

# Government Responses to the Survivors of Trafficking in Human Beings: A Study of Albania

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**Abstract**—This paper presents Albanian government policies regarding the reintegration process for returning Albanian survivors of trafficking in human beings. Focusing on an in-depth analysis of governmental, non-governmental documents and semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with service providers and trafficking survivors. Furthermore, this paper will especially focus on the governmental efforts to provide support to the survivors, focusing on their needs and challenges. This study explores the conditions and actual services provided to the survivors of trafficking in human beings that are in the reintegration process in Albania. Moreover, it examines the responsible mechanisms accountable for the reintegration process, by analysing synergies between governmental and non-governmental organisations. Also, this paper explores the governmental approach towards trafficking survivors and appraises policymakers to undertake changes and reforms in their future actions.

**Keywords**—Policies, social services, service user, trafficking in human beings, government.

## I. INTRODUCTION

TRAFFICKING in human beings is a form of worldwide organised crime, consisting of the concept of modern-day slavery. In terms of definition, both the United Nations and the United States Department of Justice emphasised that the perpetrators of human trafficking use violence, scams, intimidation, and mistreatment towards trafficking victims for financial interests [1], [2]. However, there are a small number of studies related to trafficking in human beings compared to other subjects. Furthermore, studies related to human trafficking are often conducted within a short time frame and restrained resources. As a matter of the sensitive topic and lack of funding, the possibility of conducting qualitative studies is restricted. Also, obtaining a complete perspective of the complex issue of human trafficking becomes more difficult than in other research areas. Therefore, doing research on trafficking in human beings is perceived both challenging and difficult [3]. If there is a demand to obtain a solid knowledge regarding the impact that the reintegration policies have, there is a need as well to focus on the experiences of survivors and the possibilities towards their reintegration.

There are different forms of trafficking in persons which include: Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by using violence, scams, blackmailing and other forms of pressure that force the victim to execute illegal

actions, or exploited for the purpose of the traffickers' personal financial profit [4]. In this paper, the terms "victim" and "survivor" are used to make reference to individuals who have experienced human trafficking. However, both terms contain a separate meaning and their context changes when they are used in the setting of advocacy and service provision. For example, the term "victim" has legal implications within the criminal justice process and refers to an individual who suffered harm as a result of criminal conduct. The laws that give individuals particular rights and legal standing within the criminal justice system use the term "victim". Federal law enforcement uses the term "victim" in its professional capacity. "Survivor" is a term used widely in service providing organisations to recognise the strength and courage it takes to overcome victimisation [5].

In terms of re-integration, the process includes a set of different actions that a person who has been a victim of human trafficking undertakes, with their own will, to relocate in a community, both by going back to their family and social group. From another point of view, reintegration is also considered as a decision of the survivor to live in a new place. Furthermore, it remains important to consider the terms of inclusion and relationship regarding the community in which the survivor is going to reintegrate. Despite the process of reintegration, it is a priority to ensure that the survivors are going to settle in a safe environment, in reasonable living conditions and in a community that maintains their mental and physical well-being, contributing to their development and providing support, whether that is required. This persists as a crucial aspect of determining the willingness of trafficking survivors to enter in the process of reintegration and set back the connections with their communities. However, in order to explore the reasons that might act as barriers to the reintegration process, it is important to assess the obstacles that endure during the reporting process, by involving threats by traffickers, cultural attitudes that limit victimisation and lack of trust in the justice system [6].

The number of identified cases of trafficking in human beings is increasing in Albania, as a way of example, in 2017, 110 cases of human trafficking were identified compared to 100 cases in 2016 [7]. Despite the increasing number and the variety of trends over the years, girls and women reach the highest number of victims in the rates of over 80%. Given the complex situation of trafficking, there are a number of barriers that trafficking survivors have to face. There is a minimum standard of assistance; also, the needs of trafficking survivors are not being met. Such needs include secure accommodation, psychological and material assistance, medical treatment and

consultation processes to inform the survivors about their rights [8]. Issues related to language, communication and cultural context might act as a distinctive wall between trafficking survivors and their communities. Such elements lead to absence and lack of willingness from the survivors to participate in the decision-making process, which affects their way towards reintegration [9].

This paper explores the challenges faced by survivors of human trafficking during the process of their reintegration in their home country. The focus of the study is on adult survivors of trafficking. The insights that are aimed to be presented are focused mainly on the perspective of service provision. Therefore, this paper explores the experiences of the service providers involved in the provision of reintegration services and also, the perceptions of trafficking survivors. Furthermore, this paper addresses the difficulties of the reintegration process, including the experiences that trafficking survivors had. Complexities of the social, cultural and economic aspects that trafficking survivors go through are reflected in the findings of this paper.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. The Context of Human Trafficking in Albania

Albania predominates as a country of origin, for human trafficking victims, both minors and adults, mainly for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour. A high amount of Albanian victims, mostly girls, are subject to sexual exploitation within or in neighbouring countries such as in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. One of the methods of enticement used by traffickers includes false offers for employment related to those as a waitress, bartender, dancer or singer in places such as Kosovo, Greece and Macedonia or through fake marriages by betraying the victims at the moment they cross the borders. In this paper, the age range of the interviews trafficking survivors varies between the ages of 18 to 24 years.

