



Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania

July 2022



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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





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List of acronyms

ALL	Albanian Lek
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBP	British Pound Sterling
GP	General Practitioner
ILO	International Labour Organization
INSTAT	Albanian National Institute of Statistics
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	Information Technology
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UK	United Kingdom

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Executive summary

Introduction

There is no definition of the term ‘economic reintegration’ of trafficking survivors that is accepted either in Albania or internationally. Reports discuss ‘economic reintegration’ with reference to the key activities associated with the process of economic reintegration, such as vocational training; access to internships; access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities; support while engaged in new livelihood activities; financial support; environment and market assessments; and monitoring and evaluation of economic reintegration.¹ Economic reintegration of trafficking survivors can therefore be understood as the process through which they access a range of vocational training and employment services, in order to be economically stable, and no longer at risk of human trafficking.

The reintegration of survivors of trafficking in Albania derives from the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings 2021–2023. There are several normative frameworks in the country that outline the support that should be provided to survivors across the areas of employment, health, housing and economic assistance. Despite the presence of these frameworks, the available literature suggests that there are gaps and challenges in Albania’s economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors. For example, Ramaj (2021) highlighted the challenges for survivors in accessing employment, and argued that employment services in Albania are time-consuming and demotivating for trafficking survivors.² The present study sets out to contribute to the knowledge base regarding economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania by providing a new perspective on the subject – one that explores the experiences of both survivors and frontline professionals in accessing or providing, respectively, economic reintegration support and other related services.

Aim and objectives

The central aim of the present study is to strengthen the understanding of the challenges that survivors and frontline professionals (service providers employed in state agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) face in accessing and providing economic reintegration support in Albania.

The study objectives were to undertake the following:

- Examine and document the perspectives of survivors and frontline professionals (employed in state agencies and NGOs) regarding gaps and challenges in accessing or providing **quality and sustainable** economic reintegration support (such as vocational training, internships and employment).
- Explore these challenges at different levels, namely those of **individual, relationship, community and society**.
- Understand how other services (e.g., **education, healthcare, housing, legal aid and economic assistance**) act as precursors and support factors for quality and sustainable economic reintegration support.
- Identify opportunities in the provision of quality and sustainable economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors.

¹ See, e.g., International Labour Organization, *Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*. ILO, Geneva, 2010, 172 pp.; International Labour Organization, *Global guidelines on the economic reintegration of victims of forced labour through lifelong learning and skills development approaches*. ILO, Geneva, November 2020, 106 pp.

² Ramaj, Klea, ‘The aftermath of human trafficking: Exploring the Albanian victims’ return, rehabilitation, and reintegration challenges’. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 2021, 22 pp.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach. The methods employed included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Fourteen interviews were conducted with trafficking survivors, and 27 interviews and 6 FGDs were held with key informants, including social workers, social service administrators and shelter staff.

The criteria for the survivors to participate included:

- Being of age 18 years or above;
- Being trafficked Albanian nationals, including minority groups (not foreign nationals);
- Having been receiving economic reintegration support for at least three months;
- Having, at the time of the interview, received support any time during the last two years;
- Having been screened by their caseworker as able to answer the interview questions without becoming distressed.

Only trafficking survivors who met the above inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study.

Of the 14 interviewed survivors, 13 (93%) were female, and 1 (7%) was male. At the time of interview, **the survivors were of age 18–36 years.** All had received reintegration support from one of the NGO-run shelters for between three months and four years.

14 interviewed survivors age 18–36 years



Findings

Vocational training

The study identified that **it is important for the vocational training options to match, to the maximum extent possible, the survivors' level of education with the employment and business opportunities.** This is important for ensuring that survivors are able to find decent employment following completion of vocational training. Furthermore, **it is important for survivors to have information on all training options available to them, and to choose the ones they wish to pursue,** otherwise, if they are not interested, there is a strong chance they will cease their participation. In addition, the study identified that **vocational training should include life skills and business management components, and that certification should be provided** as it would support a valuable pathway to employment.

Key informants further emphasised that **the pathway from vocational training to employment or starting a business is not necessarily linear, and economic reintegration support should not finish at the employment stage.** Key informants reported that **it is important that frontline professionals follow the advisory cycle,** which provides a framework for the survivor to explore a range of vocational training opportunities, while all the time being guided by advice.

Survivors face a number of challenges in accessing quality vocational training, including lack of access to free childcare, difficulties accessing vocational training in rural areas of the country and the short duration and low quality of some trainings provided in vocational training centres.

Internships and employment support

The study identified that internships are a valuable learning opportunity, which should precede employment for survivors who have not previously worked. The study further identified that **companies that will employ survivors as interns must be vetted in order to ensure the safety and security of survivors.**

Key informants highlighted that **it is important for internships to be remunerated.** For survivors who have not previously worked, remuneration helps them become accustomed to receiving regular paycheques from their employer, and increases their budget management skills and overall confidence to enter the labour market.

The study found that appropriate training and internships can lead to decent employment for survivors in Albania. **Seven interviewed survivors (50%) were, at the time of interview, employed in the same field in which they had trained:** as a tailor, hairdresser, cook, car mechanic or other profession.

The study identified some key challenges for survivors in entering and sustaining new employment, including lack of decent job opportunities in Albania, lack of interest in the jobs, lack of education, lack of affordable childcare, ongoing trauma and stigma. The study further identified that few survivors are successful in finding employment quickly after registering with the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES).

Support to start a new business

The study found that starting a business may be a very empowering experience for survivors. Through the processes of planning and managing, survivors can experience significant increases in business and financial management nous, and confidence. However, they face challenges in starting and maintaining their own business, including lack of business know-how, insufficient start-up capital, and the presence of business competition and stigma. The study further identified that some of the challenges associated with starting and maintaining a business are unique to trafficking survivors. For example, they cannot borrow to take on financial loans as easily as other individuals, for fear of debt making them vulnerable to exploitation, and they cannot run a business from home for security reasons.

Other services that support economic reintegration

The study identified that economic reintegration of trafficking survivors through vocational training, internships, job placement and support to start a business does not occur in isolation of other support services. These were highlighted in the interviews and from the Focus group discussions

(FGD) as education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance. The study further identified that free childcare is an important support service.

Education support is critical to economic reintegration. The study found that young survivors who are supported to complete high school have a better chance of finding decent employment than those who have not completed high school, and survivors who complete higher (university) education have an even greater chance of finding decent professional work. However, there are barriers to survivors returning to high school or considering enrolment in higher education. One barrier is their age: those who are in their twenties or thirties may feel that it is too late for them to (re-)enrol in high school. Another barrier is their financial situation. Survivors who are living in the community have to pay for rent and other essentials, and thus may prioritise employment over education.

Healthcare was also identified as an important service that supports economic reintegration. Interviewed survivors reported that overcoming or managing medical issues was paramount to their overall recovery and reintegration. When survivors are ill, they will struggle to access and maintain employment. Mental health support is also critical to economic reintegration. The study found that such support should precede vocational training and other economic reintegration activities. It further identified that this support should continue to be provided while survivors are engaged in new employment or a new business. The key challenge that survivors face in Albania in accessing mental health support is the lack of specialised mental healthcare, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, specialised healthcare for survivors who suffer from substance abuse and addictions is lacking in the country.

Housing support was identified in the study as critical for survivors' economic reintegration. Under the national legislation, survivors may access a state housing bonus, and under this scheme, those (alongside survivors of violence) who are employed but have limited income, may receive a 50–100 per cent rent subsidy. However, the study found that very few survivors are able to access the bonus. Key challenges are that accessing the bonus requires proof of a rental tenancy agreement, which few survivors have, as well as state bureaucracy.

Finally, trafficking survivors who are unemployed and have a declaration from an appropriate frontline professional that they are a survivor of human trafficking are entitled to receive ALL9,000³ per month in economic assistance. However, the study identified that few survivors are accessing this economic assistance. The main reasons are that applying for economic assistance is time-consuming, the amount of such assistance is low, and the survivors may face discrimination from frontline professionals when applying for assistance.

Challenges at individual, relationship, community and society levels

The report discusses the challenges that survivors and frontline professionals face in, respectively, accessing or providing reintegration support at different levels, that is at individual, relationship, community and society levels.

In terms of individual-level factors, the report highlights that these **can have a significant influence on a survivor's economic reintegration**. For example, **their mental health may significantly affect recovery and economic reintegration**. The study further considers the factor of addiction.

Relationship-level factors focus on the survivor's family support. The study identified that **survivors who have a supportive family are better positioned to (re-)enter study, employment, or start a business**.

³ Albanian Lek, equivalent to GBP 62.70 (currency conversion as of 1 April 2022).

Community-level factors are also important in any discussion of the economic reintegration of survivors. **A key community-level factor identified in the study is stigma, which may reduce survivors' ability to maintain employment or a new business, and access state services.**

At the society level, there exists a range of factors that may inhibit or, conversely, facilitate the economic reintegration of survivors in Albania. **Relevant factors at this level include state bureaucratic processes that impede access to state support, lack of funding for social services, lack of decent employment opportunities, and inadequate coordination for the referral and reintegration of survivors.**

Conclusions and next steps

The report concludes with the following suggestions for next steps in strengthening reintegration support for trafficking survivors in Albania:

- **There is value in anti-human trafficking entities exploring options for increasing the presence and quality of vocational training schools and other training centres in rural parts of the country, and expanding certified training programmes** across sectors that are likely to employ survivors.
- Frontline professionals should ensure that **survivors receive full information about the vocational training and employment options available to them, and are empowered to choose their preferred trainings and employment.**
- **Relevant frontline agencies could establish and share databases of companies that may employ survivors as interns and trainees.** Companies that express interest in employing survivors as interns or trainees should be vetted to ensure the safety and security of survivors.
- Frontline agencies could collaborate to **strengthen self-employment training mechanisms** for survivors. Training programmes could be developed in collaboration with private sector entities; such training programmes could provide knowledge and skills in the importance of market assessments, developing business plans, managing budgets, and marketing. Also important is that survivors are provided **with start-up capital** to support themselves during the early phase of commencing their new business. Such start-up capital may come in the form of a loan with a very low or even no interest rate.
- **Survivors should continue to receive reintegration support from frontline professionals after they commence a new job or start a new business.** The advisory cycle should continue into the long term, at least one year after the commencement of new employment or a new business. Life skills and business management support should be ongoing, along with psychosocial counselling.
- **There is a need for increased efforts to strengthen the infrastructure of education, healthcare, housing and other key social services such as childcare.** This requires the scaling up of reforms in each of these areas, materialised in increased funding at the local level to increase the availability of services. Most urgent is the need to strengthen the system of mental healthcare in the country.
- **Economic reintegration support should be provided to not only survivors but also their families.** Such family support should include support to access education, healthcare,

housing and economic assistance, and be long term in nature.

- Efforts to increase the availability of services to trafficking survivors should be made at the same time as those to reduce negative attitudes towards trafficking survivors among some frontline professionals. To achieve this, relevant anti-human trafficking entities could **develop a nationwide programme of awareness raising to increase knowledge and awareness of human trafficking** that also aims to reduce discriminatory attitudes towards survivors.
- **There is value in increasing the efforts of frontline agencies and the private sector to collaborate.** There may be value in revisiting the entire infrastructure of coordination in order to: expand the National Referral Mechanism function to include a broader anti-human trafficking agency coordination; expand existing structures, such as the regional anti-trafficking committees, to better coordinate on aspects of survivor reintegration support, including economic reintegration, and to connect with relevant private sector actors; and introduce coordination mechanisms at the municipal level.
- Economic reintegration should not be viewed separately from social integration. **Service provision within economic and social integration frameworks needs to be interlinked and translated into streamlined service provision.** Service provision should, furthermore, be survivor-oriented. Increased capacity building of all service provider professionals should be strengthened, with all relevant professionals made aware of the importance of survivor-centred service provision and the importance of the advisory cycle for planning service provision.
- Finally, **more research is needed to understand the challenges and opportunities in the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors.** Possible studies could include: Mapping national legislation on economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, and how legislation and policy is translated into practice; qualitative studies to explore what long-term economic reintegration looks like in the Albania context; qualitative research to address questions on the economic reintegration of male and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI) survivors; on the challenges and opportunities in the provision of specific support services, such as legal aid; and exploration of the specific challenges that survivors face in accessing services online.



