. And what's the prevalence among LGBTQI+ persons?

Dr Anta Brachou: I have no information on that, so I can't comment.

Asylos: Okay. Do you have information on the prevalence of trafficking among persons with disabilities?

Dr Anta Brachou: No.

Asylos: Okay. So let's talk about the prevalence of sex trafficking in Albania. Do you have any information about whether certain groups are disproportionately affected by sex trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: Women and girls, because, of course, we do have a problem with gender-based violence and the role of women in society is generally speaking. So they are in very much at risk to exploitation. I would say, but perhaps this is not the question; maybe the landscape for sex trafficking has changed. So it wouldn't necessarily be on street prostitution like there used to be back in the days, although there are still some areas where you would see people from the Roma, Egyptian communities that would offer that kind of service on the street. A lot more is happening in apartments, massage parlors, online. But from what I know, from what I uncover from the research and the discussions with the civil society in Albania, women are the ones that are mainly exploited and involved in this industry.

Asylos: And how about trafficking for the purposes of forced labor in Albania? Are there certain groups that are disproportionately affected by this type of trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: So the forced labor concept it can be quite foreign to Albanians because we don't treat it under a modern slavery act as it's in the UK. There are very suspicious and even difficult and challenging labor conditions all over Albania, and I think that also kind of tells you why some people who come to the UK are willing to take anything because we're kind of used to the idea that, "Okay, this is work. It has to be bad."

Yeah. So I was saying I don't think this comes up as a stand-alone issue as much in Albania. I didn't find that that was singled out as a type of exploitation when I did my research, but that doesn't mean to say that it doesn't happen. I think it happens a lot; it's just that we are not progressive enough, perhaps, to recognize forced labor as a type of exploitation. Yeah. Even the concept of modern slavery is to some extent foreign to us because we usually would refer to human trafficking rather than modern slavery, and under human trafficking, the first thing that we will discuss is sex trafficking. Even forced criminality is quite a new concept.

Asylos: I see. Yeah. Talking about forced criminality, do you have any information on the prevalence of trafficking for forced criminality and/or what groups are disproportionately affected by it?

Dr Anta Brachou: In Albania, I wouldn't know. Again, this didn't come up as a theme when I was conducting field research. I mean, there is a lot of criminality; of course, there is a lot of rivalry between drug groups, so it's perhaps not the safest environment in that sense, but I don't know how much force criminality happens in Albania.

Asylos: Okay. How about trafficking for the purposes of forced begging? What's the prevalence of this type of trafficking, and are certain groups affected more than others?

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

Asylos: Yeah, I see. Let's talk about recognition as a victim of trafficking. We talked about the NRM already. Do you know that if a person has been recognized as a trafficking victim by the UK

NRM, will they also automatically be recognized as a trafficking victim by the Albanian NRM, and will they be able to access support in Albania?

Dr Anta Brachou: This should be the case in a sense that if they are returned through recognized channels, which means that one of the support organizations in Albania would be contacted and they would be waiting for them so that support would be offered. That said, when I worked as a practitioner and also while I was conducting the study, there had only been two cases of returnees. I mean, very, very few Albanians who have gone through the UK NRM system go back to Albania. And I know this also from practice. As I said, there were cases that we would work on the returnee bundle. We would liaise with the organizations in Albania so that they would get someone to wait for them, and on the day of the travel, there was a JR put in place, and the person or the family, if it was a woman with children, they would abscond. So the return of victims, I would say it's another area that has a lot of question marks because we haven't had many victims return. So this is not kind of a foolproof route that we know much about it, just because it has not been used. But from my understanding and the conversations with civil societies, so the four shelters that are run by NGOs, they are very willing to. Of course, in order for the status to be given in Albania, they have to go through the police. But they're willing to kind of help as navigators and support them through that system; it's just that not many people have gone back.

Asylos: I see. Talking about trafficking-related legislation, what's the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: So in terms of the legislation, Albania looks like it ticks all the boxes. So we don't have a unified law. There isn't a special law for victims of trafficking either that would lay out the support that is available. So everything related to trafficking is very much scattered in the criminal code of Albania, but most of these provisions are just taken from European law like the Convention*. All the main conventions have been ratified. So, by the book, everything looks good. Of course, if you compare it to the Modern Slavery Act, it's not comparable because the act is quite a unique piece that brings everything together. I think [inaudible] and what appears to be the main challenge is sometimes the implementation of some of those provisions that are related to trafficking, both in terms of protection and prosecution of trafficking charges.

*[*In further clarifications following the interview, Asylos asked the interlocutor: "When you mentioned 'the Convention' are you referring to the European Convention Against Trafficking (ECAT) law?". The interlocutor responded as follows:*

"Yes."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, written clarifications, 19 September]

Asylos: Yeah. Great. We'll get back to that in a moment as well. What legislation exists in relation to child protection in Albania?

Dr Anta Brachou: I wouldn't want to comment on that just because I didn't specifically look at children. My research was mainly focusing on adults, so I don't want to point in the wrong direction.

Asylos: Let's skip this one, then. So then we come back to the effectiveness of the legislation; you've already touched upon that. Is there anything else that you want to add on the effectiveness?

Dr Anta Brachou: I think also maybe resources. From what I understood, the law enforcement side, they are also very much under-resourced. If we're talking about particularly these trafficking cases that cross border and is not just the UK, but let's take the UK case. These cases need to be very well-resourced because you're talking about arguably operations across various jurisdictions. And the conversations that I had with law enforcement representatives, the law is

there, but then there are challenges in implementation and one of the challenges is also related to resources above everything else.

Asylos: Yeah, I see. Is there judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked?

Dr Anta Brachou: Do you mean what type of punishment there is?

Asylos: So under law, can people be punished for--?

Dr Anta Brachou: Yeah. Of course. Yeah. And the punishments actually are quite hefty. I mean, I don't remember the year on top of my head when the legislation was changed to actually make the punishments harsher, but some of the offenses get up to 20, 25 years.

Asylos: And that is a result of being a victim of trafficking or [inaudible]?

Dr Anta Brachou: So if someone is involved in trafficking, if they get charged with any of the trafficking offenses for adults or children, those are the kind of punishments that are involved. And sometimes I think-- so you have trafficking charges, and then you also have clauses which would specify that if the case involved aggravated circumstances that resulted in death, for example, that would be a heftier sentence. If it is proven that the people are also involved in organized crime, that again adds to the sentence. So the sentencing or the years that are given it's not the problem, I would say.

Asylos: And what about punishment for being a victim of trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: Oh, blaming the victim?

Asylos: Mm-hmm.

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, that can happen also because if they are charged under the prostitution clause, that mean that they would be seen as offenders rather than as victims. So yes, there is that gap in the law that would unfortunately allow for victims to be seen as purely offenders.

Asylos: Yeah, I see. So we've seen some research that points to an implementation gap between the legislation on trafficking and how it's implemented. You've already touched upon that, but is there anything you want to add about the implementation of legislation and practice?

Dr Anta Brachou: I think, and I'm not the expert there, but if you wanted to speak to organizations in Albania who have actually supported women through the compensation scheme, they would also tell you about the lack of implementation because sometimes it takes ages for the women or victims to get compensation and sometimes it doesn't materialize.

Asylos: Which organizations are you thinking about?

Dr Anta Brachou: Different and Equal, but you also have Vatra. I mean, it's the usual suspects because there are only so few organizations. But yeah, Different and Equal and Vatra would be the main ones because they are kind of the leading organizations that also have shelters. Yeah.

Asylos: Do you know what provisions exist to protect witnesses? So, for example, is there a witness protection program?

Dr Anta Brachou: Yeah, I found out that there is a witness protection program, and I found it initially through the conversations with the traffickers because they were telling me that the victims had applied to go into this program. But it's not popular, so it's not that everyone goes through this protection program. And it's very difficult to go through it because, essentially, what it would need is for a court case to also be ongoing and for the people to have evidence to prove why they are still at risk of exploitation. So the short answer is yes, and there is a legal provision

for that. But how effective it is? I mean, it wouldn't be a surprise that it's not working because there are other things that are struggling to be implemented properly.

Asylos: Okay. Talking about state protection from trafficking, how effective are the following institution at providing protection to victims of trafficking? So first of all, talking about the police.

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, the main standpoint is that people get no protection from the police, and there is always that mistrust that the police will not help. That said, when I had the focus group with women in the UK, Albanian women in the UK going through the NRM, so potential victims of trafficking. When I asked them what kind of support they had access in Albania or whether they had made any support to access support in Albania, none of them had their own cases to talk about. So they had never approached the police save in one case, which was a domestic violence case, which had gone to court, but then the case got dropped. But the rest - and I'm talking about a group of 13 here - the rest had never-- or they didn't report that they had an interaction with the police. What they did quote to justify the mistrust were kind of the media cases that become very famous. So at the time, there was this judge that got killed by her husband, so that was a very famous case. That, of course, if a judge cannot be safe, who can? So that kind of fuels the mistrust, but there weren't any kind of experiences that they could share themselves. On the other hand, when I spoke to the police officers, at least the ones that I spoke to because, of course, I couldn't speak to all of them, they did look very proactive, especially in cases that related to gender-based violence, trafficking, child exploitation, but they did mention several challenges. With regards to the UK cases, they said that they don't have kind of an open channel of communication. So things get lost in translation. They are not informed of what happens when they report, and of course, they also reported on discrepancies that some of these cases are not necessarily genuine cases; hence, there wouldn't be a report in the police, for example, or something to prove that these are genuine cases of, I don't know, blood feud, domestic violence, things like that. So it's quite a complex picture because, of course, there are those cases that are very tragic and they're very much real. They also are part of the collective trauma because they stay with everyone, but then if you start to look at the cases, or at least the cases that are related to the UK, you find that the only reference is to these media cases rather than to their own journey, if that makes sense.

Asylos: Yeah. And how effective is the judiciary in providing protection to victims of trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: I think that is quite a challenge. And Albania has been going through the review of all the judiciary personnel. So they've gone through very thorough investigations, and quite a lot of judges and other judiciary personnel have been removed, but that doesn't necessarily mean that things have been solved. There are those that have been removed and then there are still lingering in the background. And I think it's probably the most corrupted link that is also very much detrimental because that's where people look for justice, and they never get it or it takes ages.

Asylos: Yeah. Is this also something that has come out of your field research?

Dr Anta Brachou: Yes. I mean, the judiciary I touched very little in a sense that-- well, I had the court cases, so I had court files that I investigated; I didn't interview the judiciary itself, but even when I spoke to the traffickers or the alleged traffickers, that's what they pointed towards. That it's very corrupt, usually the ones that should be on trial or should go through these legal proceedings are exonerated immediately, and then it's the little soldiers, if you want that, are caught, which are then used for statistics because statistics would look good.

Asylos: And how effective are other state authorities at providing protection to victims of trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: I don't know which one to single out now. I mean, the majority of the work I did was with civil society and less so with state authorities. But also, my understanding from the interactions with the victims here and also the civil society, there wouldn't be much interaction with other state authorities. What I found interesting, for example, is that schools who could be potential guardians - if we look at the crime triangle and we have the potential victim, the motivated offender, and the potential guardian to disrupt - schools play a critical role there, but given the fact that so many young people are leaving and these are school-age children or young people, I feel that the role of the school is not very much explored or reviewed because essentially the main question that I was asking when the news broke about 200 Albanian children gone missing from the UK, the first question I asked, "But are they also missing in Albania? Hasn't these schools who have missing children done anything to report it." So there are quite a few gaps to explore to get to the bottom of the story, I think.

Asylos: Yeah, I see. Do you know what the conviction rate is for trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: I can share with you that part of my Ph.D. I don't remember on top of my head. But if you find that helpful, I can send you the charts.

Asylos: Yeah, that would be very helpful. Thank you. Yeah.

Dr Anta Brachou: It has gone down, but there are still trafficking cases that go through the court. But none of them-- I have to say, none of them relate cases that are linked to the UK. The cases that I looked at, and I had quite a big sample - I mean, quite a big. I had like 30, 31 - they were some of them historic cases in the sense that they dated back 2013, '14. So not current.

Asylos: Yep. I see. Do you know what state measures are in place to prevent trafficking of men, women, and children?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, there is the strategy that they have the national strategy to prevent trafficking. And again, some of these documents would appear perfect in paper because they are taken from the EU. One thing that was very clear is that Albania has been dreaming to enter the EU for a while now, so anything that brings them closer to the EU it's great. Even with regards to trafficking, of course, they want to take as much as they can in terms of good practice. The civil society, although they are so small, they do punch above their weight and they do a lot of work in terms of prevention. But the type of prevention that is needed is not one that civil society interventions or awareness campaigns or anything that would solve it because we're talking about desperate people who want to leave. So the only way to prevent that is to have some systemic change in terms of having jobs that would pay decent wages, having after-school clubs or places where young people can go and nurture their sense of belonging. So I don't know what, if anything, can be done to prevent with the current political will.

Asylos: Yeah, I see. And then the next question is about child protection system. I'm not sure you're familiar with this. Do you know how effective the child protection system is in protecting children from trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: So the best organization to speak about that would be Another Vision. So they are based in Elbasan, and they are the only shelter that accommodates children. And they would be able to give you all the details.

Asylos: Okay. Right. And I assume we will also be skipping the next question, which is about adequate provisions for children who do not have parental care?

Dr Anta Brachou: Yeah.

Asylos: Okay. We've touched upon this, but in case you wanted to add, what limitations are there in respect of existing prevention measures? Is there anything more you want to add?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, at the moment, I also find it very difficult to kind of come up with solutions even at an ideal level. When I was doing the Ph.D., I collaborated with Mary Ward Loreto, which is another organization, and we tried to do some informative workshops in the north of Albania. So one of the cities that is mainly linked with people migrating to the UK. And the idea is that we would talk about illegal migration, what happens when you come to the UK and what asylum accommodation would look and things that-- and that was not done to kind of curtail people's aspiration to move and progress with their life, but just to tell them the reality because some of the messages that go there are very glorified. And the feedback that we got was very positive. People said, "We generally didn't know this," or "I find this very interesting." So they were kind of very hungry for that type of information. But yet again, you are dealing with people who have somebody in the UK who's triggering this chain migration. They're not randomly coming to the UK because they like the UK for the good weather. So it's very, very difficult to prevent-- not prevent, address that because maybe prevent is quite a big word.

