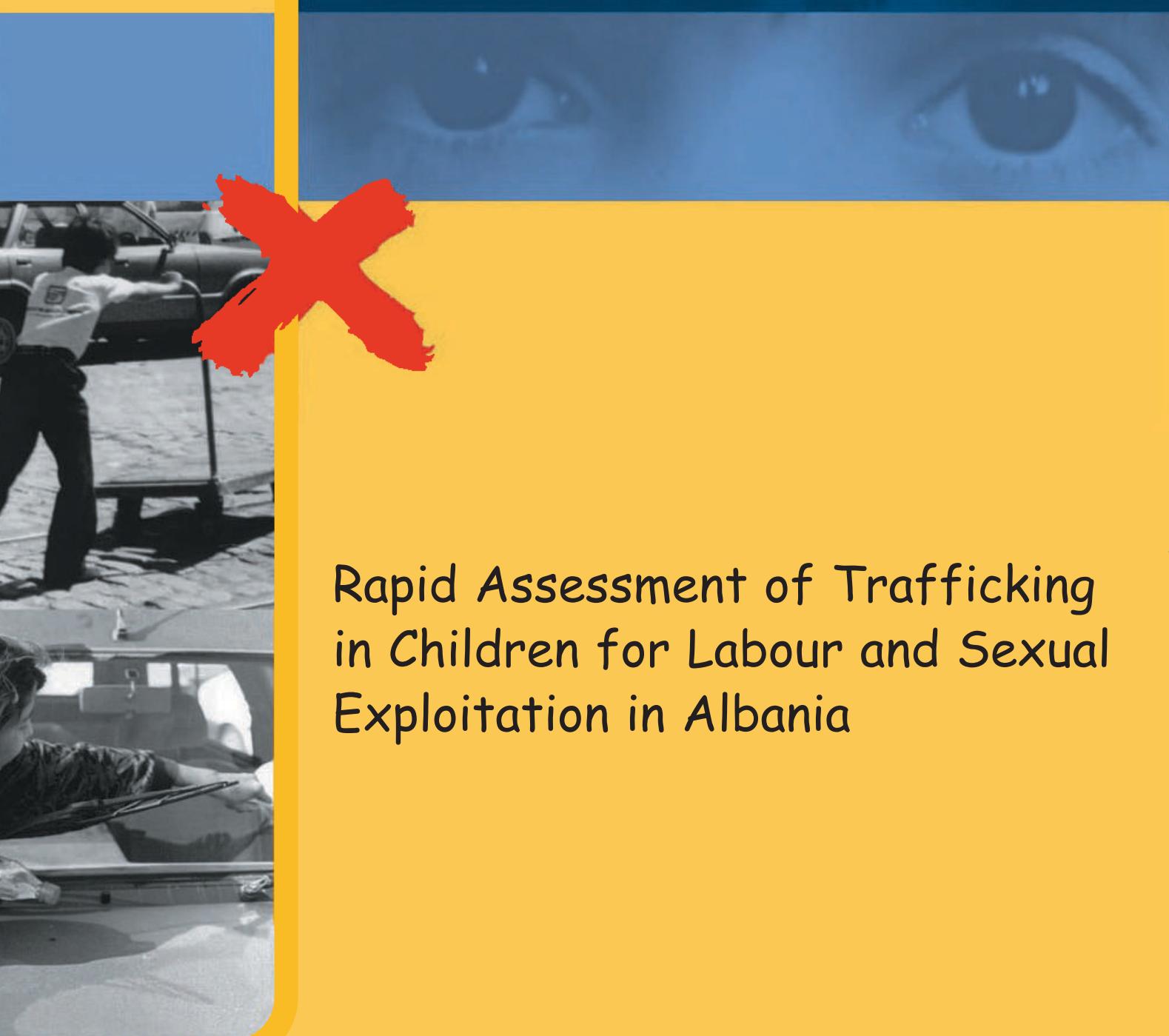


PROject of Technical assistance against the Labour  
and Sexual Exploitation of Children, including Trafficking,  
in countries of Central and Eastern Europe

**PROTECT CEE**



## Rapid Assessment of Trafficking in Children for Labour and Sexual Exploitation in Albania

**2003**

**IPEC**  
International  
Programme on  
the Elimination  
of Child Labour

# Rapid Assessment of Trafficking in Children for Labour and Sexual Exploitation in Albania

Prepared by INSTAT, Tirana

Under technical supervision of FAFO Institute for Applied International Studies, Norway

for the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)  
of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

Tirana 2003



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS  
REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA



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## **Foreword**

Unacceptable forms of child labour persist and affect the lives of many millions of children. Some of those practices are particularly difficult to research due to their hidden, sometimes illegal or even criminal nature. Slavery-like conditions, debt bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in the drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work are defined as worst forms of child labour.