Despite the prevalence of girls and women of all ages and nationalities to become victims of trafficking in human beings, the demand is for girls younger than 24 years [10]. Regarding the National Action Plan for the Socio-Economic Re-Integration of Women and Girls Victims of Trafficking in the Republic of Albania, published in 2016, most of the victims come from poor rural and urban areas, mainly from Tirana, Durres, Elbasan, Shkodra, Berat, Vlora, Korca. The majority of the victims have elementary education. However, there are some cases where victims have achieved to obtain a high school diploma. Nevertheless, their housing situation is very problematic, not only due to their poor economic condition, but also because of poor relationships with their families.

A commonly used strategy of traffickers is to expose the victims to the risk of prosecution by manipulating and involving them in criminal activities. Therefore, it is not unusual for victims of human trafficking to commit criminal offences or other law violations that arise from their trafficking situation [11]. The stigma that might follow the

trafficking survivors and the fear of being prosecuted are some of the obstacles faced. Despite the efforts in the fight against human trafficking, an increasing number of cases are identified every year. In 2017, based on the Albanian government and non-governmental organisations data, a total of 105 potential trafficking survivors were identified. More to the point, in 2017, minor trafficking victim cases increased. One significant aspect of the human trafficking context in Albania is that from a total of 105 trafficking victims, 80 were girls and women, and 25 were boys and men.

Most of the trafficking victims were from families that have faced economic difficulties, also, in the majority of the cases, both victims and their families, have had basic education, and were unemployed or self-employed in seasonal works, mainly in agriculture. In some of the cases, families of trafficking victims have migrated within the country from rural to urban areas [12]. Therefore, the element of sex is visible in the case of human trafficking in Albania, where there is a distinct difference between girls and women, boys and men victims. Furthermore, sex is recognised as a risk or protective factor at the Organization's for Migration (IOM) determinants of vulnerability model.

### B. Physical, Psychological and Social Consequences of Trafficking Survivors

The process of reintegration requires a long-term approach and efforts from a variety of disciplines. The United States Department of State evaluates the position of doctors, psychologists, and social workers as crucial, in order to support trafficking survivors to gain wellness and improve their physical and mental health [13]. From the process of assessing the health condition of survivors, a variety of needs have been identified related to medical treatment. Such needs are possible to have arisen as traffickers tend to neglect usual medical control to avoid detection and to boost the working time of trafficking victims, aiming to increase their financial profit as much as possible [14]. In addition to the previous statement, a huge number of trafficking survivors suffer from increased levels of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance use and abuse, hostility, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide [15]. Also, in some cases, signs of memory loss, dissociation, insomnia, guilt, shame, distrust of others, social withdrawal, loneliness, loss of self-esteem, a sense of apathy or resignation, including loss of personal initiative and autonomy, have been discovered as psychological consequences faced by trafficking survivors.

The physical and emotional harms that trafficking survivors face during and after trafficking require specialised attention and treatment; a three-stage process exists, which supports the assistance provided to human trafficking survivors. The first stage is related to emergent interventions named as crisis intervention, which intends to provide support, in order to meet the critical and emergent needs of trafficking survivors. The second stage is rehabilitation, including support through both the physical and emotional viewpoint. The aim is to reduce health implications to the survivors and to provide sustainable improvement of their emotional condition. The last

stage is the reintegration process, which is related to the measures of respecting human rights. Also, during the last stage, projects are implemented to empower trafficking survivors to increase their self-esteem and their social connections. Such actions aim to construct solid connections with the families of survivors, including as well, initiatives linked to vocational training and chances of employment [16].

The reintegration process of trafficking survivors combines a variety of initiatives and efforts in order to provide assistance to the survivors and achieve effective outcomes. Therefore, the reintegration of trafficking survivors is perceived as a long-term process. A variety of theories have attempted to interpret the phenomenon of human trafficking. Identifying theories that might lead to possible solutions towards human trafficking are perceived with high importance from the policymakers' point of view [17]. One of the theories applied to explain human trafficking is the conflict theory which divides perpetrators and victims into different groups, claiming that the perpetrators' profit from the weakness of victims. However, from another point of view, the economic theory emphasises that the existence of an illegal market for trafficking victims relies on demand and it is closely related to the Globalisation [18]. Another theory, named as the vulnerability theory, perceives human trafficking from the role of the state, seeking a more active position of the state, with a focus on the evaluation of vulnerable group needs [19].

### *C.Domestic Legislations Related to Human Trafficking*

The process of reintegration requires a set of actions and a consistent willingness in order to achieve effective outcomes. It is not only a way to obtain socio-economic rights, but it also ensures to secure trafficking survivors from the infringement of their human rights [20]. In terms of legislation, Albania has ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Also, the law no. 9642, dated 20.11.2006, on the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on measures against trafficking in human beings supports the ratified convention. In addition to the previous statement, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs are responsible for the implementation of the convention. More to the point, the Anti-Trafficking Strategy and the action plan for the socio-economic reintegration of human trafficking victims, focus on the aspect of protection, including timely identification of possible trafficking victims, for all types of exploitation, both domestic and international, whether the activity is linked to organised crime or not.

In terms of legal responses, trafficking in human beings is reflected in a variety of laws and incorporated in the criminal code of Albania. However, despite the legal consideration given to trafficking in human beings, compared to the previous years, the government reported fewer prosecutions and convictions [21]. Moreover, the Criminal Code, Article 110/a, on trafficking of adults, and Article 128/b, on trafficking of minors, are the main codes that recognise

trafficking in human beings. From another point of view, there are specific laws that address trafficking in human beings, such as the law no. 8920, dated 11.07.2002, on the ratification of the United Nations Convention against transnational organised crime. Also, two additional protocols, and Law no. 9265, dated 29.07.2004, on the ratification of the European Convention on the compensation of violent crime victims support the recognition of human trafficking as a crime, and protect the victims.