Asylos: Yeah, I see. And do victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted?

Dr Anta Brachou: So as I said, there is law in place that they should get compensation, but the reality is a different matter. But as I mentioned, probably the best people to speak to you about this is someone from Different and Equal or Vatra, just because they actually handhold these women, mainly women, to go through this process of getting compensation.

Asylos: We'll move on to corruption. And the first question is how, if at all, does corruption and state institutions affect the ability to protect victims of trafficking?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, as I said previously, the general feeling is that there is a lot of corruption, and this was my experience. So when I tried to kind of get to the nitty-gritty examples of what corruption would look like, I didn't get any personal stories. And by that, I don't mean kind of the sensationalist, but anything that people say, "This has happened to me. This is how things progress." It was always in reference to, "Yes, but if this happened to this person and it was a prolific media case, imagine what would happen to me," kind of thing. So it's very much hearsay. So the problem sometimes is how do you make hearsay empirical evidence, and I struggled a lot with that as part of my Ph.D.

Asylos: Thank you for your input on that and for your willingness to share that experiences. There's one more question about corruption, and we'll move to another topic. Just a second. Is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, again, this is what you would hear, but it's very difficult to prove, so I will not comment further on this.

Asylos: Okay. So now we're going to move to assistance for the victims of trafficking with the state, and then the similar questions are going to be for NGOs too. For the first part with assistance for victims of trafficking in regards with the state. The first question would be, what is the current capacity of state-run shelters to provide accommodation and final support, whether inside or outside shelters, to several categories? First, it's to girls. Would you like me to state the full category, or?

Dr Anta Brachou: I have the sheet on my screen, so I'll just go through what I know. So there are four shelters. So Different and Equal, Vatra, and Another Vision, and the state-run shelter. So the state-run shelter is the reception, where sometimes people go as soon as they are identified. The three other shelters are NGO-run, but of course, even the NGO-run shelters get minimal support by the state. So almost like in the UK, they have the, let's say, victim care contract. Is not the same, but they get some funding to cover costs for their staff, for example. In terms of beds, I should have that number in my thesis. I'll have a look and then share it with you. I'll say that the

best people to give you all the details would be the people from these shelters. If you don't have any contacts, but I'm guessing you do because they were also part of your first report, let me know. So Another Vision is the only one who hosts children as well. So under 18. I'm not aware of a shelter for men only. The other two, so Different and Equal and Vatra, they host women usually over 18, but I think they've had cases of 17, I think, in the past. So the other question is financial support. Everyone who is recognised as a VoT is eligible for the financial support [from the government], not only those in the state run shelter. Recently this amount has been increased to 9000 ALL (equivalent to £85 per month), which is still very little. And sometimes going through that process alone makes it not worth exposing yourself to the bureaucracies to only get that minimal amount. Whereas what the NGO-run shelters would provide is sometimes, once the people are out of the shelter, they might help and contribute towards rent for, I don't know, three months, six months, depending on the agreements and the funding available. So it's not an amazing package. The work that the NGOs do, it is remarkable, I must say. I mean, I didn't know them before my research, so I don't necessarily hold any other affinity with them apart from me going as a researcher, but from what I've seen and what I've witnessed, they do a lot of work. The problem and this, I find sometimes very frustrating even when I have sat in immigration court hearings when they asked, "Is there support for victims of trafficking?" If you're asked yeah, and these four shelters can accommodate the thousands of Albanian victims that have gone through the NRM, the answer is no. But also, these people who are here are not just looking for an anti-trafficking support package for, I don't know, six months or one year; they're out of the country because they want to achieve something bigger and more sustainable, not be confined in a shelter and then get breadcrumbs to survive. So it's quite difficult, unfortunately.

Asylos: Okay. Shall we touch it up on the question after that? Are the trafficked persons' and state-run shelters able to access services aim to rehabilitation and reintegration?

Dr Anta Brachou: Yes. Whatever is available, of course. I mean, as I said, civil society is quite a tight, small society in Albania compared to the anti-trafficking NGO sector in the UK, but they do quite a lot. So there are always projects. So when I went there, and at the time I was coordinating a women's center in the UK, we did almost the same things. Our therapy, counseling, everything will be on offer. I think what they struggled, and I uncovered this with a conversation with Another Vision, is people who might have drug and alcohol addiction or severe mental health issues. So complex needs like that are perhaps more difficult to address.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you for that. The other question is, "How effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?"

Dr Anta Brachou: Yeah. I mean, the thing is that sometimes I feel that it's also not fair to put all the burden on whatever services are available to kind of ensure that-- the rehabilitation, okay, if we look at it from the therapeutic or medical point of view, but the reintegration process cannot be solely linked on the services that are available because it's about what is outside those services that's also very much important. And I think this is the struggle with Albania. Whatever services are there, very small organization with very little resources, they are doing great work; but what happens once they leave those services is the problem because we don't have a welfare system as in the UK. Not that here is perfect, but we don't have anything like that, really. So this is what people are missing. That space where they can create a sustainable future, and it's not just living to survive and barely survive sometime. And I think I covered the barriers because--

Asylos: Indeed. So we're going to be asking the similar questions, but regarding to NGOs. So what is the current capacity for NGO-run shelters to provide accommodation and financial support inside or outside the shelters for girls, boys, adult women, and adult men?

Dr Anta Brachou: So what I mentioned earlier, I think I combined. So I think I've covered everything. I'm just going to see. So you have a question there: "Is funding for support services

permanent or time-limited?" The answer is it's time-limited. I know that it's a struggle for the shelters and the other NGOs, so they need to constantly also do fundraising or bid writing, which takes a lot of time that can be only dedicated to service delivery. So I mean, the funding that they get from the government, that might have a permanent element because, of course, there is an agreement that needs to contribute towards this, but it's minimal from what I understand. But the rest, so if they want to offer certain services or evaluate certain services, that would always need this additional fundraising, and the funding is often very much time-limited.

Asylos: Thank you so much. And just to follow up on that part. For example, what factors of funding can be interrupted and when the funding is ceased or interrupted, how can that impact the service provisions?

Dr Anta Brachou: So one thing that perhaps is useful, and you probably explore this with people when you speak to them, but what I found interesting is that actually some of these organizations had the ability to adapt according to the needs in a sense that, for example, although Vatra is originally set up as a shelter for victims of trafficking, they also accommodate victims of domestic abuse, for example. And this is how they also kind of justify the funding and they accommodate people that might be part of this harmonic continuum, because sometimes if that happens, it might start as domestic abuse or gender-based violence and things pile up. And I quite liked this idea that they are very much able to adapt but also on the other hand, you can argue that they need to adapt according to the available funding needs and what is a hot topic during each year, for example. And so internal victims of trafficking, for example, internal trafficking is still an issue, but they might have more women affected by domestic violence or gender-based violence than they have victims of trafficking. So things sometimes shift. Not necessarily related to that question, but I think it's important in terms of considering how funding works. But I think I just need to add that, having worked in the voluntary sector, we did that as well here. I mean, usually, if there is a particular agenda going around, you need to unfortunately sometimes jump on that to kind of save the rest of what you're doing while still protecting the essence of your organization.

Asylos: Thank you. We'll move to the stigma part now, and then there will be what's left of the questions. So when it comes to the stigma, to extend do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked? And is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking, for example, sex trafficking or forced criminality or forced begging?

Dr Anta Brachou: Definitely, there is a lot of stigma, not just boys and young men also women, I would say, but of course, men are the ones [inaudible] more just because of the culture that we have. We are very much a society that likes to keep that macho bravado facade of men who are strong and are leaders of the household and the society in general. So it's not usual that men would come forward and identify as victims of trafficking. Hence, I find it very suspicious that now we have so many men coming forward. And I'm not saying that they are not vulnerable; I think because there're these prescribed roles, they are very vulnerable also to show any kind of emotion, but yeah, the numbers here are a bit shocking. In terms of what types of trafficking would be attached to most stigma for men, sex trafficking definitely. I think the forced criminality, and that's probably it, might kind of explain the high numbers here because there is the element of criminality they don't necessarily see the victimhood as such because it's part of what would make a man strong and all the glorified qualities. So with forced criminality, less. Maybe that kind of makes it easier for them to come forward. I don't know, there is a lot of psychology and understanding behaviors here that goes beyond my criminology hat. Forced labor, again, I said it's not in our culture to single out forced labor just because of the very bad working conditions that we have generally and that are very much from the UK, perhaps if we were to compare, so they wouldn't even see themselves as a victim of forced labor. Forced begging is very much linked to the group that I mentioned, the Roma, Egyptian, and the ethnic

minorities, but I have very limited information as to how stigma affects them. I have not worked with Roma in Albania. I have here in the UK, but I don't want to confuse the two together because they were not Albanian Roma, the people that I worked here, so. I think that's all I can add with regards to that.

Asylos: So I would like to ask, with employment...

Dr Anta Brachou: No, I'll have a look at the question, and I can just contribute what I can. So I would say best to contact the civil society. Maybe for employment, I would suggest Mary Ward Loreto, just because they don't run a shelter but they have a lot more empowering projects and prevention projects. And one of the elements was to help people find work and train them. I know that the job centers in Albania or the equivalent of job centers in Albania are not as proactive or effective as they would seem to be in the UK, but I will let you discuss that with Mary Ward Loreto because that's where I got my information. They have the contacts with the job centers in certain cities, so they can tell you a little bit more.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you so much for that. Shall we then move to social assistance?

Dr Anta Brachou: Yes. So the social assistance, as I said, there is that quota that I mentioned, the equivalent to £85, something like that. But again, Mary Ward Loreto would be the good contact to speak about that. They have an advice center in Albania where they guide people through the process of getting social assistance and housing assistance. There is social housing as well, similar to the UK, but from what I understand, it is also very limited. So I don't know how accessible it would be, for example, for single people who have been affected by trafficking. But best to ask them. In terms of healthcare. So the rehabilitation, as I said, there is very limited support for people with complex mental health needs and also alcohol and addiction. There aren't many places where you can go to get that help. In terms of the general healthcare. I mean, the kind of unwritten rule or the written rule is that access to healthcare is free. However, a lot of people are not happy with the healthcare system, so whoever has the means chooses to go private because that's where you solve your problems. And I know and this is probably funny to a certain extent. I know that people in Albania complain a lot about the healthcare, but they complain a lot more when they come to the UK about the NHS just because of the way the NHS, we have easy access to medicine, we don't need to beg to get antibiotics. And there are certain expectations that Albanian people have, not just victims of trafficking, but also victims of trafficking have when they come here and they want certain responses from the healthcare here. So they end up in long queues, and by long queues, I mean months and years to access counseling, for example. So yeah, it's not great in Albania. However, if you kind of have your contacts or you know someone and you can pay £5 in the pocket of the nurse, you can get a lot more done. It's the reality.

Asylos: Okay. In regards to internal relocation, shall we touch upon this question too, or?

Dr Anta Brachou: So internal relocation, I mean, I know it's one of the common arguments that the home office puts forward when they say that this person can go back. If it is a victim of trafficking who has escaped a genuine trafficking experience or situation in Albania, the idea of internal relocation is very much impossible just because of how small the country is, and you don't necessarily need much research about it. I mean, we are so tiny and you can go through the whole country in, I don't know, seven, eight hours. And everybody knows everybody, or you can find people easier if you wanted to. However, the argument that I would have is that all these people sometimes have that exact exploitation situation. So the internal relocation shouldn't even be an argument in either way, really, because for victims of trafficking, yes, it is impossible, and other people who would be returned, they don't necessarily need to be internally relocated. And actually, in the two cases that I came across that I mentioned that they returned, in one of them the shelter workers mentioned that they had done everything to go and wait for her because allegedly she couldn't go home; she needed to be relocated eventually, and she ended

up just going home. Her family waited for her. She didn't even make it to the shelter. So it's a matter of discerning, really, which case is what, but definitely if there is an open trafficking case that is ongoing or the source of exploitation has been in Albania, it would be very difficult for them to find safety even if they move to a different town.

Asylos: So are trafficking victims able to avoid their trafficking by relocating to another parts of Albania?

Dr Anta Brachou: I mean, they could avoid them, but it would relate to the other point that if there is still something ongoing, and this very much depends on the case because sometimes the cases that we see of Albania, they are very similar. They have the same narrative, the same argument. "If I go back, people will find me." Most of the cases that I worked with, for example, the people from the law enforcement didn't even exist in the database. There was no trafficker as such. There was no trafficking case. Exploitation happened not in Albania, happened in France. There was no trace. There was nothing tangible. And yes, you could argue, but there is no trace of this organized crime group. You cannot put it together. So if that is the case, everything becomes very surreal. I mean, there isn't a tangible story to cling on.* There are cases, for example, that you would have a case with the police, you would have the names of the people who were involved, which makes it the dangerous scenario because these people would make everything to kind of reach out to the victims or even their families. But sometimes, especially because these cases are immediately merged with the asylum and immigration system here, they are processed in a way that the same arguments are put forward. The same kind of evidence sometimes is put across, and you never get to the bottom of the case. So yes, you can find anybody in Albania and not just victims of trafficking, and it's not to be disputed because you can go and find any-- and I'm talking about Albanians because from a foreign national person who doesn't know Albania, that might sound bizarre. But if these people are using this narrative just to, of course, regularize their status, it shouldn't be a case of, "Can this person relocate?" Because it's not an imminent danger that they're facing. There isn't an organized crime group that is after them is my point.