Promoting the Convention (No. 182) concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, is a high priority for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Recommendation (No. 190, paragraph 5) accompanying the Convention states that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms as a matter of urgency.” Although there is a body of knowledge, data and documentation on child labour, there are also still considerable gaps in understanding the variety of forms and conditions in which children work. This is especially true for some of the worst forms of child labour such as trafficking of children, which by their very nature often are hidden from public view and scrutiny.



Against this background, the ILO through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) launched a process in 2002 to investigate the trafficking of children for labour and sexual purposes in four selected countries of Eastern Europe: Albania, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. In collaboration with the FAFO Institute for Applied Social Sciences, Norway, a research methodology manual was developed and research institutions in each of the concerned countries contracted and trained. Through the collection and analysis of primary data as well as secondary data in each country, substantive information was compiled on the specific features of the trafficking dynamics and the consequences for the lives of many girls and boys.

To the partners and IPEC colleagues who contributed through their individual and collective efforts to the realisation of this report, I should like to express our gratitude. The responsibility for opinions expressed in this publication rests solely with the authors and does not imply endorsement by the ILO.

The wealth of information contained in these reports on the situation of the girls and boys trafficked for labour or sexual exploitation within the countries concerned and across their borders will surely contribute to a deeper understanding and a sharper focus on the challenges that lie ahead. Most importantly, we hope that the studies will guide policy makers, community leaders, and practitioners to address the problem of child trafficking with determination. And help them put an end to this grave injustice that shatters children’s lives.

**Frans Röselaers**

Director

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

International Labour Office

Geneva, 2004



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As a country in transition, from a central economy typical of the communist era to the free market economy demanded by structural adjustment, Albania has experienced huge political, economic and social transformations since the mid-nineties and has faced a number of challenges never experienced before, such as extreme unemployment and lack of job opportunities, decreased access to basic social services including education and health, and massive migration flows.

Among these challenges, one that deserves special attention is child trafficking, unknown until 1990 because extreme isolation made impossible any international exchange. Evidence shows that, after 1990, girls especially  trafficked from Albania to European countries for exploitation; between 1992 and 2002, an estimated 4,000 children were trafficked, mostly from Gypsy families.

Child trafficking emerged in most Eastern European countries in the closing decade of the twentieth century and today has taken on the shape of the market economy, characterized by supply and demand, profits and constraints.

Responding to this challenge, the International Labour Organization (ILO) through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and in collaboration with other relevant ILO departments (DECLARATION and MIGRANT), launched a subregional programme entitled 'Prevention and Reintegration Programme to Combat Trafficking of Children for Labour and Sexual Exploitation in the Balkans and Ukraine', focusing on Albania, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. The programme comprises preparation of a strategy for action document based on a comprehensive situation analysis developed through Rapid Assessment surveys; and the implementation of a comprehensive programme for prevention of child trafficking and reintegration of victims. The present study was carried out as part of the first component of this programme.

The study was undertaken using Rapid Assessment methodology as described in the *Manual for Rapid Assessment on Trafficking in Children for Labour and Sexual Exploitation* prepared by the FAFO Institute for Applied International Studies. Standardized information from questionnaires, qualitative information from semi-structured interviews and existing information were the main research tools used. Children who had been trafficked and released, and children who had never been trafficked, completed 83 questionnaires. In addition, 63 semi-structured interviews were done with children released from trafficking, children who had never been trafficked, parents of trafficked and never-trafficked children, and key informants. Twelve group discussions were held in Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan and Korça, the cities chosen for the Rapid Assessment. Girls exploited in prostitution were especially difficult to reach. Access to trafficking victims became more difficult as children were identified but then often re-trafficked or moved across borders illegally.