However, by 2009 the legislation related to trafficking in human beings has started to raise the importance given to the survivors by focusing on the protection of the witness, in particular, the law no. 10173, dated 22.10.2009 on the protection of witnesses and co-workers of justice, followed by the law no. 10383, dated 24.2.2011, on compulsory health insurance in the Republic of Albania, have contributed to the protection of the witness. Furthermore, during the last four years, a social perspective has been promoted towards victims of human trafficking, reflected in the law no. 111/2017, on state legal assistance and law no. 121/2016, on social care services in the Republic of Albania. In addition to the previous statement, the Albanian Council of Minister's decision no. 195 of 11 April 2007, on the approval of the standards for social care services for trafficked persons or those in risk, in the Residential Centres, was an initiative to increase the capacity of the social services provided to trafficking victims.

Related to the process followed, for the identification of a person suspected to be a victim of trafficking, is based on the format of a formal interview. Firstly, the identification starts with a formal interview after the notification by the referral agency or when the potential victim of trafficking expresses the will to the state police structures to conduct the formal interview. Secondly, the process of determining whether the person is a victim of trafficking follows. The assessment is based on the accumulation and analysis of information provided by the potential victim of trafficking. Thirdly, an in-depth assessment of the victim's needs for assistance and protection follows. Fourthly, guidance is provided to the trafficking victim through appropriate and safe assistance. Fifthly, the stage continues by collecting information and initiating the investigation. Lastly, the process concludes with a formal interview that follows the final confirmation of the person being a victim of human trafficking [22].

Nevertheless, in the Albanian legislation, there is not a dedicated law for the compensation of trafficking survivors. However, there is a possibility that trafficking victims can claim compensation under the procedural law for criminal charges through a civil lawsuit. The civil lawsuit in the criminal process is presented in Article 61 of the Code for Criminal Procedure and grants the victim to seek through a civil lawsuit criminal proceedings against the trafficker, by requesting the return of property and damage compensation. Also, survivors of trafficking can submit one separate civil lawsuit in the civil court referring to Article 647/a, of the Civil Code on compensation for non-pecuniary damage. Despite the clausal that is not directly related to human trafficking, victims of trafficking face difficulties to access and claim for

compensation.

#### *D. Differences between Policy Aims and Policy Implementation in the Aspect of Human Trafficking*

In a period where manners of government are modified into those of governance, implementation can be perceived from a variety of perspectives and patterns, within diverse cultures and institutional settings [23]. There are differences in the process of making and doing policies. Such variations are relevant as well when it is aimed to explore the gaps between policy intentions and their final outcome [24]. The possibility to explore a variety of viewpoints and to explain why the implementation process of a policy disappoints the completion of its aims prevails to be crucial [25], [26]. The viewpoints might differ from the way politicians interfere with the policy-making process due to their own political agenda, to the groups of interest that have an important role in the process through which policies are shaped and delivered [27].

Policy on the ground might seem distinct from the practice in which it was conceived throughout the planning process [28], [29]. On the other side, those who make policy tend to be different from those who implement it, followed by the insubstantial approach of the relationship between the design process of a policy and its implementation [30]. While representatives of public authorities own the legislative and institutional authority to establish policies, they might lack expertise on policy issues and practical level. On the other side, professionals who are in the role of implementing the policies, have the right to get involved in the policymaking process [31]. As a way of example, the action plans and initiatives to combat trafficking in human beings differ from the implementation process, which extends on those who engage directly with trafficking victims. In addition to the previous statement, despite the continuous governmental efforts, after the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was transferred to the Ministry of Health, the funding provided for rehabilitation services was reduced [21]. Therefore, the implementation of services is usually characterised by a shift of the competence from the government towards the NGOs. Shifting the authority to the NGOs is characterised as a way to minimise costs and provide a better service [32].

From another point of view, reintegration services which were provided by NGOs in Albania were administered under budgetary pressures, mostly receiving funds from external founders and partially from the government. Based on the United States' state office to monitor and combat trafficking in persons' report, NGO-run shelters in Albania supported 71 trafficking victims and potential victims, compared to the state-run shelter that supported in total 30 service users. More to the point, non-governmental run shelters in Albania provided specialised services for minor victims under the age of 18 years. More to the point, in some cases, trafficking victims in Albania were provided with rented apartments, where they received further assistance including employment opportunities provided from non-governmental organisations [21]. A multi-disciplinary approach is currently being implemented in Albania, which aims to provide standard

operating procedures for identifying and assigning victims to reintegration services. However, the sustainability of the approach persists to be uncertain, due to the lack of permanent staff, specialised professionals, and limited financial resources.

#### *E. Government Responses to the Reintegration Process of Human Trafficking Survivors*

The action plan for the socio-economic reintegration of trafficking in human being victims released in 2016 from the Ministry of Internal Affairs focuses its reintegration approach on four main areas. The first area is related to the economic empowerment of survivors including property rights, employment, and vocational training. The second area includes housing provided to trafficking survivors. The third area is related to education and vocational training, and the last relates to social care services. Currently, the Albanian government provides a variety of programs regarding the economic empowerment of human trafficking survivors. One of the programs is the support for unemployed women [33]. The program includes employment for marginalised jobseekers for at least one year by providing to them 100% of the minimum wage for four months and 70% of their share of social security contributions. The included target groups in this category are trafficking survivors, Roma community women, women with limited skills and divorced women with children who face financial difficulties.