*[*In further clarifications, the interlocutor was asked to clarify what was meant by "law enforcement didn't even exist in the database. There was no trafficker as such." The interlocutor made the following comment in response:*

"In many of the cases I dealt with, there was no validation/corroboration from law enforcement. For instance, the individuals mentioned in the trafficking/asylum narratives could not be found on any law enforcement database, i.e., there was no evidence of an actual trafficker or a trafficking case. The exploitation didn't occur in Albania but rather in France, leaving no discernible traces or tangible proof. One could argue that there's no substantial evidence linking to an organised crime group. As a result, the entire situation takes on an almost surreal quality because there is no concrete narrative to grasp onto."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, written clarifications, 19 September]

Asylos: Yeah. Thank you so much for this. I think this is covered. We'll be moving to the last part of our questions today. And it's related to the re-trafficking and further exploitations. So what issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

Dr Anta Brachou: So with regards to the cases in the UK, I must say I have never come across a case that was trafficked in the UK or elsewhere and then re-trafficked.* The re-trafficking rate in Albania it's higher. I mean, if someone is internally trafficked, and then gets out for a while, and because of the vulnerabilities persisting, i.e., not having the means to make a decent living, the person chooses to go back to the perpetrator. So again, I would suggest you explore the re-trafficking of victims of internal trafficking in Albania. There is little evidence to suggest that people who have been trafficked to the UK have done been re-trafficked, but that may be

something that you uncover with this new trend of men who are going through the NRM, so. With the women, I never came across someone who came to the UK, got into the NRM, and then was re-trafficked or anything that. So yeah.

*[*In further clarifications, the interlocutor was asked "Could you clarify, does this comment relate to the two cases you came across as a practitioner/researcher who were returned from the UK to Albania? Or do you mean you have not seen Albanian trafficking victims in the UK who are then re-trafficked from the UK to other locations?" The interlocutor made the following comment in response:*

"Yes, the two cases that I came across, who were returned from the UK to Albania. One of the cases, was actually categorised as a voluntary return, i.e., she wanted to go back to Albania. In both cases, the issue of re-trafficking was not mentioned by the practitioners who supported them."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, written clarifications, 19 September]

Asylos: Okay. And the last question would be, what issues affect the likelihood of reprisals?

Dr Anta Brachou: Again, the narrative in the UK is the same. So in all 27 cases, but hundreds or more that I've worked with,* they had the same narrative that, "This organized crime group will do this to me and to my family." I have not uncovered any evidence to suggest that that is the case. We're talking about blood feuds, that's a different topical together. But again, with blood feuds, when I went back to Albania and inquired about it, in the north, where blood feuds is a phenomenon, they know exactly the families that are in blood feud with another family. So you would know the people who are affected by the phenomenon. It is not that everybody is affected by the phenomenon. So the reprisals in those pockets where families are affected by blood feuds, of course, there're imminent, so the risk for that is imminent. In other cases, I have not come across evidence to suggest that there is likelihood for such reprisals for victims of trafficking who are in the UK. So it remains a mystery again.

*[*In further clarifications, the interlocutor was asked to clarify what the 27 cases mentioned referred to. The interlocutor made the following comment in response:*

"27 cases relate to the cases I reviewed as part of my PhD. During my course of work, I worked with over 100 Albanian women going through the NRM."

Source: Dr Anta Brachou, written clarifications, 19 September]

Anxhela Bruci

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. Anxhela Bruci was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report.

Interview transcript – interview conducted 24 May 2023

Asylos: So I'll start with some questions then. So first of all, what are the profiles of victims of trafficking in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, when it comes to victims of trafficking in Albania, we can not say that there is a specific profile because, in this way, we might do more harm to specific profiles that are not included. But generally, what we have seen - and this is from my direct work with survivors of human trafficking - is usually girls and women, the majority of them victims of sex trafficking. Most of the women that I've worked with, they've been trafficked abroad, usually in Italy, some of them in Belgium; and others trafficked to Italy, Belgium, and the UK. The UK was not the first country trafficked to. It was the second or the third country. And then they were returned back

to Albania either through the process of the referral mechanisms in Belgium. But yeah, these are the details. And yes, the specific profile is usually girls and women aged from 18 up to 35 years old. But usually, it's 18 to 25 or 28 years old. But we've had also cases aged 35 or 35 plus, but less common..

Most of the girls and women I've worked with, they did not have higher education. Most of them, they've had nine years of elementary education, which is not high school. But it's pre-high-school education converted in the UK system, I think. And the majority of them were coming from rural or remote areas; not living in the central, or in the capital city, but coming from more vulnerable backgrounds. Not all of them, but most of them, they've also had previous experiences with their families, which were not very positive, either they were previously victims of domestic violence or they have seen their mothers experiencing domestic violence and coming from dysfunctional families

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. The next question is, what factors are associated with the risk of being trafficked in Albania? I appreciate you've just touched on some of them, but is there anything else you would like to add in terms of factors that are associated with the risk of being trafficked?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. I think I touched more on the push factors, but we do also have some pull factors, which I think are important to emphasise. For example, at the moment, what we've seen with young girls, but also young boys, for forced labour or debt bondage, is usually this glamorous lifestyle that is portrayed on social media. And we do see young people in Albania using a lot of TikTok or Instagram. Now, it has slightly changed with the new agreement that TikTok with some UK charities have done to prevent some of the content, but we did see before that there was a lot of use of TikTok. But going back to the factors, the pull factors is the luxury lifestyle portrayed in the social media abroad but also the promise of better working conditions and a better lifestyle in general. Coming also to the push factors such as, for example, corruption, which is a push factor that can make someone vulnerable to human trafficking, either because they cannot access the services to be protected, social protection services from the public, or even accessing services from the police or the judicial system, that can be a huge barrier and a huge vulnerability to be exploited later on.

Asylos: Thank you. And then moving on to think about the trafficker profiles, what are the profiles of traffickers in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, I have an answer for this, but this comes from the source of Deanna Davy, Trafficked by Someone I Know, a recent UNICEF report in 2022. Well, you might also have read it. And I can confirm with discussions with the girls and women I've worked with; the most common profile of a man trafficker is usually they are close to-- not to the family, but to the area where the victim lives in. And they use methods, at the beginning, of luring the victim into love relationships. Usually, the lover boy method is among the most common forms for girls being trafficked. But also, in the case of boys, it's usually luring them into this luxurious lifestyle. Usually, the trafficker will have a very expensive car, and they will be dressed in very well expensive clothes. And that can be as one of the tools they can use to initially make contact with their potential victims. But we also have women as a profile of a trafficker, and usually these women are of an older age compared to the victims they target. For example, we might have women traffickers aged 45 up to 55, 60. And most of them, they've usually been involved in the sex trafficking or they've been victims themselves or partners of the traffickers who have been involved in sex trafficking for years.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then the next question is, what are methods of recruitment into trafficking in Albania? I appreciate you also just touched on a few of them, but is there anything you'd like to add in terms of methods of recruitment?

Anxhela Bruci: The most common ones is, yes, lover boy method. That's the most common one. But also now we've seen an increase in debt bondage, for example - it's initially human smuggling - where Albanian boys, usually from the north or even from vulnerable areas in the south, they want better life conditions or just to provide for their families. And at the moment, in Albania, it's very difficult for youngsters to do that because unemployment rate is 27%. I can also share the statistics later from the national authority. And yes, debt bondage is also another form.

Asylos: Thank you. And yeah, it'd be great if you could share that statistic after the interview. And next question is, if a person has been recognized as a victim of trafficking by the UK National Referral Mechanism, would they be automatically recognized as a trafficking victim by the Albanian national referral mechanism and therefore able to access support in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes, well, for this one, we've also had discussion previously with the network because at the moment, we don't have a dedicated law in Albania to define all of these structures and how you can obtain a victim status by court. But if a victim is referred to the National Referral Mechanism or the Mobile Identification Units in Albania, then the respective authority within the NRM of Albania, they will issue a statement which proves that the person is either a victim of human trafficking or a potential victim of human trafficking. And that's enough for them to access any services they're entitled to based on the status of being a victim of human trafficking.

Asylos: Okay. And so I understand that if a person is referred to the relevant civil society organizations in Albania, that they can be referred into national referral mechanism. Are you aware of any arrangement whereby somebody coming from the UK who's been identified in a national referral mechanism in the UK jurisdiction would automatically return to Albania or be recognized as a victim of trafficking? Or would it have to be in that manner that you just described?

Anxhela Bruci: In the case where an Albanian victim from the UK is in the NRM, there are facts that they are a victim or a potential victim of human trafficking, then they will also be recognized in Albania as such a victim of human trafficking because the link will be through the UK NRM or UK organizations with the Albanian organizations.

Asylos: Thank you. And then moving on, just to think about trafficking-related legislation, what is the legal framework in Albania in relation to trafficking?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, as I mentioned, we don't have a dedicated law. That makes it very challenging to protect victims in general. But Articles 110 and 128, Section B, of the criminal code in Albania, they do criminalize human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking and labor trafficking. And they anticipate penalties to those involved in exploiting the victims from 8 years up to 15 years of imprisonment, based on the case. And also, when this offense involves children, the imprisonment can vary from 10 up to 20 years of imprisonment, in an offense involving child victims.

Asylos: Thank you. And my next question is, what legislation exists in relation to child protection in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, in relation to the child protection, it's usually the Article 128 (B) of the criminal code for labor trafficking. But there is also specific legislation to protect children victims of human trafficking, especially in the situation of children living in streets and being exploited by their family members. But the exact article, I don't remember it, so I can follow up later.

Asylos: Thank you. And can I ask a clarifying question? So the articles you had just mentioned relate to children and trafficking or labor exploitation. Is there kind of a more general legislation around child protection as well?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes, there is also a relevant legislation that refers to child protection and also social protection in Albania.

Asylos: Thank you.

Anxhela Bruci: I will follow up with a specific one, I think, in a single email with all of these.

Asylos: Thank you. And how effective is the legislation that exists in terms of what we've just discussed around trafficking and also child protection?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. Well, I would prefer to answer for adult victims of human trafficking because I haven't worked with children victims of human trafficking, but I can send you the reference later on on some of the research going on. Well, at the moment, if I could, I will answer it both from my personal experience working with victims and then also from what the data tells us. From my personal experience, we have seen that, usually, law enforcement-- or how effective the legislation in place is in terms of protecting victims of human trafficking. It hasn't been effective because we have seen an increase in numbers of human trafficking in Albania. And we cannot say that that was as a result of better identification procedures because the government, at the moment, does not fund any identification operations or mobile units in Albania. Usually, 80% of all the identified victims in Albania, they are identified by the efforts of non-governmental organizations in Albania, who are mainly funded by other agencies, non-public donors.

In terms of how effective the legislation is in prosecuting traffickers, it has not been very effective because of challenges in the judicial system in Albania and a continuous judicial reform that Albania is undergoing since 2016. We have seen a decrease in the number of prosecutions. For example, in 2020, we had zero prosecutions. And after that, we've seen a slight increase in prosecution. In terms of the Albanian State Police, we had last year; 61 investigations of possible cases of human trafficking with 27 suspects: 15 suspects for adult trafficking and 12 suspects for child trafficking. And the general prosecution office prosecuted 60 cases last year with 19 defendants: 6 defendants for adult trafficking and 13 defendants for child trafficking. We have seen an increase based on the previous years, but still, we believe as professionals involved in this field that this is not enough compared to 130 cases approximately every year and many more who go unreported because we don't have the necessary capacities to go on the ground and identify victims.

Asylos: Thank you. Can I just clarify a few points that you made there? So one, you were talking about, basically, the idea that about 80% of trafficking victims are actually identified, I think, by civil society actors rather than state authorities. Can I ask, do you have any statistic on that? Or is it a kind of anecdotal from your experience of seeing the identification process?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes, the statistic is, after the end of each year, the NGOs report to the national authority in Albania for human trafficking. And they report how many cases that were identified possible cases of trafficking by the NGOs, how many by the police or public authorities. And I can send you later the statistic that says the specific number of how many cases were identified by the shelters and mobile unit-- not shelters, mobile units run by the shelters, or how many cases by the police.

Asylos: That would be great. Thank you. And just one more question. In terms of the prosecution and conviction statistics, I just wondered where you were quoting those from, which source.

Anxhela Bruci: These are from the trafficking persons report from last year, but I can also send.

Asylos: Perfect. That's great. So in terms of the next question, it does touch on some things that you've already mentioned. So feel free to expand on anything if you would like. And the question is, is there judicial punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked?

Anxhela Bruci: I do not have information in this regard.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then how fully would you say is the legislation implemented in practice, the legislation that exists?

Anxhela Bruci: In terms of enforcing the law by the police, usually, what we've seen is that the police has not been proactive in identifying and, in this case, in enforcing the law for protecting the victims or potential victims of human trafficking. But also, we've seen-- I think you have the questions later on. But we've seen the implementation gap between the legislation mostly when it comes to protecting victims after they've been identified as victims of human trafficking, such as victims receiving compensations when they also testify against their traffickers and they win the trial, but also victims being protected and provided basic social support and assistance, which I think this is where we see an implementation gap. But maybe that's also a gap within the legislation itself, where the legislation is not very well developed itself. So I don't know if I can frame it as an implementation or legislation gap.

Asylos: Okay. Yeah. That makes sense. Then next question is, what provisions exist to protect witnesses. For example, is there a witness protection program? And if there is one, how effective is it?

Anxhela Bruci: There is a witness protection program, which is not only related to victims of human trafficking but to any victim who testifies against their abusers. And in terms of how effective it is, for the ones who have applied and went through the process, they have received the protection. Now I have a statistic, but it's not public. It's usually from what I've heard from my colleagues who work directly supporting victims of human trafficking. Over the last five years, only two cases of Albanian victims of human trafficking in Albania. They have been part of the witness protection program by receiving special support on either changing their identities or changing the countries where they live, for example, from Albania to another country, to be protected from what they've testified against their traffickers. And in terms of the effectiveness here - and this is also something that I say on a personal level; I don't have the statistics - usually, the high rates of corruption that might exist within the prosecution system or the involvement of some traffickers having connections with police officers or within the judicial system might make victims not even want to be part of this witness protection scheme or program because they will feel very exposed and not believe that their identities will be kept safe.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you for your answer. Moving on to talking a bit about state protection from trafficking, I'd like to ask, how effective are the following institutions at providing protection to victims of trafficking? So firstly, the police.