The Rapid Assessment survey focused on identifying push and pull factors influencing child trafficking; sketching profiles for different categories of children who had been trafficked or risk being trafficked; detailing the trafficking process and ways of exploiting children. This was partly achieved by drawing up a picture of the daily life of trafficked children: the work they have to do, the control exerted by traffickers, the ways in which children exit the trafficking net and the process of rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who have exited trafficking.

The study results are provided alongside an overview of the legislative and action framework that exists to combat trafficking: Albanian legislation on trafficking with a focus on children, current government and non-government policies addressing child trafficking, and related institutions concerned with implementation of anti-trafficking policies are surveyed in this report. The study also presents first-hand and related accounts of the experiences of trafficked children.

Analysis of the institutional and legal framework shows that Albania has made significant progress in raising public awareness and encouraging policy makers to consider child trafficking as an important issue. The Albanian Government in 2001 adopted a National Strategy for the Fight against Trafficking. This includes a National Plan of Action that outlines concrete steps to be taken against

trafficking and allocates responsibility for these to various institutions. The government has put trafficking high on its political agenda. A National Steering Committee on Child Labour, chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, was established in November 2001 and is fully operational. A National Strategy for Children was approved in 2001, and defines the strategic objectives of Albanian Government policy on children and the main areas of work for all institutions regarding child development and protection.

Despite these concrete steps, there has been no dramatic fall in the number of trafficked children and the problem of child trafficking is still a long way from being solved. The main push factors influencing child trafficking continue to prevail in Albania: poverty and the desire to earn a living, parental unemployment, dysfunctional families, domestic violence, low education levels of parents and children, lack of hope within the country, inadequate legislation and/or difficulties in its enforcement.

Among the main pull factors influencing child trafficking is the widely held belief that a better life is to be had 'abroad'.

The study draws up a profile of trafficked children and children at risk of being trafficked. It shows that boys between the ages of 11 and 16 are most likely to have been trafficked or to be at risk, and that most of these children will have worked before the trafficking incident, often on the streets. When trafficked, most of the children trafficked within and especially outside Albania live with friends who accompanied them when they left home.

The family backgrounds of these children indicate why they are so vulnerable. In general, they come from families where the parents do not have even a minimal education, and are divorced and/or remarried. The families live in poor conditions; large extended families live together and the households are characterized by social problems such as alcoholism, health problems, or domestic violence.

In the majority of instances, the parents and the traffickers were involved in recruiting the children. Traffickers are in almost all the cases responsible for transporting the child from the country of origin to the destination country. In 90 per cent of the cases of children interviewed for the study, there was an agreement with a family member of the child.

Parents interviewed often said they hoped that their children would earn some income for the family. It should be noted that frequently parents were not aware of the difficulties and challenges that their children would face.

The preferred country for traffickers is Greece: this is because it is easier to cross the border, inexpensive and, in most cases, there is no need to prepare documents for the child; the greatest expense is for travel costs to the border. Trafficking to Italy is more difficult: the traffickers accompany the children from their home to the destination. This is because generally the family of the child knows the trafficker and, because of this link, the trafficker is obliged to keep promises to deliver the child to a place of work. There are very few cases where the trafficker accompanies the child just to the border and another person takes over there.

Trafficked children are engaged in a range of activities that have proven profitable for traffickers. The majority of the children interviewed were engaged in begging and hawking on the streets in Greece. Some children were involved in illegal activities such as theft; a smaller number were involved with drugs. Other children were variously exploited in agriculture, as waiters, running games of luck (boys only), housework, street-based car washing (girls and boys) and other such activities. Only 17 per cent of those interviewed said they had been involved in sexual services (girls); these children were particularly difficult to reach.

The average working day is 10-12 hours long. Children involved in sexual services, drug dealing, or working as waiters or thieves, worked at night. Trafficked children live under arduous conditions:

these children are considered merely tools for profit; they are generally given only minimal food and lodging. There are no social, entertainment, schooling or training activities in their lives. No gift or positive reinforcement is given for the work they do, no matter how challenging.