1

Section

1. Introduction

The reintegration of trafficking survivors is broadly understood as the process through which survivors are able to re-establish the social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity, and inclusion in civic life.⁴ A central feature of successful (re)integration is access to a quality and sustainable standard of living, along with opportunities for economic growth. For many trafficking survivors, economic issues are a primary concern during reintegration.⁵ While there is no internationally accepted definition of the term, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) refers to economic reintegration as *the process in which a returning migrant re-enters the economic life of his or her country of origin and is able to sustain a livelihood*.⁶ While this definition is useful in that it highlights that economic reintegration is a process, and requires a sustainable livelihood, the definition does not consider the other important aspects such as vocational skills training, access to employment services, support for starting a new business, and access to economic aid. Other reports discuss ‘economic reintegration’ with reference to the key activities associated with the process, including vocational training activities, access to internships and traineeships, to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, support while engaged in new livelihood activities, financial support, environment and market assessments, and monitoring and evaluation of economic reintegration.⁷ Thus, **while there is no internationally accepted definition of the term ‘economic reintegration’ of trafficking survivors, it can broadly be understood as the process through which survivors access a range of vocational training and employment services, in order to be economically stable, and no longer at risk of human trafficking.**

In Albania, there is no national-level definition of ‘economic reintegration’ of trafficking survivors. The National Action Plan for the Socio-Economic Re-Integration of Women and Girls Victims of Trafficking in the Republic of Albania⁸ refers only to the broader term of ‘reintegration’ and suggests the following as a definition of the term: ‘the process of inclusion and re-building relationships within a community in the country of origin at four levels: physical, socio-economic, socio-political and cultural.’⁹

In terms of the national policy approach, the National Action Plan outlines the importance of survivors’ economic reintegration, and focuses its survivor reintegration approach on four main areas. The first area is related to the economic empowerment of survivors, including property rights, employment and vocational training, and microenterprise support. The second area is housing, the third is related to education, and the fourth to social care services.¹⁰

The Albanian government has developed policy and programmes to support the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors. Female trafficking survivors fall under the category of ‘unemployed women’ in employment services.¹¹ The employment promotion includes employment

⁴ See International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration*. IOM, Geneva, 2019, 237 pp.

⁵ Surtees, Rebecca, [‘Re/integration of trafficked persons: supporting economic empowerment. Issue paper No. 4.’](#) King Baudouin Foundation, Brussels, NEXUS Institute, Washington, December 2012, 86 pp.

⁶ International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration*. IOM, Geneva, 2019, p. 76.

⁷ See, for example, ILO, 2020, [Global guidelines on the economic reintegration of victims of forced labour through lifelong learning and skills development approaches](#); ILO, 2010, [Socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants](#).

⁸ See [The National Action Plan for the Socio-Economic Re-Integration of Women and Girls Victims of Trafficking in the Republic of Albania](#), p. 8.

⁹ International Journal of Refugee Law, 2001, Volume 13.

¹⁰ See [The National Action Plan for the Socio-Economic Re-Integration of Women and Girls Victims of Trafficking in the Republic of Albania](#), p. 13.

¹¹ Law 15/2019 ‘On the Promotion of Employment’. Article 4 acknowledges victims and potential victims of human trafficking as marginalised, and entitled to additional support.

support for marginalised jobseekers (including trafficking survivors) for one year. This support includes paying survivors the minimum wage for six months.¹² Another programme aiming to support trafficking survivors' economic reintegration is on-the-job training for jobseekers. Under this programme, jobseekers receive 100 per cent of the minimum wage during the duration of the four months of training.¹³ Unemployed trafficking survivors also have the right to register as jobseekers at the Albanian National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), the government agency responsible for assisting Albanian citizens seeking employment. NAES offices reportedly prioritise jobseekers from vulnerable groups, including trafficking victims. According to the 2021 United States Trafficking in Persons Report, in the reporting period (the year 2020) 60 trafficking survivors registered with NAES for employment opportunities.¹⁴

Further, under Law 65/2016 on social enterprises, survivors of trafficking, comprise one of the main beneficiary groups based on Decision of Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 56/2018 'On the definition of concrete categories of disadvantaged groups'. Under this law, at least 30 per cent of employees should belong to marginalised groups, and trafficking survivors (typically women and girls) are to be given particular support to access the labour market.

Trafficking survivors can access free vocational training in vocational schools across Albania. There are currently 50 technical vocational schools (41 public, and 9 private) and 10 public vocational training centres, mainly located in urban areas. They are present in almost all regions, with a higher concentration in central Albania. There are 340 private businesses or training providers licensed by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, and 30 operating as vocational training centres.¹⁵

In recent years, trafficking survivors in Albania have also been entitled to state financial support of ALL3,000¹⁶ per month under the national legislation, recognised as 'economic aid'. As of early 2022, this amount increased to ALL9,000 per month.¹⁷ Under the same legislation, the possibility to grant financial support to trafficking survivors is given also to municipalities.

Survivors (both victims and potential victims) of human trafficking are also a priority group under Law no. 22/18 on social housing. As a result of this legislation, programmes to support vulnerable persons have been established, including one on special housing for survivors of trafficking, who also have the right to access a state housing bonus. This mechanism allows trafficking survivors, who are employed but have limited income, to receive either a 50 per cent or 100 per cent rent subsidy, depending on their income level and number of children.¹⁸

The government of Albania currently operates one specialised shelter for survivors of trafficking and supports three specialised NGO-run shelters.¹⁹ The National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking (the government-run shelter) and the three NGO-run shelters²⁰ provide various reha-

¹² DCM no. 17, 2020, '[On procedures, criteria and regulations for the implementation of the employment promotion through employment, on-the-job training, and professional practices](#)'.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United States Department of State, 2021, '[Trafficking in persons report 2021: Albania](#)'.

¹⁵ Different and Equal, 2018, Research on local job market skills and opportunities to support the economic empowerment of survivors of trafficking and domestic violence in Tirana, Kukës, Dibra and Saranda.

¹⁶ Albanian Lek, GBP20.90 (currency conversion as of 1 April 2022).

¹⁷ GBP 62.70 (currency conversion as of 1 April 2022). Information provided by government and NGO interviews and FGD participants. Law 57/2019 'On social assistance' article 7. DCM no. 597/2019 'On the definition of procedures, documentation, and monthly allowance of the economic aid and the use of the additional conditional funding for the economic aid.'

¹⁸ Information provided by government and NGO interviews and FGD participants.

¹⁹ United States Department of State, 2021, '[Trafficking in persons report 2021: Albania](#)'.

²⁰ Different and Equal, Tjetër Vizion, 'Vatra' Psychosocial Centre

ilitation and reintegration services, including education, vocational training, coaching for employment and services for economic empowerment.²¹

The available literature suggests that, despite these policies, there are gaps and challenges in Albania's economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors, and many of these challenges are at the society level. For example, Tahiraj (2017) suggested that while support for Albanian trafficking survivors into employment is available for the registered unemployed, their chances of finding gainful employment in Albania are low.²² The scholars argued that the chances of a trafficked person finding employment cannot be expected to be higher than for other unemployed people.²³ Ramaj (2021) also highlighted the challenges for survivors in accessing employment. Unemployed trafficking survivors have the right to register as jobseekers at NAES. However, most frontline professionals that Ramaj interviewed reported that accessing the service is a time-consuming and demotivating process for trafficking survivors. Survivors reportedly wait several months for their documents to be processed, and then often for approximately another five months until they can find a job. This leads to financial instability and reverses any mental health gains.²⁴ Ramaj further argued that long-term reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania is negatively influenced by a lack of economic sustainability and exploitative working conditions.²⁵ Most frontline professionals interviewed for Ramaj's study stated that, for trafficking survivors, building a healthy lifestyle is highly associated with financial steadiness. However, employment is often unstable due to factors related to the unwillingness of employers to support the survivors' professional development or the sporadic nature of the private businesses in which they might find employment.²⁶ According to the frontline professionals interviewed for the Ramaj study, trafficking survivors are mainly employed as manual workers in sweatshops with poor working conditions.²⁷

While the available literature provides useful information on the legal and policy framework on economic reintegration in Albania, there remain significant knowledge gaps regarding the experiences of, and challenges faced by, survivors and frontline professionals in accessing or providing, respectively, economic reintegration support. While various laws and policies outline trafficking survivors' rights to economic reintegration support, there is scant mention in the literature of whether survivors are able to easily access these support provisions. Further, little is understood, from the perspective of survivors, regarding whether the support that they do access is of quality and sustainable. There is also limited understanding of how factors at different levels (i.e., individual, relationship, community and society) negatively affect survivors' ability to access quality and sustainable economic reintegration support.

This study addresses important knowledge gaps regarding the challenges associated with accessing and providing economic reintegration, from the perspective of frontline professionals, private sector organisation representatives and trafficking survivors. It represents one of the first efforts to explore in depth the subject of challenges in the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania. Improving our understanding of the gaps, challenges, risks and opportunities in economic reintegration support will equip government agencies, international organisations and NGOs in Albania with important information for strengthening the provision of economic reintegration support, and, as a result, reduce vulnerability to (re-)trafficking.

²¹ Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, '[Evaluation report: Albania. Third evaluation round: Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings](#)'. GRETA, December 2020, 48 pp.

²² Tahiraj, Enkelejda, 'Understanding Trafficking of Girls and Women from Albania'. Shpresa Programme, July 2017.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ramaj, Klea, 'The aftermath of human trafficking: Exploring the Albanian victims' return, rehabilitation, and reintegration challenges'. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 2021, 22 pp.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

The report is structured as follows:

Introduction,

Section 2 presents the aim and objectives of the study,

Section 3 explores the study methodology,

Section 4 discusses the study limitations, and

Section 5 reports the findings, including challenges in the access to, or provision, of support in the areas of vocational training, internships, job opportunities and starting a new business, as well as other relevant services.

The findings section also explores how factors at different levels – i.e., individual, relationship, community and society – facilitate or hinder survivors' economic reintegration.

The report concludes with **a summary of the key points and suggestions** for the next steps in strengthening economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors in Albania.

2

Section



2. Study aim and objectives

The central aim of the present study was to strengthen the understanding of the challenges that survivors and frontline professionals face in, respectively, accessing or providing economic reintegration support in Albania. It should be noted that the study did not set out to compare government and NGO economic reintegration services for trafficking survivors.

More specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- Examine and document the perspectives of survivors and frontline professionals (employed in state agencies and NGOs) regarding the gaps and challenges in accessing and providing **quality and sustainable** economic reintegration support (e.g., vocational training, internships and employment).
- Explore these challenges at different levels, i.e., of **individual, relationship, community and society**.
- Understand how other services (e.g., **education, healthcare, housing legal aid and economic assistance**) act as precursors and support factors for quality and sustainable economic reintegration support.
- Identify opportunities in the provision of quality and sustainable economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors.

In line with the above-mentioned objectives, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the key challenges that survivors face in accessing quality and sustainable economic reintegration services, and sustaining livelihoods?
- How do individual-, relationship-, community- and society-level factors facilitate or hinder survivors' access to quality and sustainable economic reintegration services?
- What are the key gaps and challenges for frontline professionals in providing quality and sustainable economic reintegration support to trafficking survivors?
- How do other services, such as education, healthcare, housing, legal aid and economic assistance act as precursors and support factors for quality and sustainable economic reintegration support?
- What are survivor and frontline professional perspectives on mechanisms for overall strengthening of economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors in Albania?

The study had a forward-looking perspective in terms of identifying key areas for future intervention in economic reintegration support in Albania. The study also aimed to identify persistent gaps in knowledge that can be addressed through future studies.