Anxhela Bruci: In terms of protecting victims of human trafficking, the police has been effective when was called by the NGOs, for example, on cases where they've identified potential victims of human trafficking or when they needed to provide a specific order to protect the victim. For example, based on the severity of danger that a victim of human trafficking might be in, they can be given a specific order of protection by the police and then be placed in a high-security safe shelter to be protected by possible threats of the traffickers or even family members in cases where there is a high stigma and also safety concerns by the family members.

Coming back to the effectiveness, I would refer back to the same numbers that the TIP Report - Trafficking in Persons, US, report - stated about how many cases were investigated last year and how many suspects. And seeing that we had, last year, 154 potential victims of human trafficking and 5 official victims of human trafficking and seeing, on the other side, the Albanian State Police investigating 61 cases with 27 potential suspects, I would assess from my experience here that the police has not been very proactive and effective but also not passive at all, so at the medium level.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then the same question. So how effective is the following institution at providing protection to victims of trafficking? And in this instance, we're asking about the judiciary.

Anxhela Bruci: Also the same in terms of the statistics from the judicial aspect. And here, I think it's because also of the focus of the recent reports of Trafficking in Persons Reports but also the push from the NGOs in Albania. Compared to 2020, where we had zero prosecutions, we've seen an increase in prosecutions from the judicial system in Albania. Also, with the Special Structure Against Corruption and Organized Crime in Albania, the SPAK Authority, it has helped in order to prosecute more traffickers but still does not affect it because, when we see the data, we do see that for last year, 60 cases were prosecuted with 19 defendants. And the Special Authority Against Corruption and Organized Crime prosecuted two new cases and continued two cases from the previous years of investigation. That's still very low compared to the number of victims we have every year.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then the same question - how effective are the institutions at providing protection to victims of trafficking? - but just in relation to any other state authorities that you can think of.

Anxhela Bruci: I was thinking more on the social protection perspective here, in order to protect victims of human trafficking, either from re-trafficking. And from the social protection system, I would say that they haven't been effective because, usually [...] But usually, a victim of human trafficking is entitled to 9000 lek per month, which is, I think, £70 per month, where the cost of surviving in Albania at the moment would be around £350. And we do see that the support being available from these social protection systems is not very effective to protect actual victims of human trafficking.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you for your answer. The next question is, what is the conviction rate for trafficking?

Anxhela Bruci: I think I mentioned the statistics, and I will also send later from where I found the sources. But in terms of the rate, we do see that we have more victims, and we keep having more victims and extremely low conviction rates for human trafficking. This reflects that there is a crucial need for the institutions responsible to do the convictions to be either restructured or to have better and more proactive policies placed.

Asylos: Thank you. And then just thinking specifically about measures to prevent trafficking, can you describe what state measures are in place to prevent the trafficking of men, women, and children?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. In terms of state measures, in paper, we do have measures placed for protecting victims for-- for preventing human trafficking. It's the National Action Plan to Prevent Human Trafficking in Albania. And we also have a budget, quite a budget allocated to this action plan. I will send you later the exact number. And according to this national action plan to prevent human trafficking or against human trafficking in Albania, there are specific provisions. But when we see the responsible authorities or organizations to implement most of these actions in the action plan, it usually lies within the non-governmental organizations. When we review who funds the non-governmental organizations in Albania, it's usually, in the majority of cases, private donors or international agencies or the EU, but not the government.

So in terms of the state measures, I would say they fall more into policy-level efforts rather than the provision of direct services. And it's usually through, firstly, the action plan, a policy level, but also through more sporadic awareness campaigns that usually will happen during October, which is the anti-trafficking month in Albania, or during July, which is the world day against human trafficking, the 30th of July, where they would make an awareness-raising spot in the television

or an awareness-raising campaign in the community. But apart from that, I haven't experienced or seen any effective state measures to protect men and women. When it comes to children, I have seen more vigilance towards especially online forms of human trafficking. But here, still, these have been cases mostly taken by international organizations or, for example, by the US embassy in Tirana or UK embassy in Tirana, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with different schools, to go to the schools and talk about human trafficking, raising awareness. But they still don't touch the root causes of the human trafficking. They don't do in-depth work with families, who might be extremely vulnerable or have low literacy rates, to educate them on different forms of trafficking for their children or how exposed they might be online when they're unsupervised on their mobile devices.

Asylos: Okay, thank you. Is there a child protection system. And if so, how effective is the child protection system in protecting children from trafficking or re-trafficking?

Anxhela Bruci: There is a child protection system and established structures within each municipality in Albania. And there is also a shelter for child victims of human trafficking in Albania, which provides emergency support to children. The shelter aims to provide alternative ways of care, such as, for example, for the children being placed back to their families in case their families were not the ones who trafficked them, or finding alternative methods of support. At the moment, in terms of preventing re-trafficking, we haven't seen any effective state measures because in Albania, we have challenges with the foster care system and adoption in general. And that's also a cultural issue that we have inherited because we are a post-communist country. We have only 33 years that we are free from this regime. And it's not in the mentality of the citizens to go through the adoption or to have foster care family programs such as the ones that are being implemented in the UK. And that makes the child protection system in general, when it comes to reintegration and preventing re-trafficking, very vulnerable, because we do see children being placed in public institutions or in those big buildings where the family support or the role of the family is very limited.

Asylos: Thank you. Your answer links again to the next question which is about whether there are adequate provisions, particularly accommodation and social care, in the case where children don't have any parental care.

Anxhela Bruci: In the case where children don't have any parental care, they will be under the authority and responsibility of the government of the state, where they will be placed in the house for children with no parental support and stay there until the age of 18 years old. After that, there are sporadic programs that they can help adults to move into rented apartments. And the rent might be supported by the municipality in Albania, but that will last up to a year. And what happens after this year ends? Usually, they need more support.

Asylos: All right. Do you have anything else to add to that about the adequacy of the provision for children who don't have parental care?

Anxhela Bruci: No, not at the moment.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. So next question is, what are the limitations in respect of the existing prevention measures that you've already talked about in previous questions?

Anxhela Bruci: For me, firstly, it's the lack of interaction with the communities that we are targeting. For example, when the government launches an awareness-raising campaign, usually, the government will be the initiator, but then that will be delegated to the Ministry of Education. And the minister of education will delegate it to specific schools. And all of it will lie on the responsibility of the teachers in the schools. And given the workload that they have-- usually, in Albania, the classrooms have approximately 40 students each classroom, which is a high number for a teacher to deal on a daily basis. And then when an awareness campaign is also tied in the

massive list of responsibilities that teachers have, that makes the campaign ineffective. It's just a ticking box in the letters that we've done an awareness campaign. So firstly, it would be to allocate resources, not just financial resources but also expertise in doing awareness-raising campaigns.

Second, would be to target the root causes of human trafficking. And we've seen that the most common one is poverty. Going to the most affected areas or in the areas where we see the highest rates of poverty and providing more employment opportunities or schemes that can help to firstly train the vulnerable communities and provide income or increase investments to those smaller areas.

Asylos: Thank you. And then my next question is, do victims of trafficking receive compensation when their traffickers are prosecuted?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, according to law, victims of human trafficking, they are entitled to compensation. But because of limitations in the law, and not having dedicated structures in place, even in the cases where victims of human trafficking have won the rights to win compensation, they weren't compensated, because there is no part in the Albanian legislation to define who should be responsible to compensate the victim and from where the compensation will come from. And even when the trafficker is responsible to compensate the victim, there are no legislation measures in place to get this money from the trafficker or to take the property of the trafficker and to give it to the victim of human trafficking entitled to compensation.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And then just moving on, thinking about corruption, how, if at all, does corruption in state institutions affect their ability to protect victims of trafficking?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, from my personal experience interacting with victims, usually it's the perception, first of all. Generally, in Albania, there is a perception that there is a lot of corruption going on. For example, South East European Development Initiative [SELDI], for the last year, identified that Albania is the country with the highest administrative corruption in the region, where 57% of the citizens that they were involved in the study, they mentioned that they were asked for a bribe at least once during the year where they sought for public services, either in the police, asking for documentation. And 47% of those interviewed-- surveyed, not interviewed, in the study, they participated in corruption transactions.

And also, Transparency International ranked Albania as being around 36 out of 100 - a highly corrupted country [the source can be found at: Transparency International, "[Albania: Country Data](#)", 2022]. Where 0 is highly corrupted; 100 is not corrupted. Albania is 36. Not even in the middle. But when it comes to victims of human trafficking, that is a huge barrier because, first of all, within the police, we've had cases where victims of human trafficking, they've been self-referred to the NRM in Albania or the organizations. And usually, that is a huge barrier at the beginning because it would make them scared to reach out to public institutions. And we can prove that also by looking at the rate of how many victims have been identified by the NGOs and how many victims by the police, for example. That seems that the victims do not trust the police. Maybe they've had cases where they've seen police officers cooperating with their traffickers when the trafficking experience happened. But we don't unfortunately have the statistics or the stories to prove that.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And is there evidence of ties between trafficking gangs and politicians or other public officials?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, that's a tricky one because here now, I'm recorded, but I will say I will try and find. Usually, there is a claim that there are links, but there are no official reports. But who gathers data for this official report? Is actually the police and prosecution. And when the police is part of the government, it's very difficult for them to prove that. But we've had international investigations and journalists investigations who have found ties, not directly of MPs but, for

example, the people closer to the MPs, who were involved in organized crime activities, mainly for drug trafficking. But we know in Albania that, usually, the organized crime groups that are involved in drug trafficking, most of them are also involved in human trafficking. That falls within the profile of the trafficker as well, who is involved in drug trafficking and human trafficking at the same time. But there are no official reports, unfortunately.

Asylos: Thank you. Are trafficked persons who are in state run shelters - so shelters basically run and provided by the government - able to access services aimed at their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Anxhela Bruci: Thank you. Well, when it comes to state-run shelters in Albania, we have only one state-run shelter, which is based in the outskirts of Tirana and not very inclusive because we have the north and the south left uncovered. But also, in terms of the state-run shelter in Albania, this offers only rehabilitation services, the emergency services after a victim has been identified as a victim of human trafficking, which means that no reintegration services are provided. Now, what happens is that, usually, the victims who are placed in the state-run shelter, after they receive the rehabilitation services and the case workers assess and identify that the victim has moved now from the rehabilitation period, which, usually, in Albania, lasts from six months up to a year, but it can depend on the case, there is no specific timeframe. And that's positive about Albania, that we don't have a specific number of days that you are entitled to receive the service. After the victim has been assessed as moving from the rehabilitation phase, they can be referred from the state-run shelter to the NGO-run shelters, who are specialized and they can offer reintegration services. But the state-run shelter itself does not offer reintegration services, but at the same time, does not stop the victims after they have been identified by the case workers to be part of the reintegration period and to be referred for reintegration services in the NGOs. They can then be referred and access freely the reintegration services. [crosstalk]. Ask me follow-up questions.

Asylos: Thank you. Thank you for the clarification that it's just rehabilitation that the state-run shelter would offer. How effective are the rehabilitation services that the state runs shelter is able to provide and that victims are able to access?

Anxhela Bruci: In the state-run shelter, there is not a lot of freedom in the victims to meet family members or just be reintegrated in the community. I'm not a supporter of this kind of support, but the government has made it in this way because they usually place the victims with very high risk of security-related issues in this shelter in order to be safe. So I don't know.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And you say you heard that from colleagues. Are those colleagues that have experience of going into the state-run shelter or working with people who live there?

Anxhela Bruci: It's usually case workers who have worked with victims who have been part of the shelter and now they've been referred to receive reintegration services. And there have been statements, for example, "Oh, I love this sense of freedom. Oh, I love this activity in the nature, something that was not very often in the first shelter."

Asylos: Thank you. And then just thinking lastly about the state-run shelter, are there any barriers to accessing rehabilitation? I mean, you've already talked a bit about the feeling of not having much freedom in that center. But are there any other barriers that people might find to accessing rehabilitation when they're in the state-run shelter?

Anxhela Bruci: Apart from not being able to meet their families often or have this conversation, it's usually also lack of socialization beyond fellow victims in the shelter. But not any other barriers I could think of or I could find resources to back them up, because that's challenging.

Asylos: Looking next at assistance to victims of trafficking from NGOs, are trafficked persons in NGO-run shelters able to access services aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. In terms of NGO-run shelters, because they would have access to both rehabilitation and reintegration services.

Asylos: Okay. And how effective are the rehabilitation and reintegration services that they may be able to access?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, from what I've seen also-- maybe I'm biased in my role as Arise coordinator because we do fund this state-run shelter. So I'm just disclosing also this bias when I give my response. But usually, knowing the services that they provide, they focus on providing a holistic package of services, which is not just health support and immediate support, but it also goes on psychological support, group therapy, and also creative ways of supporting victims in their rehabilitation periods, such as using image therapy. We had cases of even using arts and crafts. But also, in terms of integration, besides from the support that the local employment offices provide in Albania for unemployed citizens in Albania, included also victims of human trafficking, some of the NGOs have also taken the initiative to run social enterprises.