Most of the children released from trafficking were returned home by the police after they were caught. Others found ways to escape; a few were helped to exit trafficking. Most of children released from trafficking continued to work in the streets after they returned home.

The profits of child labour are under total control of the bosses. A large number of children did not receive everything their ‘contracts’ had promised: food, lodging and clothes. Some of the children said they had to sleep in tents in very rough conditions. Control is an important element in the life and work of trafficked children. The level of control largely depends on the type of work and the working conditions of the child: whether they are out in the open, on the street or in closed quarters; the way things have been forced upon them or deals made; and the child’s age or sex.

In group discussions with the parents of trafficked and released children, it became clear that, despite money earned from their children’s exploitation, the family’s economic situation had not improved. In general, the parents of released children find it difficult to fully understand the trauma their child has suffered, because of their lack of education and information. Parents can more easily identify physical injury or health problems and for this reason the psycho-emotional damage caused by trafficking experiences may become lasting because it goes untreated.

Existing programmatic responses towards child trafficking include prevention, protection, repatriation and reintegration. Prevention is mainly related to the further improvement of legislation and enforcement of existing laws, more opportunities for legal migration for employment or vocational training, support to family reunification for children with migrant parents, reinforcement of the borders to prevent illegal crossings and coordinated police operations with neighbouring countries, and public awareness campaigns.

Protection programmes are mainly related to improving the legal framework to establish criminal, civil and administrative liability for all those involved in child trafficking. Actions around repatriation are mainly related to establishing a legal framework and national benchmarks for the repatriation of trafficked children. Reintegration focuses mainly on creating new rehabilitation centres for repatriated children while strengthening existing ones, providing anti-trafficking training to NGOs and government agencies, coordinating and synchronizing donor activities to avoid overlap and ensure the sustainability of NGO activities, and supporting the efforts of NGOs with government policies and funding

To effectively combat trafficking in Albania, both governmental and non-governmental institutions need to enhance their capabilities. The strengthening of regional cooperation in order to obstruct trafficking routes is also vital.

## **1. CONTEXT TO THE TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN IN ALBANIA**

### **1.1 Transition and the emergence of child trafficking**

Albania emerged from seclusion in the early 1990s and over the succeeding decade experienced huge political, economic and social transformations. Throughout its transition, Albania faced a number of phenomena never experienced before, such as extreme unemployment and lack of job opportunities, decreased access to basic social services including education and health, and massive immigration and emigration and their consequences. Many Albanians responded to rising domestic unemployment by seeking work abroad; the number of emigrant workers increased from 110,000 in 1991 to 428,000 in 1996, while the domestic labour force declined from 1.57 million to 1.27 million over the same period. Under the pressure of such developments, families, particularly in rural and less developed areas, have faced considerable challenges.

It is important to emphasize that, apart from the difficulties of the transition phase, the Albanian family continues to maintain traditional values. Historically, Albanians have been distinguished for having stronger family relations than other neighbouring or European countries.<sup>1</sup> Parents are dedicated to their children's future. In almost every case the parents' decision to migrate is motivated by the desire to improve their child's prospects.

One challenge that deserves special attention is child trafficking, unknown in Albania until 1990 since extreme isolation made impossible any international involvement. Human trafficking is an especially pernicious form of criminal activity that has increased alarmingly in Europe since the mid-nineties. The trafficking of human beings is unacceptable; child trafficking is intolerable.

Trafficking in children is linked to the worst forms of child labour, as defined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182). The ILO views trafficking as an assault on human dignity, a denial of a person's opportunity to make the most of his or her resources and to contribute to the economic development of his or her nation. The exploitation suffered by victims of trafficking is contrary to "full, productive and freely chosen employment". This is particularly true for trafficked children, who often suffer the loss of their potential to become productive adults.