The study's aim, objectives and research questions were informed by a literature review conducted in the study design phase. The lead researcher collected and reviewed the limited body of recent academic and grey literature on the subject of economic reintegration support for human trafficking survivors in Albania, particularly that on the challenges and opportunities for survivors and frontline professionals in accessing and providing, accordingly, economic reintegration support. The study aim and objectives were further refined at the inception phase through a series of consultations with relevant stakeholders, including UNICEF Albania staff, several national anti-trafficking NGOs, a national anti-trafficking expert, IDRA Research & Consulting, and the study

Reference Group, which engages the national governmental anti-trafficking entity. The draft report was subject to same layers of review.

2.1 Theoretical framework

Data were analysed using social work ecological theory as a framework for the interpretation of results. As this study sought to strengthen our understanding of the current system for the economic reintegration support available to survivors of trafficking in Albania, and the various gaps and challenges that survivors and frontline professionals encounter in accessing or providing economic reintegration support, a lens for understanding the activities of frontline professionals, and the challenges at various levels, was considered helpful for interpreting the qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

As highlighted by Cecchet and Thoburn (2014), trafficking survivors are in need of support plans based on a comprehensive ecological system approach in order to provide the necessary support and services after their rescue from exploitation.²⁸ **The ecological environment consists of four different levels of systems arranged as a nested structure: Individual (e.g., attitudes, behaviours, health, social history), relationship (poverty, unemployment), community (access to local services) and society (national and local policies).** By considering these different levels, the ecological model provides a multi-layered level of social work approach and promotes an action plan for the healing and recovery of survivors.²⁹

The ecological perspective provides a useful framework for understanding the support needs of rescued trafficking survivors and the activities of the frontline professionals that provide services to survivors, as it **seeks to analyse partnership structures and increase understanding and coordination among service-provider network partners and between survivors and frontline professionals. Central to the ecological perspective are frontline professionals, who sit in a strategic position to observe, coordinate and improve streamlined service provision to trafficking survivors.** From this strategic position, **frontline professionals are able to see how a survivor's experiences and needs may be affected by the criminal justice system, frontline professionals and other agencies and individuals, and to subsequently plan for and manage such events.**³⁰

The ecological perspective was adopted as a lens for the current study to explore, inter alia, the different elements of economic reintegration support available to trafficking survivors, the non-linear nature of reintegration support, the pivotal role of frontline professionals in supporting survivors' economic reintegration and the challenges the former face in providing economic reintegration support to the latter. Finally, the model allows for exploration of the challenges that survivors face in accessing economic reintegration services at the different levels (individual, relationship, community and society).

²⁸ Cecchet, Stacy J., and John Thoburn, '[The psychological experience of child and adolescent sex trafficking in the United States: Trauma and resilience in survivors](#)'. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, vol. 6 no. 5, 2014, pp. 482–493.

²⁹ Sanchez, Rosario V., and Dula Pacquiao, '[An Ecological Approach toward the Prevention and Care of Victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking](#)'. *Journal of Forensic Nursing*, vol. 14 no. 2, 2018, pp. 98–105.

³⁰ Pardeck, John, 'An ecological approach for social work practice'. *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, vol. 15 no. 2, 1998, pp. 133–142; Beyer, Kirsten, Wallis, Anne B. and Hamberger, L. Kevin, 'Neighbourhood environment and intimate partner violence: A systematic review'. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, vol. 16 no. 1, Epub December 2013, pp. 16–47.

3

Section



3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach. The lead researcher, in consultation with UNICEF Albania and the various stakeholders mentioned above,³¹ agreed that such an approach was the most appropriate for enabling in-depth exploration of the challenges for survivors and frontline professionals in accessing, or providing, economic reintegration support in Albania. Semi-structured interviews and FGDs with frontline professionals employed within government agencies and NGOs, and interviews with private sector representatives and with trafficking survivors, allowed for the collection of in-depth narratives and rich data for use in the analysis and report writing.

Methods

The qualitative methods adopted for the study comprised semi-structured interviews with trafficking survivors and key informants (frontline professionals working in government and NGOs, and private sector representatives), and FGDs with key informants. These different data sources served to complement and triangulate the findings from the different datasets. Only trafficking survivors who met the inclusion criteria (see below) were invited to be interviewed for the present study. Convenience sampling³² and snowballing methods were used to recruit key interview informants and FGD participants.

All data collection was conducted during the period 14 October 2021 to 7 February 2022. Prior to collecting the data for the research, the team monitored the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation carefully. Data collection only commenced when the research team agreed that it was safe, for study participants, interviewers and facilitators, to conduct interviews and FGDs.

Semi-structured interviews with trafficking survivors

Fourteen face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with trafficking survivors. The process of organising and conducting the interviews was performed adopting a survivor-centred approach. All measures were taken to ensure that survivors received a full explanation of the study from the shelter³³ that supports them, that they understood the interview questions and the reasons for asking them, how their data would be used, and who would conduct the interviews (a qualified Albanian researcher). Prior to the first interviews with survivors, relevant frontline professionals and the interviewers participated in a half-day training session with the lead researcher and UNICEF Albania, who explained ethical processes for participant recruitment, interviewing and data management.³⁴

³¹ See Section 2 of the report.

³² Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which people are included in a study simply because they are 'convenient' sources of data. In the case of this study, key informants who could answer the interview questions, and all survivors who met the inclusion criteria, were invited to participate in the study.

³³ Different and Equal, Tjetër Vizion, 'Vatra' Psychosocial Centre, and National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking.

³⁴ For further information see the report section on ethical processes.

Criteria were applied for the recruitment and participation of trafficking survivors in interviews for this study. The criteria for the participants included:

1

Being of age **18 years** or above;

2

Being trafficked Albanian nationals

3

Having been **receiving economic reintegration support** for at least three months;

4

Having received **support at any time during the last two years** (from the time of the interview);

5

Having been **screened by their caseworker** as able to answer the interview questions without becoming distressed.

Only those survivors who met all the inclusion criteria were approached by their social worker to discuss their interest in participating in the study.

The survivor interview questions were reviewed by all relevant stakeholders³⁵ at the study inception phase. Shelter staff reviewed and provided comments on the questions (in Albanian), which were again revised following the first two interviews conducted with trafficking survivors.

The purpose of interviewing trafficking survivors was to explore, from their perspectives, the challenges they face in accessing quality and sustainable economic reintegration support, including, but not limited to, vocational training, internships, employment services and support to start a new business. The interviews aimed to explore the experiences of survivors in accessing these and other important services (such as education, healthcare, including mental health support, housing and economic assistance), and their perspectives on gaps, highlights and opportunities in economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors in Albania.

Following completion of each interview, audio files and interview notes were saved securely on a password-protected computer. The interviewer was responsible for transcribing the interviews and removing any identifying information that the survivors may have volunteered. Translation of the survivor interview transcripts was undertaken by a vetted translation company that UNICEF had previously used for other sensitive studies. The interviewer was responsible for checking the translated transcripts for language accuracy.

Profile of survivor interview participants

Of the 14 interviewed survivors, 13 (93%) were female, and 1 (7%) was male. Only one (7%) survivor identified as belonging to an ethnic minority. At the time of interview, **the survivors were of age 18–36 years.** The survivors had received reintegration support from one of the shelters for between three months and four years. Most, but not all, were still being accommodated in a shelter at the time of interview. Of the 14 survivors, two (14%) were at the time of interview enrolled in university degree programmes, four (28%) were at high school, three (21%) had completed high school, two (14%) had achieved basic (9-year) education and two (14%) had not completed basic education.

³⁵ UNICEF Albania staff, several NGOs, including social workers, a national anti-human trafficking expert, the research company IDRA, and the study Reference Group.

Semi-structured interviews with key informants

Twenty-seven face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants employed in government agencies, NGOs and the private sector in Albania. Twenty-one interviews were conducted with government representatives working at regional or municipal levels, and with persons employed in state health services and the state shelter for survivors of trafficking (National Accommodation Centre for Victims of Trafficking). Four interviews were conducted with NGO workers in shelters and two were conducted with representatives of private sector organisations that employ trafficking survivors. The interviews were conducted by a qualified and experienced Albanian researcher.³⁶

Interviews with key informants were organised by IDRA, who mapped the most relevant state agencies, NGOs and private sector organisations involved in the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors and reached out to those agencies for interviews. The agencies were selected based on their economic reintegration activities and the anticipated ability of their representatives to discuss the study research questions. Efforts were made to ensure that there was a balance in interviews with state and non-state entities and those with senior agency representatives (e.g., directors) and frontline professionals. However, as outlined above, only two interviews were held with relevant private sector organisations. While fewer interviews were conducted with representatives of NGOs than state agencies, NGO representatives also participated in FGDs.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore, from the perspectives of the frontline professionals that provide economic reintegration support to trafficking survivors, the challenges they face in providing quality and sustainable support. The interviews were further used to triangulate the findings from the interviews with survivors.

The key informant interview questions were tested on a small group of key informants, and changes made to the questionnaires prior to the interviews being conducted with the rest of the key informants.

Following completion of each interview, the interviewer was responsible for transcribing the interview and removing any identifying information before securely forwarding the transcripts for translation.

Focus group discussions

Six face-to-face FGDs were also conducted with 22 representatives of relevant government agencies and NGOs in Albania. These participants included social workers (government and NGO staff), social service administrators (government) and shelter staff (Different and Equal, Tjetër Vizion, Vatra Psychosocial Centre and the National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking). There was no intentional geographical distribution of the FGDs, which were conducted in Albanian, transcribed by the facilitator and translated into English for the purpose of data analysis by the lead researcher.

³⁶. A different interviewer from the researcher who conducted the interviews with survivors.

3.2 Data analysis

Interview and FGD transcripts were entered into the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo 12 (QSR International), and thematic analysis was performed to identify themes and patterns in survivor and key informant responses to the interview and FGD questions. Initial themes appearing in the analysis were used to develop codes. As the analysis proceeded, new categories emerging from the data led to the development of additional codes. All material was analysed in this way and then subsequently re-read and re-analysed in order to complete data interpretation and analysis.

An Excel file was used to manually collate key information on the survivors, including age, gender, training received, duration of the training and current employment status. Simple tabulations were created to report, e.g., the number of survivors who had received training in specific areas, reported being able to choose their vocational training, reported being satisfied with the training they had received, and were employed at the time of interview in a field in which they had received training.

3.3 Ethical processes

All UNICEF ethical processes were followed during the study. Prior to the commencement of data collection, the study received approval from a recognised ethics review board (Health Media Lab Ltd.).³⁷

As noted above, prior to data collection, a half-day training session was conducted with the interviewers where guidance was provided by the lead researcher and UNICEF Albania on the processes for identifying survivors who met the inclusion criteria, recruiting survivors for interview, obtaining informed consent, interview processes, dealing with potential distress in interview participants and ensuring survivor confidentiality and the secure transfer of audio files and interview transcripts to UNICEF Albania and the lead researcher.

Confidentiality of survivors and key informants was upheld throughout the study, from identification of survivor interview participants, to transcribing interviews and securely transferring interview audio files to UNICEF Albania and the lead researcher.

The principle of 'do no harm' was prioritised for the study. An informed consent process preceded the interviews with survivors, each of whom was informed of the purpose of the study and the types of questions they would be asked. This information was provided through a written informed consent document (in Albanian) and verbally explained to the survivors, who were informed that they could have their social worker join the interview if they wished. Furthermore, it was explained that a psychologist would be on standby to support them during and after the interview, and that they could decline to participate in the interview, stop it at any time, and request at any point prior to report publication that their data be deleted, without any consequence to them.

An informed consent process was also conducted for all key informant interviews and FGDs. All key informant and FGD participants were provided with a written informed consent document in Albanian that explained the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, the principle of anonymity, and that they could stop the interview or FGD at any time or request that their data be deleted.

³⁷ See <https://www.healthmedialabirb.com/unicef>

4

Section

4. Risks and limitations

Few male survivors agreed to participate in the study

Few male survivors expressed an interest in participating in the study. Only one such male met the inclusion criteria and participated in an interview. There are several possible reasons for this low level of participation: most identified trafficking survivors in Albania are female,³⁸ not all shelters in the country support adult male trafficking survivors, and, from the lead researcher's experience in conducting similar studies involving trafficking survivors, fewer males than females are interested in participating in such studies.