At the moment, we have the case of Different and Equal, who is running one social enterprise in Tirana called Tirana New York Bagels, but also very recently, [inaudible], which is another NGO - not shelter, but NGO - who supports victims of human trafficking. They've also opened another social enterprise, a social bakery, that also trains and provides skills to potential victims of human trafficking or victims of human trafficking to increase their chances for employment. So we've seen, based on my experience working with them, that they are effective, but not in terms of economic reintegration. We haven't seen a high effectiveness in economic reintegration. And this is not because the willingness lacks from the perspective of NGOs, but it's the current conditions of the labor market in Albania and the weak social protection support that victims are entitled to receive, which makes the economic reintegration process of survivors a process that takes more than five years to see the results. If compared to other countries where you would have, for example, the rent provided by the government or other measures, such as social assistance, it would be much easier to step on your feet again after the trafficking experience.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. And what are the barriers to accessing rehabilitation reintegration services?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, in terms of accessing, there are no barriers as long as the victims they have been referred in the NRM or they've been identified by the structures as victims of human trafficking. When they're identified, then they can access. And also, the NGOs, they do work very well with each other. So in cases where one of the NGOs is not able to provide a service because they are short on funds, they can refer the victim to get this service from another NGO. So there is a very well cooperation in order to meet their needs. But the barrier is when the victims are not identified. When the victims are not identified as victims of human trafficking, then it's very hard to access the services.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. And I appreciate you've already touched on this next question to some extent. But how are NGO shelters funded?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, for the NGO-run shelters, we have 80% of their funding-- approximately 80% of their funding comes from international organizations and non-public foundations. For example, private foundations, usually most of the funding comes from European Union institutions or embassies, for example, but not directly from the embassies. It's funds from the corresponding countries, for example, US, UK, and also European Union. In terms of the public support, the government, at the moment, supports the NGO-run shelters. And at the moment, we have three NGO-run shelters in Albania: Different and Equal in Tirana; Vatra Shelter in Vlore;

and Tjeter Vizion, Another Vision, in Elbasan. These three NGO and shelters, they receive funding from the government to cover the meal costs for their beneficiaries, which is a very low cost compared to all the other needs that they have. And they also receive the salaries of some of their case workers, paid by the government, but in the rate that the government defines, which is usually near the bottom line of the minimum wage in Albania, which makes it so challenging for the NGOs to keep their staff engaged, to decrease burnout, and also just decrease the cases of staff rotation because they would-- staff circulation because they would leave the job within the first six months or a year. They'll be burned out very quickly. The salaries are very low. But at the moment, that's the situation of funding.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. Next question. Is funding for support services permanent or time limited?

Anxhela Bruci: Unfortunately, it's time limited. Usually, also from the government, it's on a yearly basis, after the budget is being approved every year from the government. But also, from the NGOs, it's also time limited, which means, in the best case scenario, it would be two to three years funds in the best case scenario. But usually, it's one-year long or two-year long funds that they do receive. And then they will have to apply for another project to keep up their direct services.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And what factors affect funding being interrupted?

Anxhela Bruci: Usually, one of the factors is donors withdrawing from Albania as a region. We had recently, in the last three years, international donors not having Albania anymore in their focus. This is mainly also because the government or the EU, they do joint statements saying that Albania is a very safe country, is actually in the process of being part of the European Union, which I think will take quite a few years, but we are in the process. And that makes some of the donors not see Albania as a developing country anymore. So they shift their focus to other countries that they might have more evident needs or they are in conflict, for example. Also, the war in Ukraine has shifted some of the funding because of emergency needs, which we understand. And the third reason: usually, it's donors wanting to focus more on projects that they do have direct results or direct impact. And usually, services related to victims of human trafficking, they do not show a direct impact, especially reintegration. You will need three to five years to see a case successfully reintegrated, opening a business or being in a stable job. And most of the donors are just not very interested into that because of policy procedures or internal agendas that they might have.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. And when funding ceases or is interrupted, what impact does this have on service provision?

Anxhela Bruci: Unfortunately, has a huge impact on the beneficiaries. But I think, for this question, I'm not the best person to answer because-- yeah, I think I will skip it. I think the NGOs who do provide the service directly, they can say how they do it because, from my experience, they always managed to do something to not leave the beneficiaries out of support, but I don't know how.

Asylos: No problem. Thank you. Looking next to stigma, to what extent do Albanian trafficked men and boys experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked?

Anxhela Bruci: That's from my personal observation and also discussions with colleagues working with men and boys. Usually, Albanian men and boys, they experience a different type of stigma than Albanian girls and women experience. With Albanian boys, we see the stigma of being a failure, of not succeeding in the country where you were initially sent to succeed, because what we've seen with Albanian men and boys is usually forced labor or debt bondage as among the most common forms. And when this is not successful where they initially thought it would be successful for them and they're returned back to their home countries, it's usually the stigma of

failure. Also, the stigma of being the breadwinner of the family: usually, in Albania, we do see men as the breadwinners and women as caretakers of the family. That's not in Tirana. It has changed. But in most of the areas of Albanian, it's still existing, this belief. And we would see men being stigmatized as unable to provide for their families because they're weak after their trafficking experience, and it takes a little bit more time for them to get back into the labor market and provide for their family. And the third stigma we've seen is unfortunately this stigma of the bad boy, that you were not a bad boy enough to do bad things in order to survive or in order to succeed in the dark world, and now you are returned; you're a failure. But these are among the most common.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. And next question is, is stigma particularly associated to certain types of trafficking, such as sex trafficking, forced labor, force criminality, and forced begging?

Anxhela Bruci: What we've seen, yes, also from interactions with the community is that, usually, sex trafficking is associated with the stigma mainly for girls and women, that it was your that it happened, that it would never happen in case you wouldn't seek for it; you should have been more vigilant. And we've had a lot of cases. Also I've worked personally with victims of sex trafficking, whom their families would deny to talk to them after the trafficking experience. And it's more evident for girls and women. For boys and men, it's true that stigma associated with first labor is different. They would be more compassionate towards the victim of what happened to them of being exploited for long working hours, no contracts, compared to sex trafficking. And forced criminality, by some communities in Albania, it would be seen as a bad boy thing. "I did this thing. I was holding guns. I was selling drugs, so I'm a strong boy. I did this thing in the UK," for example. And it would be seen sometimes as a Medal of Honor by some groups in Albania.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. I'm looking next to unemployment. What barriers, if any, do trafficking victims faced finding employment in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: There was a study being done by Different and Equal, I think, in 2018. I don't know if it's in English. But based on that study, some of the main findings for survivors being integrated in the labor market were, firstly, the unstable labor market that exists in Albania and a lot of nepotism in the hiring process, which would make it so unfair for victims of human trafficking with no contacts, with no references, to just break into this unstable labor market. Secondly are the working conditions. Usually, in Albania, according to the law, you usually work no more than 8 hours per day, according to specific provisions. But private businesses, they would ask for their employees to work for 10 hours per day, 11 hours per day, and not pay them for the additional hours or not giving prior notice for these hours being required. And when it comes to survivors of human trafficking, usually most of them, they experience severe mental health conditions. And that makes it even more challenging to work in long periods of time.

And the third barrier was the lack of policies within those companies or businesses or people providing jobs to be considerate towards survivor needs, because they are a vulnerable group and they have specific requirements. Some of them, they are single mothers. They need to leave the job, let's say, at 3:00 PM instead of 5:00 PM to pick up their children from the kindergarten or school. And such provisions were lacking. This is why social enterprises are seen at the moment as the most suitable way to provide sustainable employment for survivors or for vulnerable groups in Albania, because they can be more considerate towards those needs.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. And what support is available to finding employment, and does it include professional training or job placements?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. At the moment, support is available. Survivors of human trafficking, they can access either vocational training provided by public agencies. The challenge there is that this course is provided by the public authorities. Usually, they have limited options, which we we're very thankful that they are provided, but they're very limited. For example, they're not quite

modern based on what the labor market needs now, for example, social media managers or different ways of coding, creating websites. They are not very up to date with the current labor market. So when it comes to their effectiveness, we do not see them being very effective. And also the NGOs, they do provide some of the vocational training themselves. I know that Tjeter Vizion in Elbasan, Another Vision in Elbasan, they do have a specific vocational training center that they provide their services. But I also know cases where NGO and shelters, they have paid for private vocational training courses which are advanced. And they have also ties with businesses so they can provide further employment in order to make it more smoother, this integration.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And I appreciate you've touched on this next one a bit, but what kinds of employment are they able to find, if any?

Anxhela Bruci: Usually, in the types of employment, there is a tendency to have more low-skill jobs available in Albania, which means, for example, in the cleaning industry or a waitress job, or usually supporting in the kitchen, preparation of the main meals, but not other types of jobs that they would provide better salary or a more sustainable way of life.

Asylos: Yeah, thanks. That leads me more to the next question, which would be, and how do their earnings compare to the cost of living in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Unfortunately, I don't have the statistic. It would be very helpful, actually, to have a research about it to see what's the current financial situation of survivors of human trafficking, maybe a 10-year study in the records. But we also lack in terms of data in Albania a lot. But I would answer it from my personal encounters and work with survivors. Usually, they are among the poorest groups in the society in Albania. And that's not just because of experiencing human trafficking, but it's also because of, when they experienced human trafficking, they were quite young, and they lost a lot of years of education or work experience that they cannot replace when the trafficking experience happens, which places them quite back in the process.

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. And I appreciate you've answered this next question before, but I'll ask it again. What is the level of unemployment among the general population in Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. Well, among the general population, I think it's 11%, but I will send you the exact statistic for the last year via email. I'll send you one email with all of the statistics that I mentioned. And in terms of youth, I do have the statistics here. Just give me a second. In terms of youth, during 2021, the youth unemployment rate was 27.1%, about twice as high as the overall unemployment rate for the whole population in Albania. And what is even more concerning is that among these 27% of unemployed youth, 24% of them, they are neither in training, not in education, and not in any other type of support, which makes them so vulnerable to be victims of human trafficking because they haven't been trained, they haven't been involved in anything, and they are the best targets for the traffickers to use neither in the county lines or other forms of exploitation.

Asylos: Thanks. And could I just clarify quickly? What was the source of those statistics?

Anxhela Bruci: Yes. The source of this statistics is the International Authority for Statistics in Albania. The National Authority for Statistics in Albania.

Asylos: Great. Thank you.

Anxhela Bruci: I will share you the statistic and the source

Asylos: No problem. Thank you. So yeah, looking next to social assistance, the next question is, what social assistance are trafficking victims eligible for? And what are the barriers to accessing it?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, social assistance. First of all, victims of human trafficking, after they have all the necessary documentation, they're entitled to 9000 lek per month, which is £70 per month, as a social assistance provided by the government when they're single mothers and they have more than two children. In terms of housing, they are entitled if they provide all the necessary documentation, which is a long list of documents to get it.* And it also costs to get most of the documents notarized and ready. But when they get it, they can get up to a year support for rents for apartments. There's a support that the municipality, not the main government but the local government, gives to the survivors. And there is also systems regarding to employment. We have those local employment offices run by the government that they do link job seekers with available opportunities. But as I said, the available jobs are usually low skilled and with extremely low salaries that wouldn't be enough to even sustain survivors with their children.

*[*In further clarifications, the interlocutor was asked a number of questions relating to the requirements to access housing. The questions along with the interlocutor's answers are set out below:*

1. *Are you able to specify what documentation a victim of trafficking is required to provide in order to access housing?*

“List of required documents (these might vary from year to year, according to Municipality decisions):

- Applicant's birth certificate and marital status certificate.
- Proof of residence in the municipality where housing or residence permit is requested, for families who have moved from other areas of the country.
- Verification of net and gross income (verification of employment from the employer) accompanied by verification from the Regional Tax Directorate for the payment of social and health insurance contributions.
- Certification from the office of assistance and care at local government units for family members, included in the program of economic assistance and payment for persons with disabilities.
- Certification from the employment office of the relevant local unit for persons included in the unemployment payment program.
- Certification from the real estate registration office that the family or any of its members do not own an apartment or any environment that can be used as such.
- Certification from the real estate registration office for the area of the property owned by the family or any of its members, when the area of the apartment is below the current housing standards.
- Certification from the real estate registration office of the country of origin that there is no registered property, which can also be used for housing, for families that have changed residence for the purpose of employment, for all family members.
- The court decision, which leaves the child or children in custody for divorced couples, accompanied by the certification from the enforcement office for the amount of the pension they benefit for the children.
- If you live in a dwelling with poor conditions or at risk of collapse, the original copy of the certificate issued by the Technical Services of the Municipality.
- The document issued by the relevant state institutions for persons who have the status of "immigrant", "immigrant worker" and "asylum seeker".”

2. *Is a victim of trafficking required to complete civil registration with the municipality in order to access housing?*

“Yes, because the fund derives from the Municipality, not the central government.”

3. *Is the individual required to provide information about their family and their family's financial means in order to access housing assistance?*

“Yes, if they live in the same house or they are part of the same family under civil registration.”

4. *Does a victim of trafficking require a guarantor in order to access housing assistance?*

“No.”

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, written clarifications, 16 November 2023]

Asylos: Thank you. And I appreciate you've just touched on the rental assistant, but-- rental assistance, sorry. But what housing assistance are trafficking victims eligible for, and what are the barriers to accessing it?

Anxhela Bruci: Usually, it's this support for rented apartments when they are out of their services from the NGOs, when the reintegration services have ended. And that would be one of the supports, but that's not even for all the victims of human trafficking. That's for victims of human trafficking living in the cities where support is available, because that lies within the fund that each municipality has. And the big municipalities such as Tirana they have this funding available. But we know municipalities who are in smaller cities outside of Tirana, they do not provide it, which gives to the victims only two options, either moving to Tirana, which is extremely expensive for them, or not being able to benefit from the social support.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And the next question: does the available assistance to victims of trafficking adequately protect against the risk of homelessness and destitution?

Anxhela Bruci: From my personal experience, the assistance in place does not protect them from re-trafficking. I'm not the right person to talk about re-trafficking because I think the social--

Asylos: Can I just interrupt there? The question was about homelessness and destitution rather than re-trafficking.

Anxhela Bruci: Oh, sorry. Thank you. Well, for homelessness, I also don't have statistics on that, on how many survivors of human trafficking are currently homeless in Albania. But we do have statistics of how many families that are in situation of homelessness versus how much support is provided. But I can not distinguish which of them were victims of human trafficking. But for my personal experience, knowing the available services and assistance, this leaves them quite vulnerable to being homeless and either go back and seek for support to the NGOs again or, when they're lucky enough, to go back to their families and seek support to their families.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And looking next to that availability of healthcare and rehabilitation services, what mental healthcare services are available to the following groups: trafficked girls, trafficked boys, trafficked adult women, and trafficked adult men?