Evidence shows that after 1990 many young women and children were trafficked from Albania to European countries. The Ministry of Public Order reports that, between 1992 and 2002, an estimated 4,000 children were trafficked mainly to neighbouring countries for labour or sexual exploitation, for begging or into slavery.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs reported at least 6,000 Albanian children in Italian orphanages and between 1,000 and 2,000 in Greek orphanages.<sup>3</sup> Child trafficking in Albania appears to be mainly for the purposes of forced labour although there are reports of children being resold into prostitution and for organ harvesting.<sup>4</sup>

According to data collected and surveys done by state bodies and a number of NGOs active in combating trafficking in women, Albania is not only a country of origin but also a transit country for

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<sup>1</sup> This is noted in various studies and documents, notably that of Austrian researcher, F. Nopcsa, who visited Albania at the beginning of twentieth century and wrote, "Albanians love their children very much, being almost their slaves". Quoted in A. Luarasi, *Family relations*, (Tirana, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *National Anti-Trafficking Strategy for Albania*, (Tirana, December 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Presentation to the Governmental Conference on Trafficking: *All Together Against Child Trafficking*, (Tirana, November 2001).

<sup>4</sup> *Trafficking of human beings in Southeastern Europe*, Albania

women trafficked from Russia, Moldova, Rumania, Bulgaria and other countries. The complex and clandestine nature of such trafficking, however, makes it difficult to gather precise information. This makes it impossible to measure and quantify.

Trafficking of women and children in Albania remains a major problem and, as a lucrative activity, is unlikely to decrease or be defeated without enhanced international and national cooperation.

### *1.1.1 Migration*

A comparison of data for the periods 1979-1989 and 1989-2001 indicates a population decline of 3 per cent<sup>5</sup> caused by intensive emigration especially to Greece and Italy. The population density map has also changed significantly since 1989 when 45 per cent of the population lived in the northern and southern regions. Internal migration has concentrated the population in the central part of the country near the coast, with a notably lower concentration in the north and south. The high level of migration through the 1990s is characterized as huge, spontaneous and uncontrolled, causing serious economic and social problems.

This sometimes overwhelming movement of people upset the urban and environmental equilibrium and stretched public services beyond their limits. The prime motivations for such migration are poverty, limited work opportunities and difficult living conditions. There is clear evidence that the life of many migrants has not improved, but migrants continue to justify their decision to relocate on the basis that it is better to be poor in the big cities than in a remote location, because the chances of benefiting from health and education services are better.

### *1.1.2 Poverty and living standards*

Significant economic development disparities are clear in the different geographical areas. There is a high poverty profile in the country accompanied by significant regional disparities, which reveal a strong correlation between the level of unemployment and poverty.<sup>6</sup>

In 2001, 77.3 per cent of the labour force was employed and 50.5 per cent of the employed population was still working in agriculture.<sup>7</sup> An unemployment level of 22.7 per cent is one of the highest in the region and the situation is even worse in some districts,<sup>8</sup> where unemployment reaches more than 40 per cent.

The extent of poverty is also reflected in the number of families that receive social assistance. In 2003 there were 148,000 families under the social assistance scheme. High poverty levels also affect social exclusion of individuals, families and various population groups. It is difficult to measure social exclusion, but evidence shows that poor communities tend to be at risk.

Statistical data on housing and dwelling conditions of households show that only 15 per cent of households in rural areas have indoor running water, while 20 per cent have no water supply at all.<sup>9</sup> There are wide disparities in regional basic services reflected in living conditions.

Such economic inequalities, especially in rural areas, added to already limited opportunities to improve quality of life, provide a context in which trafficking and child abuse take place.

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<sup>5</sup> *Human Development Report 2000* (UNDP, New York, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> *Albanian Response to the Millennium Development Goals*, prepared for the United Nations system in Albania, (HDPC, Tirana, n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> *The population of Albania in 2001*, (INSTAT, Tirana, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> *Human Development Report 2002*, (UNDP, New York, 2002)

<sup>9</sup> *The population of Albania in 2001, op.cit.*

### *1.1.3 Health and Social Services*

Since the early 1990s, the healthcare system has been characterized by poor quality of care and low infrastructure standards. Many health service buildings are in need of rehabilitation and new equipment, while other areas are without access to basic services all together. There are many disparities in the distribution of health facilities among districts and there is a lack of qualified staff even in existing centres. Additionally, an enlarged population in urban areas as a result of migration is having an impact on access to health services; the movement to urban areas has increased demand for services, while the decrease in population in the areas of origin has caused a reduction in services there.