The consequence of such a small representation of male survivors is that the study lacks a balanced voice in terms of gender. The one interview with a male survivor provided rich qualitative data on his experiences in accessing economic reintegration support. However, the interview data are insufficient to understand in depth the challenges that male survivors face in accessing vocational training, employment assistance, business support and other services. Furthermore, no trends could be identified through only one such interview. There was also no opportunity to compare the experiences of male and female survivors regarding support provision and the challenges in accessing quality and sustainable economic reintegration support.

This limitation was somewhat mitigated through collecting qualitative data on the challenges faced by male survivors through the key informant interviews and FGDs. Key informants were asked specific interview questions regarding the gaps and challenges for male survivors in accessing quality and sustainable economic reintegration support.

The sample is unrepresentative of all trafficking survivors

The study utilised a non-probability convenience sample, and only 14 interviews were conducted with survivors. Further, the study only involved interviews with survivors who are currently receiving reintegration support from shelters: no interviews were conducted with survivors who had exited the programme of support. Thus, the study findings are not generalisable to all trafficking survivors. Nonetheless, they are significant and, moreover, ground-breaking with regard to improving our understanding of the subject at hand. The findings will be of interest and use to policymakers and practitioners working in the field of anti-human trafficking programming, particularly those involved in preventing trafficking, protecting and reintegrating survivors, and developing anti-trafficking policy in the area of economic reintegration of survivors.

³⁸. See US Department of State, 2021, [Trafficking in persons report: Albania](#). Most identified trafficking victims around the world are female (see, e.g., United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) annual reports on trafficking in persons). It is thought that this is because police are more familiar with identifying victims of sex trafficking (who are often female) than labour trafficking, and because of the distorted notion that males cannot be victims of trafficking.

State agencies are often unaware that persons seeking state economic reintegration support are trafficking survivors

Survivors may interact with various state agencies in order to access vocational training, employment support and other services. Because survivors generally do not volunteer information to these agencies regarding their status as a trafficking survivor, agency representatives have no means of quantifying how many survivors they are supporting. Moreover, agency representatives cannot elaborate upon the challenges that they face in providing economic reintegration support to a particular group of trafficking survivors because they do not always know if they are in contact with a survivor of trafficking, domestic violence or another offence. Thus, comments presented in this report from state agencies are somewhat generalised to all vulnerable groups that the agencies support.

The study cannot discuss whether survivors in Albania are achieving sustained reintegration

The rights of trafficking survivors to protection and reintegration support are outlined in a number of international and regional instruments, including the United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,³⁹ and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.⁴⁰ The rights of trafficking survivors to reintegration support, including economic reintegration support, are further outlined in national legislation in many countries around the world. A number of non-binding guidelines developed by UN agencies and NGOs further outline the importance of providing comprehensive reintegration support to trafficking survivors.⁴¹ Despite the raft of legislation and guidelines that highlight the rights of survivors to reintegration support, the various legislation and policies provide only broad reference to the economic reintegration services that frontline professionals should provide to survivors. There is very limited information on, precisely, what services frontline professionals should provide to survivors, who should provide the services and the recommended duration of the support. In summary, **there is no detailed guidance on what, precisely, constitutes 'best practice' in economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors.** In terms of academic efforts to document best practice in economic reintegration of trafficking survivors, a very limited body of literature considers the question of what constitutes good practice in economic reintegration support for survivors. The analysis of Surtees (2012) of the reintegration of trafficking survivors focused on economic 'empowerment' of survivors in Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.⁴² Surtees stated that a central feature of successful (re)integration is access to a reasonable (and sustainable) standard of living, along with opportunities for economic growth. Her research found that comprehensive (re)integration programmes often include an economic empowerment component, either through vocational training and job placement or through business training, planning and start-up support.⁴³ Nevertheless, the paper does identify what 'best practice' in economic reintegration support looks like.

³⁹ United Nations, '[Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#)'. November 2000.

⁴⁰ Council of Europe, 'European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings'. Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 197, Warsaw, May 2005, 19 pp.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), '[Recommended principles and guidelines on human rights and human trafficking](#)'. 2002, 15 pp.; International Organization for Migration, Guidelines for assisting victims of human trafficking in the East Africa Region. IOM, Geneva, 2011, 58 pp.

⁴² Surtees, Rebecca, '[Re/integration of trafficked persons: supporting economic empowerment. Issue paper No. 4](#)'. King Baudouin Foundation, Brussels, NEXUS Institute, Washington, December 2012, 86 pp.

⁴³ Ibid.

As a result of the limited analysis, there is limited guidance on which to draw in order to make any concrete comments regarding whether survivors in Albania are being provided with the appropriate services, for the appropriate duration of time. **It is not possible to suggest that the survivors in the present study sample were being successfully reintegrated because there is no benchmark against which to measure success in survivor economic reintegration.** Moreover, **most of the survivors in the study sample were, at the time of interview, still currently engaged in vocational training. Thus, it is impossible for the report to make comments on whether the survivors have been successfully reintegrated as they are still in the process of economic reintegration.** The report therefore does not make reference to successful economic reintegration, and does not attempt to discuss whether the survivors who participated in this study, or survivors more broadly in Albania, are achieving sustained reintegration. Where the term ‘sustained or sustainable support’ is provided, it is only used to refer to the long-term and stable nature of service provision (support) and is not designed to suggest successful economic reintegration.

Bias

The research team endeavoured to mitigate bias in the planning phase of the study by holding a half-day training session with interviewers to understand the purpose of the interview questions and the importance of setting aside any negative biases towards frontline professionals. Bias was further managed through the lead researcher, who has little prior experience of engaging with frontline professionals in Albania (and thus no bias towards or against them), conducting data analysis and writing the present report.

5

Section

5. Study findings

This section of the report presents the findings of the study. It first explores vocational training for trafficking survivors, before discussing support for survivors through internships and employment, and support to start a small business. The section then explores the other precursor services (e.g., education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance) that survivors may access and that support their economic reintegration. The findings are presented in this order because this structure best illustrates the chronological nature of some aspects of economic reintegration service delivery: survivors first receive vocational training before they embark on internships, employment or starting a business. This findings section will, however, explain how economic reintegration support is not a linear process, and highlight how integrated service provision is critical to survivors' economic reintegration.

5.1 Vocational training support for trafficking survivors

Of the 14 survivors who were interviewed for the present study, most had received, or were at the time of interview receiving, vocational training in the areas of beauty services (hairdressing, massage, nail painting) (n=8), and/or cookery (n=7), followed by tailoring (n=5), Information Technology (IT) (n=3), hospitality (n=2), jewellery making (n=1) and automobile repair (n=1).⁴⁴ Survivors also reported receiving classes that would contribute to their employability, such as language classes (English, German; n=2), and business management (n=3).

All 14 interviewed survivors reported that the shelter or centre that supports them had arranged the vocational trainings. In terms of duration, 11 survivors (79%) reported that the training had lasted between one and nine months, with the majority stating that it had lasted for approximately three months. Three interviewed survivors (21%) reported that they had received vocational training for more than one year.

Seven interviewed survivors (50%) reported that they had received the training at one of the ten state vocational training centres in one of the urban centres of the country. **Four survivors (29%) reported that the training had been provided by a private training centre or sector organisation**, e.g., a hairdressing salon or a hotel. The one male survivor who participated in the study reported that he had received training in cookery at a private training centre. The private centres applied training fees, which were paid in equal share by the shelter or centre and the survivor.

Five survivors⁴⁵ (36%) reported that they had received training only from the NGO-run shelter. While this training is provided by shelter staff without provision of a training certificate, the survivors nonetheless reported that they had gained skills from the training in business management, languages and IT, among others.

All 14 interviewed survivors stated that they were able to choose the vocational training they wanted to receive from the options presented to them. **Ten of them (71%) reported that they believe the training had prepared them for employment, though two (14%)** thought the training was inadequate and did not increase their employment skills. Two other survivors (14%) said it was premature for them to answer questions on their preparedness for employment through vocational training because, at the time of the interview, they were still in school and

⁴⁴. These figures do not add up to 14 because some survivors reported receiving training in more than one field.

⁴⁵. Ibid.

not yet thinking about employment.

The interviews conducted with survivors and key informants for the present study highlighted that **it is extremely important for the economic reintegration of survivors that they possess information on vocational training options and are able to make decisions regarding the training that they wish to undertake.** It is also important that the options presented to survivors are those that will likely lead to decent employment and business opportunities. According to key informants, **it is important that these options match as far as possible the survivors' level of education and the employment and business opportunities. This is important for ensuring that survivors are able to find decent employment following completion of vocational training.**

"The first thing taken into consideration is if they are passionate about anything in particular; some survivors have clear ideas of what they want to learn. The other valued elements are their skills, background education, physical capacities, mental health condition and even family commitments. Also, we try to match their skills with the labour market, because after the training we want them to have job opportunities."

Key informant interview participant

A common thread across the interviews with survivors for this study was that **those who are able to choose their vocational training and are passionate about the training that they receive are likely to complete the training and pursue work in that area.** As the following response suggests, **undertaking vocational training in a field that the survivor is passionate about can also have significant benefits in terms of their overall recovery.**

"I chose the cookery course because I enjoy cooking, which is a passion of mine. I've liked cooking ever since I was a little boy, because I like mixing and experimenting with different ingredients."

Male survivor

Key informants further emphasised that **the pathway from vocational training to employment or starting a business is not necessarily linear, and economic reintegration does not finish at the employment stage.** Key informants reported that **it is important that frontline professionals follow the advisory cycle,** in which for some nine months survivors receive vocational and life skills training, gain awareness of the Albanian labour market and have the chance to complete apprenticeships and internships. Throughout the cycle, the survivor is supported, through discussions with the frontline professionals, on their level of interest in the vocational training. Where they wish to pursue a certain opportunity, such as an internship, they are supported by the professionals to do so. And when they express little interest in vocational training or a particular job, they are supported to pursue other opportunities. Thus, **the advisory cycle provides a framework for the survivor to explore a range of training opportunities while all the time being guided by advice and support from frontline professionals.**

“In the advisory cycle the survivor receives life skills and vocational skills, plus guidance on what a person might need in his or her life, for nine months. Through this advice, the beneficiary receives a short-term apprenticeship, a guide on the city that informs of the types and number of businesses per type, the predominant ones, and those that have developed with something special. The goal is to take the beneficiary to the end objective of the programme – namely, employment – but by going through the entire process in depth.”

Key informant interview participant

The interviews with survivors identified that **vocational training should include life skills and business management components**. Survivors who have not been employed previously, or not employed in professional positions, may require support to understand, e.g., standards around work dress, punctuality and dealing with customers and clients. Those who wish to start their own business may require support to understand business planning, the importance of market assessments, finance management and IT. Without these skills, vocational training alone may be insufficient to provide a pathway for survivors into sustainable decent employment.

“The training school staff boosted my self-esteem and self-confidence.”

Female survivor

Another key finding from the interviews with survivors is **that a training certificate is very important to survivors**. After successful completion of training at a vocational school or private organisation, each participant receives a certificate, which was highlighted by those interviewed as particularly important for the subsequent phase of economic reintegration, i.e. entry into employment. Without the certificate there is no proof that the survivor has received training and the skills in the field in which they seek employment. **Training certification is thus invaluable for paving the way to employment**.

The interviews conducted for this study uncovered some key gaps and challenges in terms of survivors’ ability to access quality vocational training. A specific challenge for those with children was the availability of free childcare. **Survivors with young children reported that they found it very difficult to engage in vocational training when they had no or limited access to free childcare services**.

“I couldn’t take hairdressing classes; they were offered to me, but I didn’t have help with my daughter.”

Female survivor

Key informant interview and FGD participants further pointed out that **vocational training is difficult to access for survivors living in rural parts of the country**. The state vocational training schools are only present in urban centres. Survivors living far from a vocational school have a long journey to make, or simply do not enrol in vocational training at all.

