'VULNERABILITY' TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING:
A STUDY OF VIET NAM, ALBANIA, NIGERIA AND THE UK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report of Shared Learning Event held in Tirana, Albania: 24-26 October 2017
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the first stages of an ethically-led, two-year research study into understanding the causes, dynamics and 'vulnerabilities' to and resilience against human trafficking in three source countries– Albania, Viet Nam and Nigeria – plus the support needs of people from these countries who have experienced trafficking when identified as potential 'victims' of trafficking in the UK. These countries have consistently been the top three countries for referrals of potentially trafficked persons into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) within the UK.

This study has been conducted in partnership between the University of Bedfordshire and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The research study uses an IOM Determinants of Vulnerability model in its examination and analysis of vulnerabilities to and resilience against human trafficking. This model identifies risk and protective factors for vulnerable migrants across five different levels – individual, household and family, community, structural and situational.

The focus of this report is on Albania, detailing knowledge, learning and emerging themes following a Shared Learning Event (SLE) held in Tirana, Albania, that took place between 24 and 26 October 2017.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1. Explore socio-economic and political conditions plus other contextual factors that create 'vulnerability' or enable resilience to human trafficking in Albania, Viet Nam and Nigeria
2. Utilise and refine the IOM Determinants of Vulnerability model
3. Outline routes taken from Albania, Viet Nam and Nigeria to the UK
4. Review existing academic and 'grey' literature on trafficking within and from Albania, Viet Nam and Nigeria
5. Explore the support needs of people who have experienced trafficking from Albania, Viet Nam and Nigeria and have arrived into the UK

STUDY APPROACH

This study is mainly qualitative in its approach with the intention of drawing out the complexities and nuances of human trafficking from Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria. In each of these countries, and the UK, a minimum of 40 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants and adults who have experienced human trafficking. These will be supplemented by available quantitative data from IOM's centrally and locally held databases on trafficking and data held by partners working alongside IOM. Ethical considerations remain paramount throughout this study, from the design stage through to dissemination. An Ethical Protocol has been drawn up and continues to evolve alongside the research.

SHARED LEARNING EVENTS

Prior to commencing the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study, Shared Learning Events (SLEs) were held in each country as the first step in ascertaining what is already known about trafficking and contextually-based considerations for conducting research on this topic.

The focus of this report is on the Albanian SLE held in Tirana, Albania, between 24 and 26 October 2017. Thirty-three stakeholders from civil society organisations and government agencies, such as law-enforcement, children services, and health services participated in the first day of the SLE. These stakeholders were invited to provide presentations addressing the key research aims and questions, helping to ensure that local knowledge was incorporated into the research study at an early stage. These presentations considered the picture of human trafficking within Albania, patterns of human trafficking from Albania to the UK and factors that shape 'vulnerability' to trafficking. During the second and third days, a smaller group of stakeholders were invited to discuss research design, methodologies, ethical protocols for conducting the research and the design of interview schedules to be used for data collection with the UK and Albania research team.

ALBANIAN CONTEXT

With a current population of around 2.9 million, there are numerous historical and structural factors that impact on Albania's socio-economic development. Up to the early 1990s, emigration from Albania was banned during 45 years of communist rule and internal movement was tightly controlled. Post-communism, the collapse of a pyramid savings scheme in 1997 and the movement of people following the armed conflict in Kosovo have each resulted in people leaving Albania through multiple means. Human trafficking is part of this mobility, becoming a criminal act in Albania from 2001.

This report details these historical, structural and situational factors relating to Albania's transition from a centrally-planned to market economy and how these relate to migration and, more specifically, human trafficking. To do this a timeline of key political events plus events relating human trafficking has been compiled, with input from the thirty-three participants attending the SLE. This historical and contextual knowledge will now inform remaining fieldwork and analysis.

INDICATIVE KEY THEMES AND LEARNING
ARISING OUT OF ALBANIAN SHARED LEARNING EVENT

At this early stage of the research, a range of key themes and learning points emerged out of the Albanian SLE and these preliminary themes will now help shape the subsequent research. This intentionally descriptive report provides the first interim report for the study, relating solely to Albania, which will be followed up with a final report addressing research aims across all three source countries in early 2019.

Issues arose around five key areas – risks and vulnerabilities; forms of exploitation; support services; the extent, nature and impact of stigma and discrimination against victims of trafficking; and, issues related to data protection plus the collection and recording of data on human trafficking.

The first of these – risks and vulnerabilities – included discussion of:

The causes or drivers of human trafficking appeared to be broad, multiple and overlapping. Stakeholders highlighted multiple vulnerabilities to trafficking in Albania across the different levels of the Determinants of Vulnerability model. These included poverty, other economic factors, low levels of education, mental health issues, forced marriage arrangements and limited options for safe and legal migration.