### *1.1.4 Education*

Despite positive efforts by the government to enact legislation, improve the quality of teaching and teachers, and reduce drop-outs, the education system faces a number of challenges. Many schools, especially in rural areas, are in poor physical condition with shortages of heating, lighting and other facilities. In many cases there are not enough teachers with basic qualifications, and there is a growing gap between urban and rural education.

Education indicators are low and there is a tendency for the levels to steadily decline. Since the early 1990s there has been a substantial fall in enrolment: the gross rate of enrolment for primary schools in 2000 was only 90 per cent. ‘Hidden drop-outs’ are an important related issue. These are children who attend school but do not progress in their studies. The number of children who leave school is reported to be significantly less than the number of ‘hidden drop-out’ students;<sup>10</sup> in some regions ‘hidden drop-outs’ are estimated to be one-third of the total number of children attending primary school. The children most vulnerable to dropping out are:

- children from rural areas with socio-economic difficulties in their families,
- children from suburban areas who do not regularly attend school,
- girls from remote areas, kept at home because of early arranged marriages or blood feud,
- children who have emigrated with their families and returned, unable to re-enter school.

**Table 1: Student drop-outs 1990/1991 – 1998/1999<sup>11</sup>**

	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Total No.	21,710	34,232	21,532	20,939	17,134	17,162	18,300	19,610	
% of pupils	3.9	6.31	4.09	4	3.11	3	3.2	3.5	3.01

### *1.1.5 Child Labour*

The transformation to a market economy in Albania spawned a large shadow economy in which child labour has been widely exploited. General social disorder and non-existent legal and administrative control and regulation left children unprotected, particularly in relation to their employer. The trend has been towards the worst forms of child labour: children working on the streets, in agriculture, and as a result of trafficking.

<sup>10</sup> *Study on hidden drop-out*, (Education for All Association, Tirana, December 2001).

<sup>11</sup> *Drop-out phenomenon for elementary education*, (Ministry of Education and Science, Tirana, April 2000).

There are several explanations for this. First, the economic and political transition has had a negative impact on the ability of adult members to support the family. Second, work is traditionally considered to be educational rather than harmful to children. As a result, because material well-being is seen not to depend on education but on the ability to perform income-generating work so education is seen as less important than employment.

Much of the child labour in Albania is found in the informal sector. Petty commerce appears to be the most common occupation for street children. The number of children living or working on the streets of the main cities is rising. The children mostly sell food or other small items, wash cars or shine shoes. An estimated one-third of those working are engaged in street or market-based (bazaar) activities.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, children are caught up in a number of clearly illegal activities referred to in ILO Convention No.182: working in forced labour (begging, prostitution, theft, drug peddling) and being sold themselves.

Since the turn of the century, the reported number of children being trafficked across borders for labour and sex exploitation has steadily increased in Albania. Although reliable data is not available and difficult to collect, observers report that these forms of child labour are not only common but increasing. At the same time, some cases of trafficking of children outside Albania for commercial sexual exploitation have been reported, although these are far outweighed by the numbers reported to be trafficked across borders for other forms of exploitation, mainly domestic labour, begging and agricultural work. According to interviews with local authorities and representatives of relevant ministries, however, the prostitution of children is growing.

#### *1.1.6 Families of working children*

An ILO-IPEC Rapid Assessment survey<sup>13</sup> of children working on the streets was undertaken in three Albanian cities: Tirana, Shkodra and Vlora. It indicated that the Albanian family is poor; only one in five families has sufficient income for a decent living.

In the same survey, 47.1 per cent of the children interviewed came from families that moved to more urbanized areas for reasons closely connected to harsh living conditions, poor levels of medical and social services, limited employment and housing in their region of origin, as well as the hope for a better life and better educational opportunities for their children. Of the children working on the streets, 64 per cent came from rural areas. Working children living with both parents comprised 74 per cent, while 22 per cent lived with only one parent and 4 per cent with one original parent and a stepparent.

## **1.2 Demographic and socio-economic profiles of the four cities studied**

Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan and Korça were the four cities selected for this study. Tirana and Vlora are the largest and initial source cities for trafficking, followed by Elbasan and Korça. Tirana, Korça and Elbasan are the most vulnerable areas for child trafficking, whereas Vlora is for human trafficking -- especially young girls for prostitution – because of its geographical position as the main port closest to Italy. The four selected cities are among the seven most populous, and together comprise 62 per cent of the urban population with a correspondingly high level of unemployment.