While only two survivors (14%) criticised the duration and quality of training in the vocational training centres, **key informants highlighted that the centres are often under-resourced, and that the training that is provided (also to others enrolled in the programmes) is often inadequate to prepare trainees for employment.** Although the trainings usually last several months, in the end, the trainees have only learned the basics of a vocation. One interviewed survivor described how she received several months of hairdressing training but that simple tasks such as straightening hair were repeated daily and no attention was paid to important principles such as safety.

5.2 Internships and employment support

Following completion of vocational training, survivors are assisted by frontline professionals to enrol in internships or find decent employment.⁴⁶

The study identified that **internships are a valuable pathway to decent employment.** Interviews and FGDs with key informants suggested that **it is important for internships to be remunerated. A current good practice is for an NGO-run shelter to determine the normal wage for employment in a certain sector, and then arrange with the company employing the survivor as an intern for the survivor to be paid the same amount as a regular employee.** The shelter funds the business to take the survivor on as an intern for several months and the business pays the intern. **For survivors who have not previously worked, this process helps them become accustomed to receiving regular paycheques from their employer, and increases their budget management skills and overall confidence to enter the labour market.**

Key informant interview participants also emphasised that **internships are an important learning opportunity that should precede employment for survivors who have not previously worked. The internships provide an opportunity for them to learn more about a particular vocation through on-the-job training and determine whether they are interested in the work.**

“Firstly, I offered training and internships because the girls didn’t know how to work, as they have never worked before in their life. That’s why I first needed to offer the training and then the employment. I employed all three survivors.”

Key informant interview participant

The study identified that **it is important, prior to survivors embarking on internships, for frontline professionals to vet each company that will employ the interns.** Such vetting may help to ensure that the survivors will not be re-victimised by the employers or their new colleagues.

The study identified that frontline professionals have been successful in supporting survivors throughout vocational training into paid employment. It also identified that many **survivors are successful in finding employment in the field in which they trained: seven interviewed survivors (50%) were, at the time of interview, employed in the same field in which they trained: as a tailor, hairdresser, cook, car mechanic, or other professional.**

⁴⁶ As highlighted by ILO ‘decent’ work means: A fair pay; safe working conditions; equal opportunities and treatment; social protection for workers and their families; opportunities for personal development; and the ability to express concerns regarding work, and to organise through unions.

Interviews with survivors and key informants also identified a number of **challenges regarding survivors' ability to engage in decent employment, including, but certainly not limited to, the daunting nature of (re-)entering employment and lack of education, free childcare and decent job opportunities in Albania. These challenges are relevant at individual, community and society levels.**

At the individual level, the study found that **(re-)entry into employment can be a daunting process for many.** Not all the survivors who were interviewed had worked prior to being trafficked. Six of them (43%) reported that they had never worked, and in all of those cases because they had been too young. Thus, entry to employment for survivors who have not worked before can be a very intimidating process, involving not only a new environment but also the application of newly acquired skills, long working hours and potentially significant face-to-face contact with members of the public. **Without adequate preparation – through vocational and life skills training – and ongoing support from frontline professionals and employers, entry into employment can be overwhelming.**

Another challenge to accessing decent employment at the individual level is a low level of education. Interviewed survivors and key informants reported that, **for those who had not previously worked, or had not completed high school, the employment opportunities were limited.**

Entry into employment for survivors often also coincides with them exiting shelter accommodation and living somewhere new. Individual- and community-level factors come into play in such situations. For some survivors, entry into employment requires moving to a different city, finding an apartment and living more independently. These factors, combined, can either be confidence building and empowering, or stressful and unsettling. **Thus, some survivors require more intense support when entering into new employment.**

Meanwhile, at the community level, decent employment opportunities available for survivors with children are also few. Survivor and key informant interview and FGD participants commented that a lack of free childcare inhibits survivors' ability to maintain decent employment. Those with children are often forced to work in one or more part-time jobs, or to try to run a small business from home.

At the society level, a key challenge for survivors in accessing decent employment is that there are few decent work opportunities for survivors in Albania. The unemployment rate in Albania is increasing, and is particularly high among young people.⁴⁷ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate had been steadily decreasing. However, it is thought that the pandemic reversed any gains. The recent literature highlights that, in a climate of increasing unemployment, trafficking survivors' chances of finding gainful employment are small. The chances of such a person finding employment cannot be expected to be higher than for other unemployed people, which are very low anyway.⁴⁸

"COVID-19 has led to many people losing their jobs, since businesses could not afford to keep on all the workers."

Key informant interview participant

⁴⁷ INSTAT, 'Labour Market Survey – 1st Quarter 2022' (in Albanian). June 2022, 8 pp.

⁴⁸ Tahiraj, Enkelejda, 'Understanding Trafficking of Girls and Women from Albania'. Shpresa Programme, July 2017.

There are also many challenges for survivors in sustaining employment, and many of these challenges are at individual, community and society levels. Individually they may not be interested in their new job. Key informants who participated in interviews or FGDs for the study reported that, despite the above-mentioned advisory cycle, **some survivors entertain unrealistic ideas of the work that they will engage in after vocational training.** With limited education and little or even no work experience, some young survivors may express an interest in engaging in certain professions that do not align with their educational level and employment background. **When they are supported to enter into employment that is more suited to their education and skills set, but not their preferred profession, they may be disappointed with the work (the repetitive nature of tasks and long working hours), and may quit from boredom or fatigue after a matter of days or weeks.** This finding aligns with the literature, which suggests that, especially at the beginning of the reintegration process, some survivors have unclear ideas or unrealistic expectations about what their future profession might be.⁴⁹ **This finding highlights the importance of the advisory cycle: survivors need guidance to understand the labour market and the requirements for their preferred jobs, in order to manage expectations and goals regarding future work and income.**

“I quit because it was hard. You had to rush with everything. You had to start working as soon as an order came in, and while you were making that order, another one came in and so on.”

Female survivor

Also at the individual level, **survivors who are still studying at university or school or in vocational training also face immense challenges in maintaining employment because of their busy schedules.** Interviewed survivors emphasised that study, training and work often take place in different locations, and it is very difficult for them to maintain both study and employment responsibilities, which may force them to give up one opportunity.

“They [employers] said that they needed me there [at work]. I told them that I had to go to school at 3 pm, but they insisted that I had to be there, **so I decided to quit.**”

Female survivor

Another individual-level factor is that **some survivors suffer ongoing trauma, which reduces their ability to maintain employment.** Frontline professionals are careful to not place survivors who were trafficked for sexual exploitation in work places such as in hotels, as this may trigger memories of exploitation. However, despite their best efforts to prepare survivors for employment, in some cases the trauma is significant and the survivors still find that they are frightened or stressed in the work situations.

At the community level, a key challenge for survivors with children in sustaining employment is that the work hours may not align with the availability of free or affordable childcare. In the event

⁴⁹. Different and Equal, ‘[Falling through the cracks! The trafficking of men and boys in Albania](#)’. Tirana, January 2015. 72 pp.

that employers will not allow a survivor with children to work their preferred hours, the survivor may be forced to quit the new job.

“Taking care of children is a little difficult for them. That’s one of the main difficulties with maintaining employment.”

Key informant interview participant

Another key challenge at the community level for survivors in sustaining employment is the one of stigma. Both survivors and key informants reported that a survivor may mention to a colleague that they have been trafficked, leading to the survivor being stigmatised by their colleagues and feeling so discriminated against that they are forced to quit their new job.

“Sometimes they speak with their colleagues about their status and in comes the stigmatisation and discrimination. **Then they feel overwhelmed and give up the job.**”

Key informant interview participant

At the society level, a key challenge in sustaining employment is that, in some cases, the pay is too small for the survivors to pay their rent and other essentials. This appears to be problematic in cities such as Tirana where rent is the highest in Albania. Consequently, survivors may quit their new job to pursue other training and employment opportunities.

Also at this level, interviews conducted for the present study identified that **not all survivors find employment after registering with NAES.** Many wait for a long time after submitting their application for employment support through the agency, and may wait many more months before being offered work. This finding also aligns with the literature where scholars argue that while unemployed trafficking survivors have the right to register as jobseekers at NAES, the service is a time-consuming and demotivating process for trafficking survivors, who often wait many months to find a job, leading to financial instability and reversing any mental health gains.⁵⁰ This study identified that as a result of the long NAES waiting times, many survivors opt to find employment through word of mouth or other channels.

“I went to ask for help with finding a job, but their [NAES] processes are lengthy, so I found this other job much faster.”

Female survivor

Also at the society level, some survivors **experience stigma when engaging with NAES office staff.** Some survivors reported feeling discriminated against by NAES staff because of their own

⁵⁰ Ramaj, Klea, ‘The aftermath of human trafficking: Exploring the Albanian victims’ return, rehabilitation, and reintegration challenges’. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 2021, 22 pp.

lack of education and employment skills. One interviewee reported that she felt belittled by NAES staff and had been turned away without any employment assistance.

There are risks and negative consequences of survivors' inability to access and maintain decent employment in Albania. Some may discuss their employment concerns and the barriers with frontline professionals and then enrol in additional training in order to pursue employment in an alternative field. However, some survivors may be forced to take on two part-time jobs that lack security and decent working conditions, while others may consider (re-)migration, but which brings with it risks of re-trafficking. This finding highlights the importance of the advisory cycle and of survivors being referred to comprehensive and integrated economic reintegration services.

5.3 Starting a business

Some survivors are more interested in receiving support to start their own business than support to find a job. Several interviewed survivors were, at the time of interview, running their own business, e.g., in automobile repairs, tailoring, nail technician work, or clothing sales. Several others were considering starting their own business upon completion of vocational training.

Survivors who wish to start their own business are supported by frontline professionals through the advisory cycle. These professionals discuss with the survivor their proposed business idea, and assess the viability of the business through undertaking a basic market assessment. If the assessment indicates that it is very unlikely that the business will succeed, the frontline professionals will counsel the survivor to consider other business ideas, or to search for a decent job. Where the market assessment determines that the business may succeed, the survivor is provided with the key skills that they need to start the business. This includes vocational training and business management training, including IT and finance management. Frontline professionals also support survivors to start a new business by providing some equipment and other tools, such as sewing machines, hairdryers, hair straighteners or mirrors.

"The centre provided courses, work equipment, lockers, shelves, mirrors and tables. These were all I needed."

Female survivor

The interviews conducted for the present study highlighted that **starting a business can be a very empowering experience for survivors**. Through vocational and business management training, they acquire business and finance management skills, which are then applied through setting up and managing a business. **Throughout the process of planning for, and starting and managing, a business, survivors can experience increased levels of confidence.**

"I did market research and I came up with this business idea. I carried out market research, I held interviews, went to work places, read about offers and demands; I did everything I could."

Female survivor

The interviews conducted for the study also highlighted that **it is important that survivors are supported to pursue their preferred business activity, even when the idea may challenge gender stereotypes of, e.g., appropriate businesses for women.** One interview participant described how she expressed an interest to frontline professionals in starting an automobile repair business. The professionals were incredibly supportive of her business plan, and supported her in finding appropriate training and devising the plan.

“Even the people at the centre [shelter] were surprised at such a decision. The centre agreed with me, and so they gave me a chance. They were [later] surprised at how things have changed. I’m very thankful for their help and encouragement.”

Female survivor

There are, however, also many challenges facing survivors starting and maintaining their own business, including, but certainly not limited to survivors’ lack of business nous, lack of start-up capital, business competition, and discrimination. Many of these challenges are at individual, community and society levels.

At the individual level, despite the business management and other training that survivors receive prior to starting their own business, **the first few weeks of a new business can be very daunting.** As the quote below illustrates, the realisation that the survivor is solely responsible for budget management, ordering supplies and acquiring clients can initially be overwhelming.

“You have to manage everything on your own, such as expenses, rent, bills, supplies; and this is not easy because if I don’t get enough supplies, the store will look empty. Things get easier with time, especially if you’re a hard worker, **but the beginning is always hard** no matter what.”

Female survivor

This suggests that frontline professionals should provide intense support to survivors in the first weeks of them starting their new business. Such support should come in the form of counselling, guidance to manage the purchase of supplies and advice on managing budgets.