Another programme aiming to empower economically trafficking survivors is the job training provided for job seekers [34]. Under this programme, employers who provide job training are given financial support from the government by reimbursing up to 70% of the training costs. Also, job seekers who take part in the training receive 50% of the minimum wage during its duration. From another point of view, a self-employment approach is considered as an effective way towards the economic empowerment of survivors. This scheme is provided through micro-credits, since funding is essential for starting a new business. The self-employment is seen as a way to economically empower, and at the same time, provide a long-term solution to the unemployment challenge which most of the trafficking survivors face. In addition to the previous statement, some of the trafficking survivors who have attended self-employment training have started their own social businesses. However, since this is a new initiative, more time is required to evaluate its effectiveness.

In terms of housing, the Law no. 9232/2004 on social housing programmes provides financial assistance to trafficking survivors for housing. The first category of the programme is related to social housing. The second, it related to low-cost rental housing. The last is related to equipment with land and proper infrastructure [35]. More to the point, there is an option for trafficking survivors to profit from subsidised loans, small, and immediate grants for the payment of the social rent. In the matter of social protection for human trafficking survivors, social protection covers social assistance payments, which include economic aid and social care

services. However, social care services provided by the government are limited not only in terms of provision but also, restricted geographically where 90% of the services are located in urban areas. In terms of education, the school enrolment for survivors of human trafficking is implemented by non-governmental organisations. In addition to the point of education, in terms of access to public education, there are some legislative barriers that trafficking survivors have to face. From the legislative perspective, if a person reaches the age of 22 years, and joins higher education, the enrolment has to be on a part-time basis.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study was focused on governmental policies and initiatives related to survivors of human trafficking, reviewing laws, policies and documents from the Albanian government and non-governmental organisations. In addition to the process of document analysis, a qualitative approach was incorporated through which five in-depth interviews were conducted with service providers in the area of trafficking in human beings. Also, three semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with human trafficking survivors. Purposive theoretical sampling was applied in this research. The access to the participants was made able mainly from contacts with a local non-governmental organisation, which provides services to trafficking survivors. The sample was made by service providers involved in the provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services, and who have had direct interactions with the trafficking victims. Furthermore, in order to attain information related to the aims of the study, criteria were set before the sampling process.

For the service providers' qualitative interviews, the criteria were related to professionals who have worked with human trafficking victims, and have been involved in the service provision. Also, professionals should have had at least three years of working experience in the field of human trafficking in order to be interviewed. Furthermore, three interviews were conducted with survivors of human trafficking, the criteria applied for the sample of survivors was related to if they had received rehabilitation service, trafficking survivors who have not received any services from State shelter or NGO shelters were not including in the sample. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, a variety of methodological and ethical challenges have arisen, which set limitations in the way the subject is researched and presented. The process of interviewing was informal in order to create a safe and neutral environment. The interviewing process with service providers and survivors lasted up to 70 minutes. The interviews were administered confidentially, in a quiet place, and not in the presence of other people despite the interviewer and the interviewee.

During the interviewing process, interviews conducted with service providers were recorded, also, notes were taken throughout the interviewing process. However, the interviews conducted with trafficking survivors were not recorded due to ethical considerations and the survivors' disapproval to be recorded. Nevertheless, notes were taken during the interviewing process of survivors. More to the point, the

interviews were transcribed and translated from Albanian to English. In terms of the translation process, it covered content related to the purpose of the study. After the transcription and translation process, data were separated into different subjects linked to their meaning. The main subjects were classified to specific groups based on the information they contained. The main classified subjects remained divided into two central topics. The first one was related to the experiences of the trafficking survivors, and the second to the reintegration process. The process followed by a more structured division of subjects, which contained difficulties, shame, poor living conditions, and obstacles faced by trafficking survivors. After the categorisation of data, and framework, the coding process followed. A coding plan was inducted in order to structure the data. The identified themes were: Services provided and not provided, the influence of family relationships and community support, the impact of service providers' attitude and service provision, also, barriers, and level of cooperation between the government and NGOs. The process of identifying the themes and codes was explanatory, and also, it was guided by the collected data.

In terms of ethical considerations, the protection and attainment of confidentiality of the participants were kept through private individual interviewing sessions. Before the interviewing process, the participants were given the information sheet, which included detailed information about the aims of the study, also, participants were provided with a consent form. More to the point, the participants were asked if they agree to be part of the research after they have read the materials provided to them. The consent was written in Albanian, which was the participants' native language. Furthermore, the participants were properly notified about the scope and objectives of the study including as well, their right to withdraw from the study or refuse their consent without being required to provide any explanations or prior notice. Regarding the anonymity aspect, codes were used rather than names to avoid any potential bias or identity reveal.

The participants were made aware that the data that would derive from them during the semi-structured interviews will be managed for research purposes, and only a few quotes from the interviews would be illustrated in the study. Despite the efforts to refrain from limitations, this study contains a number of them. First, it includes a small number of participants due to the sensitivity of the topic and the difficulty to approach the sample. Second, this study does not represent the whole population of service providers and trafficking survivors, also it is not its aim to accomplish that due to the methodology that was followed. Last, the sample of this study was selected based on some criteria in order to focus on the aim of the study. However, the criteria may have excluded other service providers and trafficking survivors taking part in the research.