Anxhela Bruci: In terms of public available mental health services for adult women and adult men victims of human trafficking, usually, they are very limited. And they are more into the institutionalized way of providing mental health services, which would be in hospitals, but not in very innovative ways or different techniques, for example, not behavioural therapy or other ways. And in terms of children, I don't have information on the mental health services available to them. But in terms of the NGO provision of those mental health services, the NGOs, they do have dedicated teams within their services who provide mental health support and also licensed

psychologists who provide those mental health services. But on a national or government level, this lacks. They're not easily accessible.*

[In further clarifications, the interlocutor was asked "Are victims of trafficking able to access psychiatric medications free of charge (i.e. covered by the state health system), when they are outpatients (i.e. when they are not in a hospital or other institution as a psychiatric patient)?" The interlocutor responded as follows:*

"It depends on the medications they are prescribed to. If they are categorised under the "chronic illness" category of patients, they can get reimbursed prescriptions. But for severe mental health cases, I have heard that most of the victims are not able to access for free the medications they need, which puts a huge financial cost for the shelters/organisations who support them."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, written clarifications, 16 November 2023]

Asylos: Okay. Thanks. The next question is, what physical healthcare services are available to victims of trafficking? And are these adequate to meet their needs?

Anxhela Bruci: In terms of physical healthcare services, usually, it would work in this way: the victim or survivor would go to their-- would have to register to their local GP doctor, and their local GP would be according to the place where they reside or the municipality where they live. And the local GP will do the initial assessment and would refer them to a specialist for specialist health support, which would take up to three weeks or two months, based on the problem and especially if they would refer. But for physical healthcare, they are available and accessible. A challenge within the healthcare system is, usually, some of the survivors might have severe physical health issues, either from their trafficking experience, forced labor experience, and they would not be entitled to be reimbursed of their medical expenses in terms of the medicine that they would need to take. And that would be a huge burden for them because, usually, this kind of medicine is very expensive. It would go around £150 per month. And here, we have a challenge because the medical support provided by the state would not cover it. But we have cases where NGO-run support, they have covered the bills of this kind of medicine. But that's also short-term, up to a year. After a year, then it's based on how much donors they have.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. Looking now at internal relocation, what problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: I'm aware of mostly not legal but documentation issues. For example, I can bring some examples in my work with survivors. Usually, with survivors I have worked with, when they had children, they had a lot of problems with the name of the father of the children. And that would be very difficult for them to register from a specific city to another city because they would need to go through a different judicial process to be entitled to change the city where their child would reside. Another challenge would be the issue of the irregular market in Albania, where, if you would like to rent a house, the person who is renting you the house would not give you an agreement because they wouldn't want to pay taxes to the government. And without this agreement, you can not apply to change your residence to a different city because you would need to prove you have rent contract. And that has been a huge challenge because, if you want this rent contract, you will have to pay 30 or 40 percent more of the price of the rent that you would pay if you don't need this contract. These are the two main challenges.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. The next question. Are trafficking victims able to avoid their traffickers by relocating to another part of Albania?

Anxhela Bruci: Well, for this and the next question about if traffickers find the victims who internally relocate, I can't answer because I haven't had discussions with the victims that I've worked with on this matter, or I haven't experienced any concerns from the victims of this

matter. But I'm sure colleagues from the shelters who have worked with more victims than me, they can give a more thorough answer.

Asylos: No problem. Thank you. And finally, yeah, looking at re-trafficking and further exploitation, what issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked?

Anxhela Bruci: For re-trafficking, what we've seen is usually lack of employment opportunities and income. When they don't have income, they would usually be more vulnerable to be re-trafficked or fall into false promises or false employment opportunities. And we've seen also lack from social support when they are not-- when they don't feel reintegrated in the community or do not feel accepted by their families. We have seen that that has increased a lot the risk to being re-trafficked, also to experience severe mental health issues after the reintegration period.

Asylos: And finally, what issues affect the likelihood of reprisals?

Anxhela Bruci: In my work with victims, I haven't had cases of reprisals or intentions of reprisals. That's mostly because I mostly work with victims in their reintegration phase-- with survivors in their reintegration phase. But I'm sure my colleagues from shelters, they might have more cases to share.

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers is a Professor of Applied Anthropology at the University of Bournemouth. Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers was interviewed by Asylos for the purposes of this report. Further information about Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers' professional background can be found [here](#).

Interview transcript – interview conducted on 25 May 2023

Asylos: What is the prevalence of trafficking for the purpose of forced criminality in Albania?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: I don't have hard facts and figures. For the purpose of forced criminality. Forced criminality. Again, it's dodgy. Where does it start, be forced? We have studies which show us that there is a normalization of crime in certain areas that are underpinned by huge poverty where you go-- not even those. I have one case in mind, one story, based on ethnographic research in Albania in 2021 and 2022, where a young man from a southern city, a perfectly decent southern city, not associated with anything untoward, generally, in the literature, decided he needs to make a bit of money to start a family and marry. Right? So in order to do so, he decided to go to the UK for just three months or so, work on a cannabis farm, make lots of money, and then come home with that, and then be a perfectly decent citizen. So is that forced criminality? He was definitely in criminality and decided to go. And then it didn't quite end up the way he wanted to, and he ended up in prison in the UK. So the motives are not-- there was no force in the background. But there's criminality and criminal outcomes. And it's, yeah, poverty and social pressures.

Asylos: How effective are State institutions in providing protection? You can answer it as a whole, but the institutions we're particularly interested in are the police and the judiciary, and any other state authorities that you might want to bring into it.

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: We know things have improved, but we also know that corruption prevails as a problem. And that is for police, judiciary, and other state authorities. And in the case of trafficking, just as in the case for blood feuds. First of all, it means that you have low trust because of the history even if there have been improvements. So people would not go there. In the case of trafficking-- also in the case of blood feuds, but in the case of trafficking, you don't want to be known as a victim of trafficking because it renders you additionally vulnerable because it

stigmatizes you. You are therefore in an extra weak position and exploitable and blackmailable, even, in theory. So it's a risk to be known as such, and it could mean real constraints on your freedom. So I think people are not taking recourse to state protection unless they are found out with or against their will, and it's nothing that people-- or if they really don't have any family, any mates, anybody. But in our research, we found that, again, the best option strategically for people, and that's what they wanted too, was to find ways of re-emigrating, and that's with a re-trafficking risk rise, of course. Right?

Asylos: On the stigma side, the question we pose is specifically about men and boys and whether they experience stigma as a result of having been trafficked. Is there anything that you want to say on that point?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: If they were known as having been trafficked. So their agency was curtailed, and they were forced into something. There would be a stigma. But people tell stories about themselves that are okay. So they can tell the story about having migrated. And then that's not a stigma. That is just what everybody tries to do. So stigma applies only if you divulge that you have been stripped of your agency and forced against your will to do something.

Asylos: And is that something that happens, divulging amongst men and boys that their agency was-- the part that they were trafficked, I guess? If that has happened.

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: So we have analyzed all these Albanian hip hop lyrics, which are about migration and migration stories, and they divulge a lot of vulnerability and yearning for mom and things like that, as I said earlier. And we haven't found amongst those lyrics any story which said I was forced into having sex with men or anything like that. We have not found such a story. And I'm sure this is about you wouldn't tell that story. Because you would, at that point, open yourself up to ridicule or stigma. Who would do that? These stories are silenced, effectively. But that renders these people vulnerable for other people to tell that story. So you're again, you can potentially be blackmailed. Somebody saying, "I'm going to tell that this or that was really the case because I know." You are easier blackmailed again and forced into things you don't want to by saying we can tell this story exactly because social honor is such an important capital in this context.

Asylos: Thank you. And so talking about whether there are any barriers that trafficking victims who are returning to Albania might face, or trafficking victims who haven't left Albania in finding employment. What support's available to find employment? Are there professional training or job placements? So yeah, anything to say on those kind of first questions?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: I mean, at the moment, the home office is running an, I don't know, multi-million program in Kukes there in northern Albania to skills training and whatnot. And our earlier project included huge component on skills training. So there's opportunities around, but it's not necessarily getting to everybody. There is a huge unemployment rate. There's high youth unemployment. And the barriers are again social. If you are at the bottom end, you will have least opportunities to get employment. And then it relies very much on family connections. This is just the way the society is knit. So if you are shamed by your family, expelled, or if you have lost this contact, or you're on your own, you have the least opportunities to end up in proper employment. Yeah, it's absolutely dismal to even survive in such a situation. Yeah. You need people around you. So that's why returnees are the most vulnerable people, particularly if they have been in situations that stigmatize them.

Asylos: Moving onto internal relocation, what problems do trafficking victims face in relocating to a different part of Albania?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: The relocation. Okay. So the problem with relocation in Albania is that society works in ways where you are as an individual always socially located. What family you are from, even through your grandparents, good family, bad family, the biography, the history of the family. So you're literally asked upon a first encounter, who's your dad, who's your family, what is your family? And people would know. So you can't really easily pretend to be from another family. Because it's always complex socially, and it's based on the social knowledge. This is how you can find people, and so why it's so difficult to hide. But also, how you have a network of support. So those people who are outside this network of support are by the same logic absolutely left to destitution. Yeah. But you can be found exactly because you will stick out like a sore thumb if you are there. And a woman on her own being dropped into somewhere where you have such social networks, a family, and then also friends that you make from school, etc., etc. People know each other. It's very personalized knowledge in Albania whereas what these people seek and why they emigrate is living in an anonymous society where you can be just an individual living on your own. And that's what we have in London or Amsterdam. But we don't have that in Albania. Just it's different culturally.

Asylos: Is there anything specific to having been trafficked that might make it difficult or might prevent someone being able to hide from their traffickers?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: Well, you're under a specific threat. Right? If you have fled an exploitative situation, and the traffickers are worried that you might seek judicial-- what's it called? Redress. So you're under a particular criminal threat to be found. So they can use those social networks to trace you down fairly easily. And because you would stick out like nothing else as an individual woman. And I know one or two women who live on their own in Tirana, but they are from elite families and their family is known, and they have high-profile jobs. I mean, really high-profile jobs. They are sort of part of these cosmopolitan elites. And then that is not so different then for a woman like you and me. But for the ordinary woman, and particularly these women who are in these exploitative situations. They don't usually have this culture or social capital at all at their disposal. And they would be expected-- this is also this patriarchal context where you always have a man in your life. It's either your husband or it's your father or brother. Right? So it's your parental family or it's your marital family. And if you're outside that, you're open prey. I mean, this is the logic of classic patriarchy. And we find that in Albanian society still, as very, very prevalent.

Asylos: Thank you. Is there anything you wanted to add on what methods they would use to find-- traffickers might use to find victims again, or anything else on the internal relocation point?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: I was just wondering what I would do my research project on now, or one of them would be looking into the ways in which social networks online support finding people through Facebook or through TikTok, or so. I think the most amazing things would happen. [laughter] And that would amplify risks if anything. But then you might want to avoid being online, of course, as a potential victim. But as I said before, I found people just by name, just going somewhere and asking around. There's no telephone book or so, but you just ask, and somebody says, "No, I don't know, but this family, okay, okay. Why don't you speak to this person?" And a few steps on, you've found the person. Know where they live.

Asylos: Thank you. And then the last question is about re-trafficking and further exploitation. So there are two questions. What issues affect the likelihood of being re-trafficked, and what issues affect the likelihood of reprisals?

Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers: And let me start with the last one. Reprisals is if you seek judicial support and expose criminals to prosecution-- Judicial prosecution risk. That would increase. You basically become a snitch. If you tell somebody's been criminal to the police, or if you seek support, then that heightens your risk on the other side of reprisal, rather than lowering

it, I would say. And the likelihood of being re-trafficked. I think the major thing is that you are not escaping your predicament through these supposed support mechanisms. But if you are exposed to stigma in the society or exposed to social exclusion, or exposed to forced marriage, your best option is just, again, to migrate abroad. And that's what people do.

Annex 5

Ana Majko Biography

Ana Majko graduated in 2008 as a psychologist at the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology (DPP), Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana and has obtained a Master of sciences in Organizational Psychology at the same faculty in 2010. She has conducted her PhD studies in the field of psychology in the University of Tirana and was awarded her PhD in 2018.

Ana Majko has 10 years of experience in the field of child rights and protection, implementing services for children at high risk, day centers for children, emergency services for children and parents in need for protection and treatment. She is an expert and trainer on issues related to child trafficking, exploitation, abuse and maltreatment, case management and emergency response. Since 2016 she has been the executive director of **Initiative for Social Change ARSIS**, a local organization focused on strengthening of child protection mechanism in Albania, community empowerment, designing and piloting new services, capacity building in child protection, advocacy and lobbying and policy development in cooperation with public and non-public institutions. She is engaged in program development and implementation of projects for the most vulnerable groups nation-wide. Ana Majko is a co-author of the in-service modules for child protection, author of several publications and presentations at national and international conferences, a researcher in different studies with a focus on children at high risk and victims of abuse and is an activist in the area of child rights and protection in Albania.

Adriana Kasa (Tjeter Vizion) CV



Europass Curriculum Vitae

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Occupation or position held	Part time Pedagogue in the Social Science Faculty,(Social Work Department) Elbasan University -
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision of the students' practice in institutions • Leading students in different researches and projects idea
Name and address of employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Aleksander Xhuvani” University – Elbasan – Education Faculty – Social Work Department
Type of business or sector	PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
Dates	October 2021- April 2023
Occupation or position held	Deputy partnership lead (Local Expert)
Main activities and responsibilities	Preventing serious organised crime among children and youth in Albania through the project RAYS (reconnecting Albanian youth and society) implemented by Palladium Group and financed from British Government
Name and address of employer	Southampton Hampshire.5031 4NB
Type of business or sector	NGO-Sustainable Criminal justice solution (SCJS) United Kingdom
Dates	June 2009 –current
Occupation or position held	Program Manager & project-proposal designer
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the program of social services offered from Tjeter Vizion Association for children, youth and women in risk.