Gender imbalances within the society were outlined as a key factor for understanding trafficking within Albania. Domestic, intimate partner and sexual violence were highlighted. It was suggested that the National Actions Plans for these forms of abuse should be linked to human trafficking Action Plans in a more coherent way. There is a potential risk factor of being a woman at the individual level which is a consequence of these gender imbalances. This can also arise from household / family and community level imbalances which are reinforced or at least unresolved at the structural level.

Recruitment methods were varied, ever changing and related to close personal and family ties. It was considered that the use of social media was a key recruitment method for trafficking alongside previous recruitment methods within close family or close social ties. There are both risk and protective factors at the household and family level and the community level.

Post-1991 migration and human trafficking are intrinsically linked to the 'transition' from a centralized state-led economy to a market economy. The transition from communist rule, where emigration was banned in Albania and internal mobility tightly controlled to market economy structures has enabled peaks of emigration in response to political and economic events. During this period new routes for migration were established and an Albanian diaspora emerged. This transition appears to be a cause of vulnerability to human trafficking at a structural level.

'Hope' and being willing to take 'risks' to find better economic and social circumstances are key factors relating to migration and human trafficking within Albania. The economies of shortage in the early 1990s and lack of hope for better futures were an intrinsic part of migration during that time.

An extensive range of places of origin were discussed. Participants in the SLEs discussed known cases of human trafficking from across Albania. Further work to establish the locations and places of origin of trafficking cases reaching the UK is necessary.

There is an implementation gap between a strong legislative and policy framework in Albania with practice in reality. Stakeholders at the SLE highlighted high level political commitment to responding to human trafficking in Albania, evidenced by the adoption of a number of policy and legislative measure but there was a feeling that these are not being fully implemented in practice.

Secondly, forms of exploitation included:

The forms of exploitation are multiple. Alongside sexual exploitation as a key purpose of trafficking for adults, other forms included forced labour (in businesses or within families), forced marriages, petty criminality or enforced criminality and work on cannabis production. For children sexual exploitation, forced begging, early marriages and enforced criminality were considered the main forms. For both adults and children, multiple forms of exploitation were outlined as common but under-researched.

Thirdly, issues around support services included:

There is little understanding or support for men and boys who have experienced trafficking. The focus of support for women and children was apparent from discussions and there is a gap in understanding about the causes of trafficking of males or their support needs.

Other support needs were identified such as insufficient financial support for individuals and a lack of access to justice. The provision of low levels of financial aid to assist victims of trafficking was outlined as an issue, as was the lack of access to free legal aid and access to justice mechanisms, considered vital but missing from current provision.

There is a gap between the number of Albanian nationals referred into the UK NRM and the numbers of people accessing support service for trafficked persons in Albania. The difference between the numbers of people referred into the UK NRM and the numbers of people identified as victims of trafficking or potential victims of trafficking within Albania was great. There is a need for further research into the reasons for such differences and potential challenges for reintegration and identification of people returning from the UK to Albania.

The fourth of these – the extent, nature and impact of stigma and discrimination against victims of trafficking – related to:

Social stigma and discrimination as a direct result of human trafficking was discussed at length and considered to be a key issues in support. These discussions centred around those who had been identified as trafficked as well as those who worked with them and access to accommodation and health services. Discriminatory labels in official or media accounts were outlined as common. Stigma and discrimination was also reported to be a key issue for the children of those who had experienced trafficking. Rejection by family members was considered a common response to people who had experienced trafficking first hand.

Finally, issues around data included:

Statistics on trafficking could be improved. Although statistics were available from different agencies, further work to centralize and improve these would be beneficial, including recording exploitation type. The available data on trafficking within Albania does not provide a clear picture of the nature and trends of trafficking, nor does it assist in understanding what makes people vulnerable to trafficking. The underlying data in Albania requires further work in two key respects – recording of exploitation type in national statistics and a mechanism to compare cases and statistics recorded with those from other sources such as shelters. The available NRM data on trafficking of Albanian nationals to the UK only focusses on referrals, with no disaggregated data provided for people officially identified as trafficked in the UK in terms of their gender, exploitation type or place of origin.

Data protection, confidentiality and anonymity were under-regarded in practice.

It appears that there is little emphasis given to data protection, confidentiality and anonymity for people who have experienced trafficking across a broad range of sectors within Albania, including within media reports. This is particularly important given historic disregard for data protection and associated principles as well as the geographic and context-specific considerations of a closely connected population within Albania.

Overall, it appeared that among the stakeholders who attended the SLE, there was less knowledge of trafficking from Albania to the UK and less experience of working with people who have been trafficked to the UK than knowledge and experience of trafficking within the region. The primary knowledge and experience discussed was on trafficking within the Balkan region and some other European countries such as Greece and Italy which appeared to be of greater interest and concern to stakeholders within Albania. This will be a key consideration during purposive sampling for this study.

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