### IV. RESULTS

From the interviews conducted with service providers, it was reflected that most of the human trafficking cases were referred from the cities. Also, from the interviews with service

providers, it was pointed out that the number of identified human trafficking cases was increasing. Based on the literature and service providers' statements, most of the identified trafficking victims are girls between the ages of 15 years to 24 years, and there are also cases of boys and men, however, such cases are less than those of girls and women. From the interviews with service providers and trafficking survivors, there is a tendency to traffic the victims nationally, considering that such a way is easier and cheaper. More to the point, it is crucial to regard that in the majority of human trafficking cases, the traffickers demonstrated a well understanding of the law and were part of well-established organised crime groups. Furthermore, based on the findings from the qualitative interviews with service providers and human trafficking survivors, a series of challenges in the service provision were identified. Also, during the interviews, from the service providers' point of view, an emphasis was given to the cooperation between non-governmental organisations and state service providers.

#### *A. Services Provided for Human Trafficking Survivors*

From the interviews conducted with human trafficking survivors and professionals who work with human trafficking victims, it was reflected that non-governmental organisations provide a full package of services during the rehabilitation process of trafficking victims. However, in the case of state shelter services, the focus was only on the rehabilitation process, accommodating the immediate needs of service users. An NGO case worker emphasised:

'We provide a wide range of services including accommodation, health services, legal support, socio-emotional support, and vocational training opportunities. The NGO shelter operates a 24-hour service, when we change shifts, we consult with each other in order to be aware of any possible health or emotional implications that survivors might face...(silence) the fear of coming to an unknown place, and the trauma, which follows them, haunts their hope towards the future' (Case Manager, 9 years' experience, NGO).

Furthermore, an increasing importance is given to the employment of trafficking survivors, from the perspective of NGOs, employment is crucial:

'For the trafficking victims located in the shelter, we provide housing, food, 24-hour care and security; there is the possibility as well of rented apartments. We provide family assistance, socio emotional support, legal, educational, health, and employment support. For example, we run a project providing paid internship opportunities. Also, we had cases where survivors were helped in order to open their own businesses' (Executive Vice Director, 15 years' experience, NGO).

Regarding the state-owned perspective, there is a different approach followed, a public shelter social worker reported that:

'We provide a multidisciplinary service, which includes accommodation in the shelter, a 24-hour service, nutrition plan, psychosocial, judicial and educational

support, and also, social activities held in the centre, based on the needs of the service users' (Social Worker, 3 years' experience, Public Shelter).

Another public shelter worker stated that the shelter provides rehabilitation services rather than reintegration ones, by mentioning that:

'The services vary, starting from accommodation, psychosocial support, security, work with the family for the rehabilitation process. We provide a private teacher that gives lessons inside the shelter' (Head of the Social Department, 9 years' experience, Public Shelter).

From the perspective of the service users, the information that derived from the survivors emphasised that the services received in the NGO shelter have helped them:

'I have two and a half years receiving services from the NGO. I have recently started working, and I moved into a rented apartment. I feel very calm. At first, I was closed to myself and I did not know what the shelter was about, here I learned for the first time what the shelter does. Then I went to school, I took English classes, and joined the self-defence course. I did the school in a private school because of security issues. I learned many other things I never knew, now I understand things better' (Survivor, 19 years old, NGO shelter).

In addition to the previous experience of a human trafficking survivor, another survivor stated:

'The person who trafficked me was my partner, even if the physical harm is now gone, I am bad emotionally, I am taking medications for this situation. Getting my children and staying away from the trafficker has helped me to gain the desire to live my life again. Also, the support here at the centre has impacted positively on me, but I still feel pain' (Survivor, 25 years old, NGO shelter).

Another survivor, shared during the interview that she has been trafficked by her partner as well, showcasing the experience of being used by the person trusted the most, she said that:

'The hardest moment for me was when I had to accept that the person who I trusted the most, was the one who ruined my life, he put me to the trafficking cycle and used me to make profits' (Survivor, 18 years old, NGO shelter).

#### *B. Services Not Provided for Trafficking Survivors and Needs That Are Not Being Met*

The socio-economic difficulties faced by trafficking survivors are considered as the main reasons to provide long-term support. Furthermore, the difficulties faced might lead to increased vulnerabilities and generate further pressure to trafficking survivors. Despite the ongoing efforts of the non-governmental organisations to provide a sustainable support, the government needs to intervene, especially when it comes to long-term approaches, as emphasised by an NGO case manager:

'The full package our shelter offers includes possibilities for employment and rent payment, but in a

long-term approach, the accommodation remains challenging. There are bonuses offered by the local authorities, but survivors need ongoing assistance. It is a long process that takes from three to six months. What happens during that period of six months, where will they live?' (Case Manager, 5 years' experience, NGO).

More to the point, as emphasised from the NGO shelters point of view, despite the free healthcare provided for trafficking survivors, no reimbursement is provided for the medicine expenses. Most of the survivors require specialised and expensive treatments:

'Even if the victims can access free healthcare, they are not in the group that gets reimbursed for the medicine. In terms of the vocational training provided by the state, it is not enough and neither sustainable enough to equip them with the necessary skills' (Executive Vice Director, 15 years' experience, NGO).

From another point of view, the state owned shelter does not offer reintegration services, is focused on the rehabilitation process. All the services provided are located in the shelter due to security reasons and ethical implications that might arise if the location of the shelter is known by the public:

'There is a difference in the services a public shelter provides, we provide rehabilitation services that are more linked to the immediate needs of the service users, some non-governmental organisations have more oriented services towards the reintegration process' (Social Worker, Public Shelter, 3 years' experience).