	<p>Design and implement the Project proposals in the function of the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience in writing and implementing EU ; USAID: MAE call for proposal • Keep contact like General Police directory, Ministry of labor, National Mechanism, State social services etc. • Represent the organization in national, international level • Participate in the process of design national strategies, Standards Operation procedures for Trafficking victims and domestic violence; standards of social services for disadvantage groups. Draft law for social enterprises. • Organize SWOT analyze and identify staff training needs • Organize and facilitate training for different stake holder and group of interests • Evaluate and analyze the services and design new project idea for the services • Coordinate the actions and activities among the managers of the services and supervise them periodically. • Responsible for monitoring and Evaluation of the program • Responsible for the project implementation and reporting
Name and address of employer	"Tjeter Vision" Association Address. Lagjia " Aqif Pasha, Rrugaria" Nr 19, Elbasan
Type of business or sector	NATIONAL NON Profit ORGANISATION (NGO)
Dates	May 2008 – June 2009
Occupation or position held	Manager of Residential Center for violated and trafficked women and children - Elbasan,
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the residential center and the entire service for the beneficiaries • Keep contact and inform public national institutions on Trafficking and violence phenomena. • Keep close contacts with Police directory and state social services as well as other referral entities. • Write project proposals in the function of the service • Identify training needs for staff • Prepare the balance and the financial plan of the service • Organise awareness campaign • Prepare periodically the progress report for the service. • Design the reintegration program for victims of trafficking and domestic violence
Name and address of employer	Tjeter Vision" Association , Adress. Lagjia " Aqif Pasha, RRugaria" Nr 19, Elbasan
Type of business or sector	INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION
Dates	January 2009- June 2009
Occupation or position held	Local consultant
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-facilitating the process for designing the development local action plan in one of the tourist areas of Elbasan. • Organize training sessions with local government of Tregan Commune • Design the community action plan within a frame work of 10 years
Name and address of employer	Albanian Development Fund Tirane /Albania

Type of business or sector	PUBLIC/ private organisation
Dates	February 2007 - May 2008
Occupation or position held	Home stay coordinator
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for recruiting and selecting Albanian Families where Peace Corps volunteers will reside for the duration of the pre-service training. • Contact and maintain a good relationship with local authorities at satellite sites and host families as well. • Design and implement a strategy for involving host families in training. • Demonstrate to trainees an effective cross- cultural working relationship.
Name and address of employer	Peace Corps Tirane – Albania
Type of business or sector	American Government agency
Dates	October 2005- November 16, 2007
Occupation or position held	Head of community development department
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate Concept Paper writing by insuring all stakeholders' involvement. • Provide information on a regular basis on community development work to other team members and ADP team. • Coordinate all stakeholders in designing the community development approach in the Area development program. • Facilitate a capacity building plan for empowering community structures. • Assess needs for revision/restructure community structures (leadership, networking, financial capacities, tech, capacities etc.) • Together with community development coordinator and project coordinator monitor assist and facilitate community based organizations in their needs assessments and project implementation • (Meetings with community, working groups' activities, community based organizations and local government) • Develop training modules in community development approach and facilitate training by ensuring outside expertise as well. • Identify and involve expertise in community development work.
Name and address of employer	World Vision Albanian Branch, Elbasan ADP1
Type of business or sector	INTERNATIONAL NON PROFIT ORGANISATION (NGO)
Dates	February 2003 – September 2005
Occupation or position held	<i>Sponsorship Department manager</i>
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for maintaining relations among sponsors and children in the World Vision office -Elbasan. • Prepare and organize communities for sponsorship programs at the start up phase, conduct meetings and share information with the community members and local authorities regarding child sponsorship programs • Develop criteria for children selection with the office team leader and sponsorship officers and recruit children into programs • Supervise Customer Relation Services Officers and Field Monitors, ensuring timely communication between the office and children through the monitors • Participate in program designing and planning through close cooperation with Office team leader and community coordinators

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor direct and indirect benefits of children enrolled in programs through program implementations • Participate in operational audits
Name and address of employer	World Vision Address: Albanian Branch, Elbasan ADP1
Type of business or sector	INTERNATIONAL NON PROFIT ORGANISATION (NGO)
Dates	<i>October 2002- January 2003</i>
Occupation or position held	Food Program Assistant
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with Logistic Officer to identify eligible beneficiaries • Supervised Warehouse distributions • Interviewed individual beneficiaries to monitor program implementation • Negotiated and signed counterpart agreements with institutions in the GFFEI (Global Food for Education) project • Worked with Logistic Officer and economic centers to set up distribution schedule, record keeping and weekly reporting to Logistic Officer • Worked to ensure monitoring and distribution of humanitarian food aid provided by CRS in Elbasan Prefecture in order to improve the quality of the nutriments. • Coordinated with Kindergarten Directors for data gathering in the GFFEI program Assisted with Food Department and Kindergarten stakeholders in food distribution and monitoring • Conducted food "Needs Assessment" for Kindergartens
Name and address of employer	CRS (Catholic Relief Services), Albanian Branch of the organization Address: ELBASAN, Albania
Type of business or sector	American Humanitarian non profit Organization - Albanian Branch
Dates	January 2002- March 2000
Occupation or position held	Field Office Education Project Manager
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided management, assistance, guidance, and supervision to Education coordinators in the sub-office • Promoted staff development through identification of Education Coordinators' training needs and dissemination of training materials and methods • Participated in regional and national CRS training, meetings, and strategy sessions related to education • Reviewed and commented on Mini-Project Proposals with ED coordinators and head of office according to mini-project guidelines and format • Ensured financial monitoring for approved mini-grants • Maintained communication between Sub-Office and Ministry of Education on District Level. • Organized and facilitated seminars and meetings, and conducted training for Parent Councils/Teachers • Maintained relations with local-level donor representatives.
Name and address of employer	CRS (Catholic Relief Services), Albanian Branch of the organization Address: ELBASAN, Albania
Type of business or sector	American Humanitarian non profit Organization - Albanian Branch

Dates	October 1995- February 2000
Occupation or position held	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher of History and English subjects, and Coordinator of the "Cluster" program
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated and managed educational programs with the American "SOROS" foundation and the A.E.D.P. (Albanian Educational Development Project) • Drafted and implemented projects for teenagers in cooperation with the "SOROS" foundation • Implemented educative programs for teenagers in local communities • Motivated and inspired students to learn by developing and implementing new educational approaches by using a variety of interactive teaching approaches.
Name and address of employer	High School Address- Belsh Municipality Elbasan, Albania
Type of business or sector	PUBLIC SECTOR
Dates	December 1993 - August 1994
Occupation or position held	Logistic & Provision Monitor
Main activities and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed and supervised distributions of provisions and medical supplies in local rural districts (Elbasan district)
Name and address of employer	German Humanitarian Mission "Ost-West" (East-West Relationships) Tirane – Albania
Type of business or sector	German Protestant Mission
Education and training	
Dates	October 2013
Title of qualification awarded	CAS (Certificate of advance studies)
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Coaching for employment Group forming Exploring labour market Short and long term internships Community projects Individual development plan Business plan
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Lucerne- University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Social Work) Switzerland
Level in national or international classification	Advanced studies (level of master degree)
Dates	December 2012- April 2012
Title of qualification awarded	Skill certification

Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Development Programme of Regional Project
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	UNDP
Level in national or international classification	Capacity building training- post graduates studies
Dates	June 2012
Title of qualification awarded	Participation certificate (coaching for employment)
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Labour Market Marketing Instruments and tool for a job identification Education and Labour Short- long term internship Working with projects How to approach a business Marginalised groups and specific trainings for them
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Sociale Arbeit)
Level in national or international classification	Post graduate studies (level of master degree)
Date	2009
Title of qualification awarded	Certificate on “Enhancing Women’s role in Governance”
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Albanian Election system& Women quota Lobby & Advocacy Women presentation in Media Networking and Partnership
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	OSCE- Tirane Albania
Level in national or international classification	Annual Training sessions
Dates	2005-2009
Title of qualification awarded	Marketign specialist
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Marketing profile Publication Public relation
Name and type of organisation	Aleksander Xhuvani” University Elbasan, Albania , PUBLIC INSTITUTION

providing education and training	
Level in national or international classification	Bachelor Degree in Business administration (Diploma of second level)
Dates	2008
Title of qualification awarded	Certificate on “ Strategy of actions against human beings’ trafficking and domestic violence”
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Albanian Strategy against the human being trafficking Albanian Standards against the human being trafficking Domestic violence law
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Albanian Interior Ministry in cooperation with Italian Org CIES
Level in national or international classification	Annual course
Dates	January 2008
Title of qualification awarded	Certificate on creating and managing (SME) Young Creative Entrepreneurs
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Leadership and management Small Medium Enterprises Business management
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	British Council Tirane- Albania
Level in national or international classification	National Training session British Public agency
Dates	July 2008
Title of qualification awarded	Diploma on “New Politician– The role of women in decision making and governing”
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Gender equality law Woman Leadership in World & Albania Globalisation women position in World & Albania
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	ACPD & Womankind- Albania
Level in national or international classification	National Summer school
Dates	August 2008
Title of qualification awarded	Certificate on “ Democracy & Participation”
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Principles of Democracy Leadership and participations Pluralisation and Participation Media and election system

Name and type of organisation providing education and training	KRIK ALBANIA
Level in national or international classification	International Summer University
Dates	2007
Title of qualification awarded	Leadership in Politic – Master Degree
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Political leadership Principles of Democracy Election system Human Rights Political parties International practices of the election system European political representation- European Parliament - Counsel of Europe
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Council of Europe (Albania- Strasbourg)
Level in national or international classification	Post graduate studies, Master Certificate
Dates	1991- 1995
Title of qualification awarded	History- Geography teacher
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Ancient history of Albania Middle age history of Europe Balkan History Albanian History World Politic Economy World Physic Geography Politic Geography Albanian physic Geography Mapping Geology
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	“ALEKSANDER XHUVANI” UNIVERSITY OF ELBASAN, ALBANIA FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES Department of History & Geography
Level in national or international classification	Bachelor Degree
Human rights related experiences- trainings sessions	
Personal skills and competences	

Mother tongue(s)
Other language(s)
Self-assessment
European level (*)

ALBANIAN

Understanding				Speaking				Writing	
Listening		Reading		Spoken interaction		Spoken production			
B2	Proficient user	B2	Proficient user	B2	Proficient user	B2	Proficient user	B2	Proficient user
C1	Proficient user	C1	Proficient user	C2	Proficient user	C1	Proficient user	C1	Proficient user
B2	Independent user	B2	Independent user	B2	Independent user	B2	Independent user	A2	Independent user

(*) [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)

Social skills and competences

- Very good social skills as a result of a long work experience
- Positive,
- Extremely organized person
- Success oriented,
- Goal achiever,
- Quick learner,
- Highly organized, detail oriented,
- Determined, responsible,
- Analytical,
- Problem solving,
- Team player.
- Ability to live and/or serve in hardship locations.
- Strong referential values of fairness, equity and dignity

Organisational skills and competences

- My work experience, professional background and extra-professional activities have their roots in my dedication toward social change, to the improvement of human life conditions and developing the societal mentalities in order to live together in a better society;
- I am very interested and believe to my abilities and my professional background. For a long time, almost 17- years I have been engaged in working with different International NGO-s which have had as their focus the implementation of different programs in education system improvement, community welfare, assisting and improving state social services, capacity building, assisting technically various government bodies and cooperation with private and government institutions to better represent the community's interest.
- Expertise in national and international development work, management, project writing, budgeting, logical framework design and reporting, as well as consultancy to governmental program management is a relevant experience I gained during my work within the national and international Organizations. I enjoy working in a team environment and have the ability to react toward changes in a fast and efficient manner. I am very flexible and able to manage/resolve difficulties and problems as they arise. Any new challenges that I face I see as an opportunity to grow and learn.
- During the years I have had the pleasure to work with a multitude of different groups divided by culture, ethnicity, and gender and I have enjoyed it. My previous experience shows a proven track record of successfully implementing my management skills in a multitude of various projects. My professional experiences go hand-in-hand with my high educational background. I continually strive to improve my skills by regularly attending various seminars, workshops and conferences.

- Committed to my work and remain calm even in stressful situations and work well under pressure. One of my main strengths lies in my commitment to my work and in my professionalism.

Computer skills and competences

Windows XP 2000, MS Word, MS Excel, Word Perfect & Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes
/Power point
E-mail and the Internet for research purposes

Other skills and competences

Publication
(Employment manual design , traineeship organizer, trainer - non-formal education)
Articles written in local newspapers
"Teachers' Role in democratic education system "- Teachers Newspaper
"Kosovo and its rights" – Elbasan Newspaper 2007
"Professionalism in name of Militancy" 2007
"Democratization of Democracy" October 2007
"Role of Women in Albania" March 2008
Guideline for returnees reintegration in Albania (children observatory)
Communication Plan for Youth council in Elbasan – Elbasan Municipality
Social inclusion Plan for Elbasan municipality 2017-2020- UNDP

Member of LPSC municipality of Elbasan
Member of KKQV municipality of Elbasan
Member of the International Women Network – Located in Forli- Italy
Referee: in different seminars, national and international conferences about gender issues, women empowerment , Human rights , community development
Researches in: Human beings trafficking in Albania 2009
Domestic violence In Albania 2008-2010 , social inclusion of the vulnerable groups, social area plans of Elbasan region

Vatra Biography

"Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre is an Albanian non-profit organization, which provides services and expertise for the prevention and protection of victims of trafficking, and domestic and community violence, according to Albanian legislation. "Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre started its activity in 1999.

"Vatra" Psycho- Social Centre has been licensed from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities as a Centre (today Ministry of Health and Social Protection) for the provision of residential and community services. Vatra has been provided with two licenses from the National Licensing Centre respectively for provision of community services and residential services. In 2022, the Legal Clinic of Vatra Psycho-Social Center has been authorized by the Ministry of Justice, for providing free legal aid for vulnerable groups, mostly victims of domestic violence, gender based-violence and victims of human trafficking and their children.