At the community level, key informant interview and FGD participants highlighted that the training that survivors receive at the state vocational training centres does not prepare survivors to start their own businesses. This concern was raised by the NGO Different and Equal in a 2018 report.⁵¹ The report highlighted that, although some concepts on learning about entrepreneurship have been introduced in vocational training courses, no serious training on entrepreneurship in terms of self-employment or starting a new business is provided. This is crucially important given that nearly all (96%) businesses in Albania are small to medium sized enterprises.⁵²

⁵¹ Different and Equal, ‘[Research on local job market skills and opportunities to support the economic empowerment of survivors of trafficking and domestic violence in Tirana, Kukës, Dibra and Saranda](#)’. November 2018, 40 pp.

⁵² [National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020](#).

Also at the community level, a key challenge for survivors who want to start their own business is lack of start-up capital. When a business can be run from home, the survivor only requires a small amount of capital to purchase equipment and materials. However, survivors may not have the money to purchase even these items. For those who need to rent an office or other space in which to conduct their business, more start-up capital is required. Lack of capital is particularly problematic for survivors who wish to live and run their business in major cities such as Tirana, where rent and other costs are higher.

“Lack of initial capital is quite problematic because you can’t buy supplies, which means that you have nothing to sell. If you have nothing to sell, you make no profit. If you sell little, you earn little.”

Female survivor

At the society level, a challenge for survivors starting their own business is competition. Despite market assessments being undertaken, after starting a business, the survivor may face stiff competition and few customers. Furthermore, even for businesses with some customers, the income generated may not be enough to sustain them.

“I started doing nails for ALL500⁵³ but what can you do with ALL500?”

Female survivor

The study identified that as a result of business competition and low income, survivors may become increasingly stressed. This may, in turn, reverse any recent mental health gains and result in the survivor needing additional support from frontline professionals and, possibly, counselling to explore other business or employment options. This again highlights the importance of reintegration support continuing while survivors are engaged in their new business.

At the community level, one challenge is that survivors who start their own business may experience stigma, which may inhibit their ability to find new clients and generate a good income. The survivor who had started her own automobile repair business reported facing significant discrimination from local suppliers who had been instructed by established automobile repair businesses not to sell to her, wanting her business to fail. Nonetheless, this survivor’s business flourished after she located a supplier who would sell materials to her (albeit at a higher cost), and she persisted in growing her customer base.

The study identified that some of the self-employment challenges are unique to trafficking survivors. For example, the survivors cannot conduct a business from home where customers (strangers) come to the house for business purposes. While running a hairdressing or nail technical business from home might appear straightforward, having strangers entering their home might create worries for safety and security.

⁵³. GBP3.45 (currency conversion as at 31 March 2022).

“I do have relevant skills, but I need to have customers and a space. **I can't let just anyone come into my house.**”

Female survivor

Trafficking survivors are also unique in that they are unable to take out loans as easily as other individuals. They may have been deceived into exploitative labour previously because of an artificial debt or be aware that taking on a loan might make them vulnerable to exploitative employment in order to service the loan. Thus, if a survivor's business is failing, they would normally consider alternative income generation that does not involve borrowing money from banks or individuals.

There are risks and negative consequences associated with a survivor's inability to successfully maintain their business. Those who are unable, for various reasons, to maintain employment and whose businesses are unsuccessful may experience frustration and despair at their inability to generate income and provide for their family. A failed business may have absorbed any savings, making the individual feel that they must quickly find other sources of income. Frontline professionals play an important role in counselling a survivor to consider other business and employment ideas, building their confidence to pursue other economic opportunities, and connecting survivors with other support services.

5.4 Other services that support economic reintegration

The study identified that economic reintegration of trafficking survivors through vocational training, internships, job placement and support to start a business does not occur in isolation. Other important support services that were highlighted by interview and FGD participants include education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance. This section of the report explores these services, and how they act as precursors and support factors for economic reintegration support. It should be noted that legal aid is important for reintegration, but having received only scant mention in the interviews and FGDs, it is discussed no further here.

Education

Especially for younger survivors, education is an essential part of reintegration, including economic reintegration. Five of the 14 interviewed survivors (36%) were, at the time of interview, enrolled in high school, and two (14%) at university. Thus, **50 per cent of the interviewed survivors were engaged in education at the time of interview.** However, the other seven survivors had not finished high school, and reported having no plans to do so.

The study identified that **education support is critical to economic reintegration. Young survivors who are supported to complete high school have a better chance of finding decent employment than those who have not completed high school,** and those who complete higher education have an even greater chance of finding decent professional work.

“Education is the most important issue right now, because I’ve gone back to school after many gap years and **after much effort by my case worker, who constantly asked me if I wanted to go back to university.** This was the year I finally made up my mind. This year I was determined, and I will finish it because it’s very important.”

Female survivor

There are barriers to survivors returning to high school or considering enrolment in higher education. At the individual level, a key barrier for some survivors to re-enrol in education is their age. Survivors who are in their twenties or thirties may regret not completing high school but feel that it is too late for them to attempt further study. Another barrier to re-enrolling in education at individual and community levels is the financial situation. Survivors living in the community (rather than in a shelter) have to pay for rent and other essentials and, thus, may prioritise finding employment over study.

Healthcare

A number of interviewed survivors reported that overcoming or managing medical issues was paramount to their overall recovery and reintegration. Similarly, interviews and FGDs with key informants highlighted that, at least, managing health issues is important for economic reintegration. When survivors are ill, they will struggle to access and maintain employment. Managing health challenges is thus essential prior to survivors engaging in full-time employment or starting a business.

The national centre and the NGO-run shelters play an important role in providing advice to survivors on the most appropriate health services for them, and often transport survivors to and from health services. Emergency healthcare is provided as soon as a survivor is rescued or has escaped a trafficking situation. However, some survivors have ongoing health needs that require regular or ad hoc visits to hospitals or clinics and sometimes specialized care.

The study identified that, under the national legislation,⁵⁴ free healthcare is not available to survivors of trafficking, who comprise the largest proportion of identified survivors. A related challenge is that access to free healthcare continues only until survivors have official survivor status, while, as this report confirms, their healthcare certainly needs to continue for a long time. Although survivors can benefit from the same legislation when registered as unemployed, that would mean more paper work and accessing other offices. Another challenge is that survivors receive specialised healthcare only when they receive a referral from their General Practitioner (GP). It is possible that some survivors, especially those who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, may be hesitant to approach their GP for a healthcare referral because of stigma. Finally, there are few substance abuse treatment centres in Albania, and key informants in the study were unaware of any such specialist centres.

Many survivors of human trafficking suffer from ongoing mental health disorders, including trauma. Thus, quality mental healthcare is of paramount importance to their recovery and reintegration. Not all interviewed survivors were receiving mental healthcare at the time of interview. Two reported that they had received counselling and other specialized mental healthcare in the past, but no longer needed it. They were aware that psychological counselling and support is available

⁵⁴. Law no. 10 383, 2011, ‘On compulsory healthcare in the Republic of Albania’.

at the shelter or centre that supports them if they decide that they need it.

“If they’re experiencing a crisis, meetings are more frequent. There is more attention paid to working on the condition, stabilising the emotional state and continuing with the other stages: to work with the trauma, post-trauma or the problems they display. Generally, the sessions are regular. Sometimes they can be shorter, sometimes longer, depending on the kind of need they have.”

FGD participant

The study identified that it is important for survivors not to commence vocational training or employment until they are mentally prepared to do so. As the quote below suggests, mental healthcare should precede vocational training.

“We can’t talk about training before stabilising the emotional state.”

Key informant interview participant

There was consensus in the interviews and FGDs that **quality mental health support is paramount for survivors’ economic reintegration**. Without ongoing support to recover from their trauma, they will experience individual level challenges in maintaining employment, struggle to deal with long working hours, job boredom, interaction with customers, stigma (from colleagues and others) and the stress of managing business finances.

“I think that mental health is key; if you’re psychologically sound, everything else will be alright. If you’re not calm and focused on what you want to do, then you can’t live in peace because you’re struggling with other things. So, mental health comes first and then the rest falls into place.”

Female survivor

Interviews and FGDs with frontline professionals highlighted that mental health support needs to be ongoing throughout the survivor’s economic reintegration. Survivors who are engaged in education, work or business should continue to receive at least psychosocial counselling sessions in order to maintain mental health gains, and manage any educational or work-related stresses.

“It’s extremely important because you have to be mentally sound and healthy in order to be employed and start working somewhere.”

Female survivor

At the society level, a key challenge reported by key informant interview and FGD participants is the lack of specialised mental healthcare in Albania. While there are certainly such services in Albania, there is an overall lack of specialised mental health care, especially in rural areas of the country, and for children and adolescents. Mental healthcare in Albania appears to be moving towards an integrated network of services that provides for health treatment, rehabilitation and social integration of individuals in need of mental healthcare. However, there are, to-date, no concrete results to show that this vision has materialised.⁵⁵

The interviews and FGDs confirmed that psychosocial counselling was managed by the trained psychologists at the shelter or centre and, in this way, there is a continuum of care provided within the shelter.

“To be frank we can provide only generic mental healthcare support. And this situation does not apply only to us but is the same all over Albania. This is the Achilles heel, and is what does not work. 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”

Key informant interview participant

This suggests that Albania needs to continue to scale up its efforts in strengthening its system of mental healthcare. At present, survivors who are suffering from acute mental health disorders, such as severe trauma or addiction, cannot access appropriate services, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, there are very few specialised mental health services for children. As a result, it is likely that survivors’ economic reintegration will stall as a result of lack of specialised care to support their overall recovery and reintegration.

Housing

Housing was highlighted in the interviews and FGDs conducted for this study 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.

“I think that the most important type of assistance is housing support.”

Female survivor

⁵⁵. Ministry of Health, [‘Action plan for the Development of Mental Health Services in Albania 2013–2022’ \(in Albanian\)](#), February 2013, 27 pp.

As noted in the Introduction, survivors of human trafficking are a priority group under Law 22/2018 on social housing. As a result of that legislation, a number of programmes to support vulnerable persons have been established, including one on special housing for survivors of trafficking. However, interview participants reported that the programme is not yet active in Tirana or in other areas of the country, and at present, there are no houses available.

“The social housing programme has some houses but our cases never benefit from this.”

Key informant interview participant

Survivors of human trafficking in Albania, as a vulnerable group, also have the right to access a state housing bonus. Under this scheme, trafficking survivors (alongside other survivors of violence) who are employed but have limited income, may receive a 100 per cent rent subsidy. Survivors who have some income can receive 50 per cent of the subsidy. Key informant interview and FGD participants explained that the amount of the housing bonus is discretionary, where a committee discusses each applicant’s case, assessing their income, and number of children, among other factors. When the housing bonus is awarded, the municipality pays the landlord the survivor’s rent.

The interviews and FGDs identified that survivors often encounter many community level challenges in accessing the housing bonus. On exiting a shelter, survivors may choose to live in a part of Albania away from where they lived previously. This has, at least in the past, led to administrative problems with the municipality stating that the survivor cannot now access housing support in the city in which they now live.

“Another major problem is that human trafficking survivors are not residents of Tirana Municipality. They come from other municipalities. In order for them to be able to become residents in Tirana, they need a property document that verifies that they live here. Only then have these people the possibility to benefit from the [housing] bonus. If they do not become residents of Tirana, they won’t be able to get any of these services. This is where I think the problem lies.”

Key informant interview participant

Another community level challenge is that some survivors who wish to benefit from the housing bonus need to show proof of a rental tenancy agreement. In Albania, this is often difficult to secure as many landlords do not want to enter into rental agreements, in order to avoid paying tax on the rental income. The absence of a rental agreement thus prevents survivors from applying for the state housing bonus.

“It is assumed that you are living somewhere and are unable to pay your rent. But in order for this to be verified, you need a rental contract or a legal document that proves what you say.”

Key informant interview participant

Key informant interview and FGD participants suggested that, due to the absence of a rental agreement, and general bureaucracy and complicated application processes, **few survivors have managed to access the state rental bonus**. One frontline professional reported that only one survivor in their care had been able to access it.⁵⁶

“The rental bonus for the most part isn’t provided. It’s been an entire year, and only one survivor has received it. This year, we still haven’t had any cases [receiving the rental bonus].”