As emphasised by another public shelter representative, in some occasions in which the shelter cannot handle trafficking cases they refer them to NGOs:

'There are cases where we cannot help; such cases are referred to organisations that provide reintegration services' (Head of the Social Department, 9 years' experience, Public Shelter).

#### *C.Role of Survivors' Family, Friends and Religious Contacts in Their Reintegration Process*

The fear that survivors have related to the judgment they might face by their families, friends and communities, remains as the main obstacle in the process of reintegration. Non-governmental organisations have strived to change the verdict through awareness campaigns, open gatherings with local communities, and schools. An NGO case manager who has been working with trafficking survivors emphasised that in most of the cases, survivors can contact their families, but a procedure needs to be followed before:

'We assess the family network before we reconnect survivors with their families, we follow a pre-evaluation process before setting contacts, in most of the cases their families are vulnerable to support them, but even in cases when their families had financial ability, they were not able to cope with the health implications of the survivors, some parents commented "I do not know how to take care of her, what she needs, and if I can help"... It is important to have people caring and waiting for them to go back home' (Case manager, 5 years' experience,

NGO).

Nevertheless, prejudices and stigma are not present in all the cases, families of survivors in some cases have been supportive, as mentioned by an NGO case manager that has been with human trafficking victims for more than eight years:

'In some cases, survivors achieved to attend school and connect with their classmates; sometimes they gather together and have lunch when they finish classes. This helps them to feel connected and engaged' (Case manager, 9 years' experience, NGO).

In cases where trafficking survivors choose to live with their families, there is support available for their families as well, in order to help the socio-economic situation of the family, as emphasised by the Executive Vice Director of an NGO:

'When survivors prefer to live with their families, we help their families as well, through vocational training and assistance for employment' (Executive Vice Director, 15 years' experience, NGO).

However, in the public shelter there is a stricter procedure that needs to be followed for trafficking victims to meet their families:

'The biggest amount of our cases had contact with their families, we had as well cases where the victims were reintegrated in the family. The victims contact twice per month with their families and they meet once per month in the police centre' (Head of the Social Department, 9 years' experience, Public Shelter).

State-owned shelters are not focused in the relationship between the trafficking victim and their family. The rehabilitation plan is more based on the service user, and the process that the service user goes through at the beginning of the rehabilitation:

'There is a complex situation when we consider the impact of the family because of the background and socioeconomic status of the families, which makes it impossible to support the victims after the rehabilitation process' (Social Worker, 3 years' experience, Public Shelter).

The statements that derived from the interviews with the service providers were emphasised from the survivors as well, related to the relationship with their families, a survivor emphasised that:

'I meet my mother occasionally, but I speak often to her; I went to the house and visited her. Only mom supported me, while my father did not. During this time that I am receiving services, my father seems to be distant from me. I never had him by my side, he was always cold and never embraced me' (Survivor, 19 years old, NGO shelter)

The aspect of the relationship that the interviewed trafficking survivors had with their fathers was weak and not consistent. Such a finding lies in the role of a father who is traditional and absent from his child as a result of the mentality and cultural norms. These elements make it difficult for the father to accept his child and the experience that his child has been through. In most of the cases, trafficking

survivors stated that their parents spent little time in the education of them, and did not invest in their future and wellbeing. More to the point, another interviewed survivor emphasised that contacts were kept only with the mother because the father of the family was being distant:

‘I have spoken only with my mother after 10 years of no contact at all; she lives in another country and I cannot meet her, and I tried to contact my father and brother as well but they do not respond to my calls’ (Survivor, 25 years old, NGO shelter).

As emphasised by another NGO shelter survivor, despite the willingness to visit home, the family did not accept the survivor:

‘I have just contacted my mother, I asked her to allow me to go and visit home but she used some excuses and did not allow me to visit them; the only thing I need is just to talk to her’ (Survivor, 18 years old, NGO shelter).

#### *D. Impact of Service Providers on the Reintegration Process of Trafficking Survivors*

Trafficking survivors might struggle to seek public services as emphasised in the interviews with survivors and service providers. A variety of barriers have arisen in cooperation with state service providers when survivors were referred to seek help from their offices. The feelings of survivors are sensitive due to the difficulty that the reintegration process had an impact that service providers have on their journey. Some of the survivors stated that in certain situations, there was a need for more cooperation:

‘Several issues need to be considered related to the police, it is important that police officers reflect on their behaviour. Also, health service providers lack appropriate training related to ethical issues. Survivors face difficulties when they access public services, they often feel that they are being prejudiced and treated differently’ (Case Manager, 5 years’ experience, NGO).

Among the interviews conducted with professionals that assist in the reintegration process of survivors, a common issue was raised related to the public services provided:

‘We face with different cases, however, the police need to be more observant and monitor cases of trafficking to not end up being negligent. Also, there is a need to train and equip them with knowledge regarding the special needs of survivors’ (Case Manager, 9 years’ experience, NGO).

The collaboration among different institutions and the process of referrals is considered highly important from the NGOs point of view. It is not only helpful for the identification, but it also, consists in a better and more solid reintegration process of the survivors:

‘We collaborate mostly with the Ministry of Internal Affairs; we have referrals from the police, from other organisations who offer social services, and from the state shelter as well. Also, we had some cases referred by religious organisations, their support is crucial for both the identification and reintegration process’ (Executive Vice Director, 15 years’ experience, NGO).