The mission of "Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre *is to prevent trafficking in human beings and domestic violence, protect and provide social inclusion to the victims of these phenomena by means of information, education and advocacy programs, and community and residential social services.*

The target groups supported by "Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre include vulnerable groups, especially women, girls, young people and children.

The main activities of "Vatra" include:

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

Since its establishment, "Vatra" has assisted 2659 victims/potential victims of human trafficking (2597 women and girls and 62 men and boys), 2190 victims of domestic violence and gender based violence (1929 women and girls and 261 men and boys) and 761 children of victims of all kind of violence and trafficking.

Vatra is a member of the National Referral Mechanism, and a member of different national and international networks. Its work has been appraised by different national and international agencies.

Dr Klea Ramaj CV
(see following page)

DR. KLEA RAMAJ

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Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) ♦ Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
Geoffrey Manton Building, Manchester, M15 6LL

EDUCATION

Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGC LTHE), 10/2023 – Present
Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Manchester, UK

- Fully funded by MMU as an academic staff member
- The Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert LTHE) provides a recognised qualification for teaching and academic practice in Higher Education (HE) in the UK.

PhD in Criminology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK 10/2019 – 08/2023

- Fully funded by Cambridge Trust International and Newnham College Scholarship (ca. £130,000)
- Thesis on the pathways between maternal exposure to violence and child development in Tirana, Albania
- Supervisor: Prof. Manuel Eisner

MPhil in Criminological Research, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK 10/2018 – 09/2019

Overall GPA: 74,7

- Partially funded by the Manuel López-Rey Studentship (£5,000)
- Thesis on the return and reintegration experiences of Albanian victims of human trafficking
- Supervisor: Dr. Paolo Campana

BA in Liberal Arts and Sciences, Maastricht University, Maastricht, NL 08/2015 – 07/2018

Distinction: Cum Laude

- Fully funded by the University College Maastricht (UCM) Scholarship (ca. £66,550)
- Courses in law, psychology, economics, statistics, sociology, and philosophy
- Thesis on the 2015 South Korean-Japanese agreement on ‘comfort women’
- Maastricht University’s Excellence Research Programme: ‘Perceptions of guilt: Differences in verdict between written and audio-visual confessions’

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Senior Research Associate in Child Wellbeing, Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU), Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Manchester, UK 06/2023 – Present

- Conducting research on the Horizon 2020 project COORDINATE, which is a Starting Community on using survey research data to enhance child wellbeing policy making across Europe
- Using a range of innovative methods to establish Growing Up In Digital Europe (GUIDE), the first pan European cohort study measuring child and youth wellbeing across Europe
- Conducting a variety of research tasks including developing ethical protocols for surveying adults and children, foresight planning, running child and youth advisory boards, establishing platforms to bring together scientists and policy makers working in the field of child wellbeing

Researcher, Cambridge Pro Bono Project (CPP), World Bank Project 11/2022 – 04/2023

- Worked with ‘Empowering Women by Balancing the Law’ initiative of the World Bank, with a focus on The Gambia’s legal framework on female genital mutilation (FGM) and gender-based violence (GBV)
- Researched primary and secondary sources across public international law, criminal law, human rights, and public law to compare the current legal framework of The Gambia (focusing on human trafficking and child marriage) with international and regional commitments

PhD Research, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK 10/2019 – 08/2023

- In-depth knowledge on early development, parenting, maternal well-being, intergenerational abuse, as well as violence against women and children in developing countries
- Collected quantitative data from 328 mothers and 59 nursery teachers through face-to-face interviews, paper-and-pen questionnaires, and telephone interviews in 8 diverse socio-economic research sites in Tirana, Albania during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Manually entered, coded, cleaned, synthesised, analysed, and interpreted more than 300 variables to answer the questions that guide my PhD thesis
- Skilled in STATA, SPSS, and in conducting complex statistical analyses, including various types of regression analyses, factor analysis, and structural equation modelling
- Served as a peer-reviewer for European Journal of Social Work, Cogent Social Sciences Journal, Qeios
- Provided peer review on a book proposal on Albanian sex trafficking for Springer publishing company

Junior Researcher, Justice and Peace, The Hague, The Netherlands 09/2017 – 02/2018

- Engaged in developing an index that assesses the living and working conditions of Human Rights Defenders worldwide
- Presented the index in front of academic experts as well as regional and international policy-makers
- Involved in conducting interviews with policy-makers and writing a funding proposal to the EIDHR funding instrument so that the development of the index could continue after the end of my contract

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Lecturer, Pembroke Cambridge Summer Programme, University of Cambridge 07/2023 – 08/2023

- Prepared and delivered lectures on the Forensic Psychology course on topics such as neurolaw, eyewitness testimonies, memory, and false confessions for visiting international university students

Guest Lecturer, University College Maastricht (UCM) 13/02/2023

- Prepared and delivered a two-hour lecture on the development of aggressive behaviour to UCM undergraduate students enrolled in the course ‘Tackling Violence’

Quantitative Methods Trainer, Cambridge University Press and Assessment 09/03/2022

- Provided training on Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to the Cambridge Assessment Research team

Undergraduate Supervisor, University of Cambridge 10/2021 – 05/2023

- **Foundations in Criminology and Criminal Justice:** introductory course in criminology. Topics covered: definitions of criminological concepts, theories of offending, criminal justice systems around the world.
 - Led small classes (1-4 students) to facilitate discussion, understanding of the course material, and critical thinking skills. Provided feedback and grading on two essays per student per term.
- **Long Essays on Criminological Topics:** the course allows students to pursue particular criminological topics in greater depth, and to engage in independent exploration, reading, and analysis of relevant literature
 - Led three 1:1 supervisions per term to help students develop a 5,000-word essay on a criminological topic of their choice

Lecturer and Supervisor, The Bridging Programme, University of Cambridge 08/2021 – 09/2021

- Prepared and delivered lectures, supervisions, and workshops on cognitive psychology and child development to Social Science and Psychology offer-holders transitioning from high school to Cambridge

Lecturer, LPN Summer School, University of Cambridge 08/2020 – 08/2021

- Prepared and delivered lectures on introduction to law, international law, human and children rights law

Private Online Tutor 09/2020 – 10/2020
• Offered tutoring sessions on the undergraduate course ‘Theory Construction and Modelling Techniques’

Outreach Initiative Lecturer, University of Cambridge 03/2019 – 05/2023
• Prepared and delivered several ‘taster lectures’ on Law and Criminology to high school students aspiring to attend the University of Cambridge
• Marked and selected essays for Newnham College’s Woolf Essay Prize

OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

Junior Library Assistant, Radzinowicz Library, Cambridge, UK 10/2019 – 05/2023
• Delivering library services at the front desk
• Ordering books according to class-marks
• Updating class-marks and records in the catalogue database

Translator, Pema Publishing Company, Remote Work 08/2021 – 09/2022
• Translated the book “*What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing*” by Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Bruce D. Perry from English to Albanian

Intern, Institute for Democracy and Mediation, Tirana, Albania 07/2017 – 09/2017
• Collected data on the tenders won by Albanian private security companies in 2016 with the purpose of identifying potential corruption in public procurement procedures in Albania
• Assisted in the organisation of the roundtable discussion held on July 14th, 2017 “On the post-NATO mission adjustment of Albanian military personnel”
• Translated academic articles in the security field from Albanian to English and vice versa

Think Tank – Centre Céramique, Maastricht, the Netherlands 01/2017 – 02/2017
• Worked with a team of ten people to provide policy recommendations to Centre Céramique, the largest cultural institution in Maastricht, on how to attract more young adults to their activities

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Student-Staff Liaison Committee, Institute of Criminology, Cambridge, UK 10/2018 – 10/2020
• Elected as a student representative both during my MPhil and the first year of my PhD to listen to the concerns of the student cohort and to pass those concerns to the institute management

Volunteer, COVID-19 Task Force on Domestic Violence, Cambridge, UK 04/2020 – 08/2020
• Involved in research and fundraising

International Officer, Newnham College MCR, Cambridge, UK 10/2019 – 10/2020
• Organised several international events and raised awareness on issues relevant to international students
• Responsible in assisting international students with difficulties encountered as a result of COVID-19

LANGUAGES

Albanian, native; English, advanced (C2); French, advanced (C1); Italian & Spanish, beginner intermediate (A2)

PUBLICATIONS

Published

- Ramaj, K.** (2021). The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2021.1920823>
- Ramaj, K.** (2022). The 2015 South Korean–Japanese Agreement on ‘Comfort Women’: A Critical Analysis. *International Criminal Law Review*, 22(3), 475-509. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718123-bja10127>
- Ramaj, K.** (2023). Predictors of Positive and Negative Parenting Practices Among Mothers of Two-to-Three-Year-Old Children: Findings from Tirana, Albania. *Journal of Family Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x231198593>
- Ramaj, K.** & Eisner, M. (2023). Adverse Childhood Experiences, Intimate Partner Violence, and Mental Well-Being Among Mothers of Toddlers in Tirana, Albania: A Cross-Sectional Mediation Analysis. *Violence Against Women*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231203659>

Under review:

- Ramaj, K.** (TBA). Maternal Parenting Practices and Behavioural Tendencies among Toddlers in Tirana, Albania: Maternal Warmth as a Potential Moderator. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*.
-

CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

- 03/03/2023: Brown Bag Seminars, Institute of Criminology, Cambridge, UK.** Questionnaire delivery mode and disclosure rates of sensitive information: Evidence from mothers of toddlers in Tirana, Albania
- 06/02/2023: Children's Health and Adverse Childhood Experiences, Paris, France.** Patterns of Associations Between Child Maltreatment, Maternal Childhood Adversity, and Maternal Mental Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study in Tirana, Albania. Awarded ‘Best Presentation’ Award.
- 23/09/2022: European Society of Criminology, Málaga, Spain.** Problematic behaviour among toddlers in Tirana: Links to maternal childhood adversity, maternal aggression, and punitive parenting.
- 15/06/2022: International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), Tallinn, Estonia.** Associations between maternal exposure to violence and harsh child discipline among 2-3 year old children: A cross-sectional study in Tirana, Albania.
- 09/02/2022; 17/03/2022: Newnham Pudding Seminars; Research Training and Development Programme, Cambridge, UK.** Researching domestic violence, maternal well-being, and child development in low-and-middle-income countries. Fieldwork experiences and initial findings from Albania.
- 09/10/2017: Expert Session on Human Rights Defenders Conference, Brussels, Belgium.** The Human Rights Defenders Index.

Dr Anta Brachou Resume
(see following page)

Contact

aabraho@gmail.com

www.linkedin.com/in/anta-brachou-phd-848b4258 (LinkedIn)

Top Skills

Insight

Summary Reports

Translation

Languages

Albanian (Native or Bilingual)

Italian (Limited Working)

English (Native or Bilingual)

Certifications

Legal Research Proficiency

Certificate of Continuing Professional Development - DDV: Destitution and Domestic Violence Concession

Project Management Simplified

Certificate of Achievement - Alcohol Awareness and Advice

Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant on Option B: Building Resilience

Publications

Sexual exploitation: framing women's needs and experiences (Chapter in Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: The Victim Journey)

Banking Regulation 2nd Edition - Albanian Jurisdiction

Closed Doors Report

What Looks Promising for Tackling Modern Slavery: A review of practice-based research

Legal Assistance for Victims of Trafficking Across Europe

Anta Brachou, PhD

Postdoctoral Researcher at Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse / Module Convenor at St Mary's University, Twickenham

United Kingdom

Experience

Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse
Research Co-Investigator

June 2023 - Present (2 months)

St Mary's University, Twickenham

3 years 9 months

Postdoctoral Researcher

May 2022 - Present (1 year 3 months)

Module Convenor

January 2022 - Present (1 year 7 months)

Practitioner MA Module on Identification, Support and Care of Survivors of Modern Slavery

<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/bakhita/study/identification-of-victims.aspx>

Project and Research Officer

November 2019 - June 2023 (3 years 8 months)

Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse

<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/bakhita/about.aspx>

Associate Lecturer

September 2020 - August 2021 (1 year)

Teaching Level 4: Investigating Criminal Justice; Level 4: Criminology - A sociological Introduction; and Level 6: Organised Crime, Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Moonshot

Research Consultant

July 2022 - Present (1 year 1 month)

London, England, United Kingdom

Law for Life
Associate
August 2020 - Present (3 years)
London, England, United Kingdom

Moonshot
Research Consultant
December 2020 - May 2021 (6 months)

HIBISCUS INITIATIVES

4 years 11 months

Research Consultant
April 2019 - June 2020 (1 year 3 months)

Project Lead Developer - Culture Mediation
April 2019 - November 2019 (8 months)
London, United Kingdom

Culture Mediation

OISC Level 2 Immigration Adviser
July 2017 - November 2019 (2 years 5 months)

Women's Centre Coordinator
October 2016 - June 2019 (2 years 9 months)
London, United Kingdom

Hibiscus Women Centre

Project Worker
August 2015 - September 2016 (1 year 2 months)
Resource for London, London - United Kingdom

Frost & Fire Consulting
Associate
January 2015 - July 2015 (7 months)
Tirana, Albania

Zaka & Kosta Law Firm
Legal Assistant
February 2014 - December 2014 (11 months)
Tirana, Albania

Global Fluids International - GFI Albania

Communication Expert
October 2013 - February 2014 (5 months)
Tirana, Albania

ATLeP (Anti-trafficking Legal Project)
Research Intern
January 2013 - September 2013 (9 months)
London, United Kingdom

Female Prisoners Welfare Project (FPWP) Hibiscus
Intern and Befriender
November 2010 - May 2011 (7 months)

Education

The University of Hull
Doctor of Philosophy - PhD, Criminology · (September 2017 - May 2022)

BPP Law School
Graduate Diploma in Law, Law · (2013 - 2013)

University College London, U. of London
Master of Science (MSc), Crime Science · (2011 - 2012)

University of Westminster
Bachelor of Arts (BA), Criminal Justice · (2008 - 2011)

Cambridge Centre for Sixth Form Studies (CCSS)
A-Levels, Psychology, French, Sociology · (2007 - 2008)