Key informant interview participant

The interviews with survivors highlighted that a lack of decent and affordable housing is often their most significant concern. A lack of stable housing limits their ability to work or study, and to enrol children in school or childcare. The stress associated with worrying about a lack of decent and affordable housing can also significantly affect the survivors’ mental health.

“Things aren’t going well right now, they’ve taken a downward spiral, because I can’t find a home.”

Female survivor

Economic assistance

The study also identified economic assistance as a key service supporting survivors’ economic reintegration. Survivors can only access economic assistance of ALL9,000 per month if they have exited shelter accommodation, are unemployed and have a declaration from the shelter that supports their claim that they are a survivor of human trafficking who has been receiving support from the shelter.

The interviews identified that not all survivors are aware of this state economic assistance. **Only four survivors (29%) reported that they have received any assistance from either the central government or the municipality. This suggests that either the survivors are unaware of the state economic assistance, or do not wish to apply for it.** There has reportedly also been a downward trend in recent years in the number of unemployed survivors accessing the economic assistance payment. Interview and FGD participants reported that **state bureaucracy makes accessing economic assistance challenging**. Moreover, **the amount of economic assistance is insufficient to pay for rent and other essentials**. Most importantly, survivors may experience discrimination when attempting to access economic assistance, and the entire **process of applying for government economic assistance can re-victimise trafficking survivors**. The survivors essentially must present themselves at the relevant government office and make a declaration to the staff that they are an unemployed human trafficking survivor. Then they may then experience stigma.

56. This finding is further supported through the following monitoring report: Mandro, A. and Rusi, N., ‘Monitoring of Law 22/2018 on Social housing by the local government units’. UNWOMEN, EU, Centre for Civic legal initiatives, 2021.

“We have that famous law of a person being entitled to ALL3,000⁵⁷ if they are unemployed. **It has been several years since our survivors benefited from this payment, because it is impossible to issue endless attestations to prove that they are survivors of trafficking. The person gets discriminated against; is stigmatised.**”

NGO participant

5.5 Discussion: The effects of individual, relationship, community and society-level factors on survivors’ economic reintegration

The present report has discussed economic reintegration support, the challenges and the opportunities associated with providing or accessing vocational training, internships, job opportunities and support for starting a small business. It has also discussed some of the other key support services that, when provided in a comprehensive manner, act as important precursors and support factors for survivors’ economic reintegration. These services include education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance. There are other factors relevant to survivors’ economic reintegration that do not fit neatly into the categories already discussed but that merit further discussion. These are the factors at the individual, relationship, community and society levels that serve to facilitate or impede survivors’ economic reintegration, and must be taken into consideration in light of the effects that they have on that journey.

Individual-level factors

Not all survivors experience post-trafficking economic reintegration in the same way. **Individual-level factors can impact such reintegration.** For example, **a survivor’s mental health may significantly affect their recovery and economic reintegration.** Severe mental health issues may negatively affect the ability to recover from trauma, to engage in full-time paid employment, to study or to form relationships with peers and frontline professionals.

“There are times when I feel all alone and in a dark place.”

Female survivor

Another individual-level factor that may have a negative effect on a survivor’s economic reintegration is addiction. Some trafficking survivors experience ongoing addictions to drugs, and this may also pose challenges for the survivor in terms of accessing and maintaining employment, studying and maintaining relationships. Key informant interview and FGD participants reported that **there are no specialised addiction services in Albania, including substance abuse treatment centres.**

The study identified that **individual-level factors, such as mental health issues and addictions, may contribute to survivors not wanting to receive the economic reintegration services offered by frontline professionals.**

⁵⁷. At the time of the interview, the economic assistance amount had not yet increased to ALL9,000.

“I didn’t feel ready because I didn’t know if I could trust them. I rarely talked to my case worker. Whenever she called me and asked me if I needed anything, I’d tell her I didn’t. I was very withdrawn, and I refused to get any type of assistance.”

Female survivor

Relationship-level factors

The interviews highlighted that relationships with families and friends are important to a survivor’s economic reintegration. Those who have no close ties to family members, or whose family is unsupportive or, worse, has subjected the survivor to exploitation or stigma due to their trafficking experience, will face major hurdles in terms of recovery and economic reintegration. On the other hand, **survivors who have a supportive family that helps them to recover from their trauma and (re-)enter study, employment or a business are better positioned to recover and sustain their new livelihoods.**

“There might be cases where the survivor has nowhere to go back to. You see the person graduate from secondary school, but he or she has no family, or perhaps one not suitable to which to return. This situation may pose a risk of re-trafficking of the person.”

Key informant interview participant

The study identified that it is critical that it is not only the survivor who receives economic reintegration support. In cases where the family is in poverty or has other socio-economic problems, it is important that frontline professionals support the entire family. **The provision of support to a survivor’s entire family ultimately helps the survivor to reintegrate,** if they wish to do so, in the family environment. It may also reduce trafficking from occurring in the first place, as well as the risk of the survivor’s siblings or other family members being trafficked.

“The economic empowerment of the survivor is closely related to the empowerment of the family.”

FGD participant

Community-level factors

Community-level factors, such as stigma, are also relevant to a survivor’s economic reintegration. In addition to survivors of sex trafficking, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI) survivors and those from minority ethnic groups may experience heightened community-level stigma. The study identified that survivors may experience discrimination from family members, neighbours, employers, customers and clients, and even frontline professionals.

Survivors who experience community-level stigma are likely to face immense challenges in terms of recovery and reintegration. They may experience discrimination and social exclusion. They may encounter difficulties securing stable housing and decent employment in their local community and may also face challenges in forming relationships with employers, neighbours and other people. Those who face discrimination in their community may feel that they have no choice but to relocate to another area of Albania or consider migration abroad.

At the community level, a lack of employment opportunities and local social services may have a detrimental effect on a survivor's economic reintegration. For example, if there are no decent employment opportunities in the survivor's community, their economic reintegration may stall. Similarly, if there is no housing support and few affordable housing options in the community, survivors may find it difficult to maintain employment, enrol children in school or access various local support services. Also, importantly, a lack of free and quality healthcare services may impede an individual survivor's ability to recover from trauma or substance addiction. This highlights the importance of municipalities fulfilling their mandates to provide social services to all vulnerable individuals.

Society-level factors

At society level, there exists a range of factors that may inhibit or, conversely, facilitate the economic reintegration of survivors. For example, and as noted under community-level factors, stigma plays an important role in a survivor's overall reintegration, including economic reintegration. The study identified that society-level stigma towards trafficking survivors, especially those who experienced trafficking for sexual exploitation, is a significant issue in Albania. Both survivors and key informants who participated in interviews for the study underscored that trafficking survivors frequently encounter stigma when enrolling in and undertaking study, vocational training or employment, or starting up a new business. A number of stories were shared by survivors and key informants during the interviews and FGDs regarding discrimination. Survivors and key informants reported that survivors often face stigma when attempting to access state services, such as employment and financial support. They may be belittled, made to feel inferior, branded liars and denied any assistance. This finding highlights the need for increased efforts to strengthen the knowledge and awareness of all Albanians, including frontline professionals, on human trafficking and the rights of survivors of trafficking to support services.

Also at this level, **state bureaucratic processes are a major factor that inhibits survivors' ability to access employment assistance and economic aid.** There was consensus in the interviews conducted with survivors and key informants for the present study that these processes are so convoluted and lengthy that many survivors do not even attempt to access state services. Some survivors may try for many months to access state support (e.g., economic support for the unemployed, or the housing bonus), and ultimately give up because they find the criteria difficult to meet or cannot organise the paperwork. Other survivors may eventually be successful in achieving some state assistance but, due to ongoing (at a minimum, annual) requirements for documentation, they may decide to not to continue to access the support.

At society level, **a lack of funding for state services also has negative consequences for survivors. Legislation and policy documents guide, at least on paper, the provision of state economic reintegration services for trafficking survivors. However, the budget limits the ability of some agencies to implement their mandate.** Key informant interview and FGD participants highlighted that state support, especially at the municipal level, is somewhat ad hoc, with some municipalities providing economic support to survivors at specific times – when the municipality has funds – but not at other times. This leads to frontline professionals reportedly having to approach state

agencies with ad hoc requests for support for survivors, some of which are granted, while others are not. In other words, there is no overall consistency to municipality-level economic reintegration support for trafficking survivors.

“They (municipality offices) are supportive but lack the power to do it all. They’re not functional enough; they lack the proper financing. The municipality may have a host of internal challenges: it may find it difficult even to cover its own salaries; and this is a problem in the large municipalities – think about the smaller municipalities who really have a challenge in paying their own staff, let alone providing services.”

Key informant interview participant

Also at this level, **the lack of decent employment opportunities available to trafficking survivors, as well as to other citizens and residents, greatly constrains the ability of frontline professionals to support survivors to achieve their employment goals.** In most cases, only specific vocational training options can be provided, simply because undertaking training outside of those fields is either beyond the reach of survivors (due to lack of education and other factors), or because the training will likely not lead to decent and long-term employment.

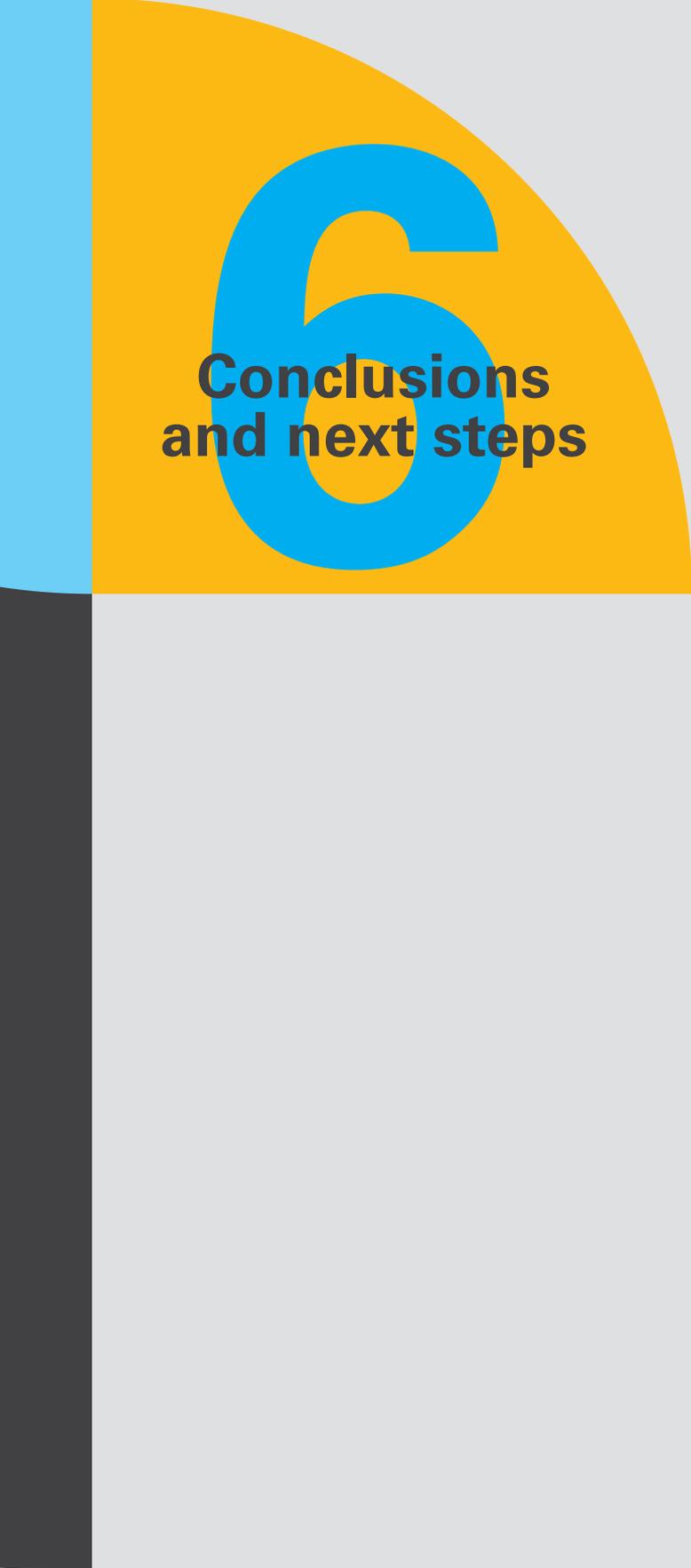
“Reintegration into Albanian society is difficult. It is difficult for a normal person who has lost his or her job, or for someone who has returned from emigration, or for someone who is educated but still cannot find a job. So, firstly, there are no vacancies and, secondly, there are no secure job positions. Meanwhile, the compensation is very little and insufficient for subsistence.”