Nevertheless, as emphasised by the healthcare shadow report submitted to the United Nation’s Committee on the Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, human trafficking victims face difficulties to access mental health services regardless of what is provided in the legal framework. Some of the barriers stated in the report reflected both the need of improvement and review of the legal framework in relation to sexual and reproductive health, screening and preventative examinations related to pregnancy and mental health, in order to provide comprehensive services [36]. From the perspective of the survivors, the services provided to them are crucial for their reintegration process, a survivor during the interview emphasised:

‘The staff have given me much respect; I was a rebel type, not easy to deal with. They have never been angry with me; the staff supported me in my hardest times. “I say to myself that I wish I could have been here years before”, how good it would have been’. (Survivor, 19 years old, NGO shelter).

More to the point, another survivor stated that:

‘There is a need for more services, but the shelter had showed care and they have been trying hard to accomplish my needs, also, they are always there to give me a helping hand whenever I need it’ (Survivor, 25 years old, NGO shelter).

In terms of service quality, a trafficking survivor noted that she had used a variety of reintegration services provided by the NGO:

‘I have received support for employment and joined some trainings and activities related to that, the services that I have received have impacted me positively’ (Survivor, 18 years old, NGO shelter).

#### *E. Barriers and Challenges Faced When Caring for Trafficking Survivors*

From the findings derived from the interviews, a variety of challenges and barriers have been identified from the service provision perspective. The issues raised by the service providers were not only related to the target group, but also to the public service providers, as emphasised by an NGO case manager:

‘A small number of courses are provided by the public institutions. There is a huge difference that such courses can make to the survivors. Most of the cases we have in the centre never went to school, they cannot read nor write; this needs a specific intervention and support in order to achieve effective outcomes. Lack of trust is a barrier, especially the discrimination they face from society’ (Case Manager, 5 years’ experience, NGO).

Another issue raised from NGO case managers who are involved in the provision of reintegration services for survivors, was the availability of the employment officers to provide relevant and appropriate job offers:

‘Employment offices, provide offers which seem irrelevant to the needs and skills of the survivors. Some jobs cannot be taken by the survivors due to their trauma. The employment process is difficult, they might stay



employed for up to two months and then leave. However, this year we had cases that have lasted up to six months' (Case Manager, 9 years' experience, NGO)

On the other side, the state shelter is facing with challenges related to the confidentiality of their services. Such restrictions lead to a limited provision of services in the shelter:

'The complexity of the needs that some of the service users might have, also, the confidential element of our service, makes it hard to provide a variety of services, because they have to be provided inside the institution. Also, the strict procedures limit some of the planned activities to be held in the shelter' (Social Worker, 3 years' experience, Public Shelter).

From the perspective of the challenges that arise from the emotional situation of trafficking survivors, several aspects persist during the reintegration process:

'Trafficking victims' exposure to non-hygiene working condition in the past, sexually transmitted infections and trauma from the violence and emotional torture caused by the traffickers remain challenging, the risk they carry when they take the decision to denounce their trafficker is high as well' (Executive Vice Director, 15 years' experience, NGO).

A representative from the public shelter, which provides rehabilitation services for trafficking survivors stated that:

'The long-term aspect of the service provision is critical. Housing, employment and reintegration in the community are issues that we struggle with' (Head of the Social Department, 9 years' experience, Public Shelter).

The fear of going through the trafficking cycle once again was a crucial challenge, a survivor emphasised that:

'Mom went to the police and made the accusation. Mom and the police made the decision for me to come to the organisation because they were afraid that I would consume drugs again and risk my life. The person who trafficked me has threatened me, even in court' (Survivor, 19 years old, NGO shelter).

Another aspect mentioned by a trafficking survivor was the courage to seek for help, as mentioned by the survivor is important when in need to approach the responsible institutions and NGOs:

'Whoever has faced or is facing what I have been through, they have to go and seek help; the fear will end and they will find their way back to their lives. I did not know that services for my situation existed' (Survivor, 18 years old, NGO shelter).

#### *F. Advocating for Anti-Trafficking Policies and Cooperation with the Government*

Service providers from non-governmental organisations have been involved in different campaigns also; they have been advocating for anti-trafficking policies and reintegration programmes. However, they claim that initiating campaigns takes time and human resources:

'The free healthcare policy for trafficking survivors was an outcome of anti-trafficking advocating campaigns. Our organisation continuously advocates to

increase the services and their quality as well. Recently, we have opened four aftercare services for trafficking survivors who work and have children as well. Last year, we had a campaign from the survivors themselves that aimed to raise awareness and give hope to those who might be in the same situation but are afraid to seek help. Even for me as a professional, I can see changes in the way I approach each case. However, collaboration with government has to increase, especially for the housing and employment of survivors (Case Manager, 9 years' experience, NGO).

From the NGO professionals' perspective, to advocate and seek for improvement, it is a stepping stone to the improvement of the reintegration process, as expressed by an NGO case manager:

'We have been advocating constantly for long-term accommodation solutions from the government and for ongoing socio-emotional support. Cooperation with the government is not strong at the moment, further training and awareness needs to be undertaken for public service providers. We had a case with different mental health problems, and from a retrospective point of view, the changes she has undergone made a significant difference, despite the time it takes, the changes can be seen, it is worth keep working on' (Case Manager, 5 years' experience, NGO).

Another issue emphasised from an NGO executive vice director is the initiation of action plans and strategies towards anti-trafficking and reintegration, considering the socio-economic elements of the reintegration process:

'Human trafficking is a phenomenon that changes year by year. Legislation, strategies and action plans that focus on the protection aspect of the victim have changed, and we have been continuously advocating for changes to improve trafficking in human beings rehabilitation and reintegration process' (Executive Vice Director, 15 years' experience, NGO).

From the perspective of a public shelter service provider, a multidimensional approach is important:

'The focus towards the system of support in terms of the process which comes after the rehabilitation requires improvement. The main element of such activity is the aspect of support, a multidimensional system with the family and institutions that provide services, also, a better execution of employment services followed by an ongoing monitoring process' (Head of the Social Department, 9 years' experience, Public Shelter).

From another point of view, when trafficking survivors were asked about their aspirations in the future, a survivor stated:

'I want to be a police officer. I have graduated from high school and now I want to enter the academy and become a police officer' (Survivor, 19 years old, NGO shelter).

Another trafficking survivor wished to move into a rented apartment and improve her general health condition:

'Getting a job and improving my health is what I want

right now, I wish I could soon move to a rented apartment and count on myself; I dream of being independent' (Survivor, 25 years old, NGO shelter).

From the interviews conducted with human trafficking survivors, the perspective towards the future was positive. The majority of the interviewed survivors were looking forward to becoming employed and being independent. As way of an example, a trafficking survivor emphasised:

'My aspiration is to graduate from school, find a sustainable job and...(silence) why not? I want to have a child as well' (Survivor, 25 years old, NGO shelter).

#### V.CONCLUSION

During the last 10 years, Albania had experienced a series of changes in the reintegration process of human trafficking survivors. Nevertheless, the execution of an effective long-term initiative has not yet been implemented. Research in the area of human trafficking lacks in-depth studies, which would have supported to design policies and programs that target the needs of trafficking victims and combat human trafficking as well. In order to deal with the reintegration process of survivors, governmental and non-governmental organisations do not only need to raise awareness, but also, work with the public sector and key institutions to strengthen their knowledge and skills. It is, therefore, crucial to mention that trafficking victims cannot be defended and survivors cannot follow a solid and consistent reintegration process unless institutions and key contacts are aware of and familiar with the complex situation. Based on the results derived from the semi-structured qualitative interviews with trafficking survivors and service providers, they emphasised the existence of a high number of minor cases in both state and non-governmental organisations shelters. As indicated by the service providers, the number of minor cases has been increasing year by year, especially for victims between the age of 14 to 15 years.

Related to the social environment and family relationships, cases of families who do not accept their daughters or sons who have been victims of trafficking have increased. Such cases might be associated with the stigma and discrimination faced in the community or because of economic problems. Especially when referring to fathers of trafficking survivors, the stigma and prejudices, accompanied by poor education, encourage the distant relationship between the father and his trafficking child. During the interviewing process, service providers reinforced the statement that in most of the cases, the background of trafficking survivors' families is economically weak. Furthermore, in some cases, service providers claimed that those who have faced human trafficking have suffered from domestic violence in the family, including cases of incest and sexual violence. The past experiences of human trafficking survivors have resulted in trauma and serious mental health problems to them. Lack of support from their families and communities remains a crucial aspect that slows down the process of reintegration and sets invisible barriers that service providers perceive difficult and complex to deal with. Nevertheless, the role of family and social network is crucial. The survivors' healthy relationship

with their families is highly important in order to follow successfully the process of reintegration. As mentioned by the case managers, having contacts with their families motivates them to recover, since they know that they have somewhere to go back to at the end of their healing process.

Based on the findings of this paper, case managers were responsible to undertake a pre-evaluation process of the family when asked to connect trafficking survivors with their families. As mentioned by previous studies, caseworkers can assist victims in talking to their families and seeking family support where appropriate. More to the point, different types of relationships result in different types of challenges in the service provision [37]. The literature on the reintegration of other stigmatised groups shows the same patterns. In a study of recovering drug addicts, it was found that while families and spouses had considerable potential for easing the transition back into society, they could have a negative influence if not guided and supported properly [38]. Among the mentioned problems and challenges faced by case managers who work with trafficking survivors, were the lack of trained staff and funds.

In terms of the identification of trafficking victims, most of the cases were referred from different cities also, from neighbouring border crossing points. Despite the services available for the survivors of human trafficking, several constraints emerge related to the accessibility of such services. Also, trafficking survivors tend to lack the knowledge to access services without the legal and financial assistance of governmental authorities or non-profit organisations. Also, cooperation between institutions is crucial in order to achieve effective outcomes and to provide a sustainable reintegration. As emphasised by the International Organisation for Migration Report in 2014, the implementation of monitoring and enforcing mechanisms lack cooperation. While numerous regional and bilateral counter-trafficking agreements exist, many are not operational, leaving the relevant actors to rely on informal networks to coordinate cross-border responses to trafficking [39].

Therefore, the government needs to increase efforts and to get involved in awareness campaigns, to ensure that professionals involved in the provision of services to survivors will have adequate knowledge in the context of human trafficking. Related to the reintegration process of human trafficking survivors, based on the interviews conducted with service providers, there is a range of services provided, mainly by non-governmental organisations. However, in terms of long-term responses, the capacities are not enough in order to meet all the needs. More to the point, the role of case managers is crucial in the reintegration process. The support which case managers provide is not limited only to the services located in the shelter. However, from the service providers' reflections, there are also, cases of stigma and prejudice identified in the service provision. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that trafficking survivors have adequate access to social services without having to go through additional barriers of discrimination and prejudice from the service providers [40]. Lastly, it remains essential to

emphasise that empowerment of governmental and non-governmental service providers working with trafficking survivors, supports the establishment of a more effective identification, prevention, and reintegration process.

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