Key informant interview participant

Finally, another society-level problem in Albania is **that there is an overall lack of coordination for the delivery of economic reintegration and other services for trafficking survivors.** Due to this lack of coordination, referral of a survivor between relevant agencies can be hindered, with survivors having to wait protracted periods for service provision. A lack of cooperation between relevant frontline agencies and professionals also means that there is reduced opportunity to address the issue of discrimination of frontline professionals to trafficking survivors.

“No one provides these services on their own. There is no organisation or institution that does all the work on its own. In order to provide reintegration services, **you need to have all actors at the table.**”

Key informant interview participant



6

Conclusions and next steps

6. Conclusions and next steps

The present report provides important insights into the economic reintegration support provided to trafficking survivors, and the challenges that they, and frontline professionals, face in accessing or providing, respectively, quality and sustainable support. The study identifies that a range of such support is provided by frontline professionals in Albania, including vocational training and internships and support for employment and to start a new business. In addition, survivors are able to access support in other important areas, such as education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance, which are important precursors and factors for economic reintegration.

In the area of **vocational training**, the study identifies that it is important for their economic reintegration that survivors receive information about vocational training options and are able to make decisions regarding the training that they wish to receive. It is also important that these options presented to survivors are those that are likely to lead to decent employment and business opportunities. It is further important that the vocational training options match the survivors' level of education with the employment and business opportunities, to ensure that they are able to find decent employment following completion of vocational training. Further, vocational training should include components on life skills and business management. Certification is also important as it provides proof that a survivor has acquired employment skills and facilitates their entry into employment.

The study further highlights that the pathway from vocational training to employment or starting a business is not necessarily linear, and economic reintegration support should not finish at the employment stage. It is important that frontline professionals follow the advisory cycle, which provides a framework for the survivor to explore a range of vocational training opportunities, while all the same time being guided through advice and support.

In terms of challenges associated with accessing or providing quality vocational training, the study identifies that survivors with young children find it very difficult to engage in vocational training when they have limited access to free childcare services. While childcare was not a service that was explicitly explored in interviews or FGDs for this study, the challenge of lack of free childcare arose a number of times during qualitative data collection. The study further identifies that vocational training is difficult to access for survivors living in rural areas of the country. Further, the vocational training centres are often under-resourced, and the training provided to survivors is often inadequate to prepare trainees for employment.

In terms of **internships and employment support**, the study identifies that internships are a valuable pathway to decent employment, but highlights that it is important for interns to be remunerated. The process of receiving regular paycheques helps survivors, especially those who have not previously worked, to become accustomed to receiving regular income from their employer, and increases their budget management skills and overall confidence to enter the labour market. The study further identifies that internships are an important learning opportunity, which should precede employment for survivors who have not previously worked. It is important that companies are vetted prior to employing survivors as interns. The study also identifies some positive efforts of frontline agencies to provide employment support to survivors, with many survivors in the study sample having found employment in the area in which they trained, while others were receiving employment support from NAES.

The study identifies some challenges, at different levels, for survivors and frontline professionals

to access or provide, respectively, quality employment support, and challenges for survivors in commencing and sustaining employment. The study identifies that without adequate preparation – through vocational and life skills training – and ongoing support from frontline professionals and employers, entry into employment may be an overwhelming experience for some survivors. A lack of free childcare inhibits survivors' ability to maintain decent employment. At the society level, a key challenge for survivors in accessing decent employment is that there are few decent work opportunities for survivors in Albania. At this level, a key challenge in sustaining employment is that, in some cases, the wage proves too low for the survivors to pay for rent and other essentials. Also for this level, the interviews identified that not all survivors find employment after registering with NAES. Many wait a long time after submitting their application for employment support through the Agency, and may wait many more months to be offered work. Also at the society level, some survivors experience stigma when engaging with NAES office staff.

In terms of **support to start a new business**, the study identifies that starting a business can be a very empowering experience for survivors. Through vocational and business management training, survivors acquire business and finance management skills, which are then applied through setting up and managing the business.

The study identifies that survivors also face challenges in starting and maintaining their own business. For example, a lack of start-up capital is particularly problematic for those who wish to live and run their business in major cities such as Tirana, where rent and other costs are high. Despite market assessments being undertaken, having started a business, the survivor may still face stiff business competition and few customers. At community and society levels, a challenge is that survivors who start their own business may experience stigma, and this may inhibit their ability to find new clients and customers and generate a good income. The study further identifies that some of the self-employment challenges experienced are unique to trafficking survivors. For example, survivors cannot conduct a business from their home when it involves customers (strangers) coming to their house for business purposes. Trafficking survivors are also a unique group in that they are unable to take financial loans as easily as other individuals.

In terms of other support services, the study identifies that education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance are critical to survivors' economic reintegration. Young survivors who are supported to complete high school have a better chance of finding decent employment than those who have not completed high school. However, a key barrier to some survivors re-enrolling in education is their age. Those who are in their twenties or thirties may regret not completing high school but feel that it is too late for them to now study. Another barrier to re-enrolment at individual and community levels is the survivor's financial situation. Those living in the community (rather than in a shelter) have to pay for rent and other essentials. Thus, they may prioritise finding employment over study. In terms of healthcare, there are few substance abuse treatment centres and few specialised mental healthcare services in Albania, especially in rural areas, as well as few specialised services for children. Also, survivors have a right to housing support, though few have been able to access the state rental bonus or benefit from the special housing programme. In the area of economic assistance, only four interviewees (29%) reported that they had received any assistance from either the central government or the municipality, suggesting that either the survivors are unaware of state economic assistance or do not wish to apply for it due to bureaucracy, the small assistance amount or discrimination from frontline professionals during the application process.

The following paragraphs highlight findings and recommend several 'next steps' for overall strengthening of economic reintegration support mechanisms for trafficking survivors in Albania.

The report discusses the lack of vocational training options available for survivors living in ru-

ral areas. **There is value in anti-human trafficking entities in the country exploring options for increasing the presence and quality of vocational training schools and other training centres in rural areas, and expanding certified training programmes across sectors that are likely to employ survivors** (e.g., agriculture, hospitality and tourism).

The study highlights the importance of survivors being supported to choose their vocational trainings and future employment. Frontline professionals should ensure that **survivors receive full information about the vocational training and employment options available to them, and are empowered to choose their preferred training and employment.**

The study explored the value of internships and traineeships as an important pathway to employment. **Relevant frontline agencies could establish and share databases of companies that may employ survivors as interns and trainees.** Those that express interest in employing survivors as interns or trainees should be vetted to ensure the safety and security of survivors.

The study highlights that some survivors want to start their own business but lack adequate business training and start-up capital to do so. Frontline agencies in Albania could collaborate to **strengthen self-employment training mechanisms** for survivors. This study identified that there is a current gap in Albania in terms of quality training to support survivors (and other Albanians) to engage in self-employment. Training programmes could be developed in collaboration with private sector entities. Such programmes could provide knowledge and skills to undertake important market assessments, develop business plans, manage budgets and pursue marketing. It is also important that survivors are provided **with start-up capital** to support them in the early phase of commencing a new business. Such start-up capital may come in the form of a loan with a very low or even no interest rate.

It is important that survivors **continue to receive reintegration support from frontline professionals once they commence a new job or start a new business. The advisory cycle should continue into the long term**, at least one year after a survivor has commenced new employment or a new business. Life skills and business management support should be ongoing, along with psychosocial counselling.

The study also highlights that the economic reintegration of survivors requires quality and sustainable access to other support services, such as education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance. **Investment in strengthened economic reintegration systems for trafficking survivors requires strengthening of the infrastructure for education, healthcare, housing and other key social services such as childcare.** These investments require the scaling up of reforms in each of these areas, materialised in increased funding at the local level to increase the availability of services. Albania should also continue to scale up efforts to **strengthen its system of mental health-care.** At present, survivors who are suffering from acute mental health disorders, such as severe trauma or addiction, cannot access appropriate services, especially in rural areas. It is likely that their economic reintegration will stall, due a lack of specialised care to support their overall recovery and reintegration. Also in relation to this, relevant anti-trafficking entities could collaborate to **ensure that the extant policy on service provision is implemented in a timely manner, and that survivors are made aware of their rights under the existing legislation and policy.**

The study also highlights the importance of **providing economic reintegration and other services, to not only trafficking survivors but also their family members.** Relevant frontline professionals should expand programmes of support to households in socio-economic distress, with a view of preventing trafficking from occurring in the first place, as well as re-trafficking cycles. Such family support should include support to access education, healthcare, housing and economic assistance, and be long term in nature.

The report mentions at multiple points the problem, at community and society levels, of stigma towards trafficking survivors. Efforts to increase the availability of services to trafficking survivors in Albania should be made at the same time as efforts to reduce negative attitudes towards these survivors among some frontline professionals. Addressing stigma in Albania requires raising awareness of human trafficking among all citizens and residents, including frontline professionals. To achieve this, relevant anti-human trafficking entities in Albania could **develop a nationwide programme of awareness raising to increase knowledge and awareness of human trafficking**, aiming to reduce discriminatory attitudes towards survivors. Reducing stigma among frontline agency personnel through such a programme may contribute to improved access of survivors to economic reintegration services.

The report emphasises that quality and sustainable economic reintegration support for survivors requires that relevant actors and services are connected. Thus, **there is value in increasing the efforts of frontline agencies and the private sector to collaborate**. There may be value in revisiting the entire infrastructure of coordination in order to expand the National Referral Mechanism function to include a broader anti-human-trafficking agency coordination, expand existing structures, such as the regional anti-trafficking committees, to better coordinate on aspects of survivor reintegration support, including economic reintegration, and to connect with relevant private sector actors, and introduce coordination at the municipal level.

The study also highlights the fact that **economic reintegration cannot be viewed separately from social integration. Service provision within economic and social integration frameworks needs to be interlinked and translated into streamlined service provision** by all relevant frontline professionals across all relevant sectors. **Service provision should, furthermore, be survivor-oriented**. Meanwhile, increased capacity building of all service provider professionals should be strengthened, with all relevant professionals made aware of the importance of survivor-centred service provision, and the importance of the advisory cycle for planning service provision.

Finally, more research is needed to understand the challenges and opportunities in the economic reintegration of trafficking survivors. There is value in relevant anti-human-trafficking entities conducting a mapping of national legislation and policy on economic reintegration of trafficking survivors in Albania, and studies into how legislation and policy are translated into practice. The findings may be helpful in identifying legislation, policy and practice gaps. Qualitative studies could explore what long-term economic reintegration might look like in the Albania context. This could be achieved through longitudinal research involving interviews with trafficking survivors. Such research, conducted over at least a five-year period, could provide valuable insights into the outcomes of economic reintegration efforts, identify areas that require further strengthening and drive future service delivery based on need. Qualitative studies could also address research questions on the economic reintegration of male survivors. The present study only includes the experiences of one male survivor in accessing economic reintegration support in Albania. Future research could explore the experiences of male survivors in accessing vocational training, employment, support to start a new business and economic aid. Similar studies could also be conducted with LGBTQI survivors, and survivors from minority ethnic groups, to understand the specific challenges that they face in accessing economic reintegration support. Studies could also focus on the challenges and opportunities in the provision of specific support services, such as legal aid, which was not discussed in this current report. As it is anticipated that access to key state services in Albania will, in the near future, move online, studies should also explore the specific challenges that survivors face in accessing those services.

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