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<sup>12</sup> Although the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) does not specify street work as one of the worst forms of child labour, it is clear that children working on the streets are at risk of becoming involved in activities that are harmful to their well-being, including prostitution and drug-related activities. There is therefore s a strong case for considering street work as among the worst forms of child labour.

<sup>13</sup> *Street-working children in Albania: A rapid assessment survey in Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra*, (IPEC and ISB, Tirana, n.d.)

There is a visible presence of the Roma and Gypsy communities in all four cities. Statistics for these communities are not available; the 2001 census did not document ethnicity. However, based on indirect data, it is estimated that about 120,000 Roma live in Albania. The number of Gypsies is even higher. These groups suffer not only social discrimination but also a high level of illiteracy, poor health conditions and a lack of employment possibilities. Their children make up the most marginalized and most maltreated group, easily targeted by traffickers.

**Tirana**, the capital and largest city with 352,352.402 inhabitants,<sup>14</sup> has 11.1 per cent of the country's population. The populace is very heterogeneous as a result of internal migration; an estimated 45 per cent of the influx arrived in the district of Tirana. The average density for the city is 80 times higher than the country's average at 8.161 inhabitants per square kilometre.

Females make up 50.5 per cent of the population. There are 108,342 children between the ages of 0 and 18. The number of families is 89,764 or 12.3 per cent of the country's total. Eleven per cent of these receive social welfare allowances.

While Tirana has the highest level of education in the country, 10.6 per cent of the population has not completed eight years of schooling or is illiterate.

Unemployment is high in Tirana: 25.3 per cent in 2001, up from 9.1 per cent in 1989. Only 45.8 per cent of the population of working age (15 years or older) is employed and about 26 per cent of those employed have temporary, seasonal or casual jobs.

The areas with the highest indicators of unemployment and poverty and lowest education level have been populated mainly by newcomers from other parts of the country.

Tirana has the largest number of children living on the street and is a significant source of children for trafficking.

**Elbasan**, located in central Albania, has seen the least demographic movement compared to the other cities studied. In April 2001, the urban area had 95,211 registered inhabitants, with 32,000 people under 18 years of age.

According to the state Social Service data, Elbasan is one of the five cities most affected by poverty. There are about 18,000 unemployed and scarce chances for employment since the closure of the metallurgical factory.

**Vlora**, in the southwest, ranks sixth in terms of population with 74,585 inhabitants. During the 1990s, it experienced marked changes in economic activity leading to a high level of unemployment, although the official rate is 13 per cent. A large number of families have members living abroad, mainly in Italy, and their remittances serve as a major source of income. Social welfare allowances are given to 8 per cent of families. The collapse of pyramid schemes in 1997 drastically worsened the situation of this region in comparison to other cities. The under-18 age group of 29,668 makes up a significant part of the population.

Until the summer of 2002, Vlora was the transit point for the illegal crossing of a large number of people, local and foreign, including children. In August 2002, a sizeable anti-trafficking police operation effectively stopped the trafficking of clandestine migrants by speedboat to Italy.

**Korça** is a city of 58,854 inhabitants in the south-eastern part of the country. Between 1992 and 2002, many locals travelled legally, mainly to Greece; between 1997 and 2002, many also travelled to the United States.

There are 17,090 children under the age of 18. Some 20 per cent of the population is unemployed and 17 per cent of families live on economic assistance.

There are numerous Gypsy and Roma families, many of whom are entirely nomadic.

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<sup>14</sup> *Females and males in Albania*, (INSTAT, Tirana, October 2002), population by city, p. 17.

Korça is a relative newcomer to trafficking. Its proximity to the border with Greece saw traffickers from other districts starting to use it as a crossing point in the late 1990s.

The Ministry of Public Order reports documented for trafficking of children, especially of infants for adoption or organ transplant. Albanian criminal elements are connected with criminal networks using Macedonia, Thessalonica and Athens to reach further out into the Balkans. In 2002, local police received reports of 30 cases of children trafficked to Greece to beg on the streets of Greek towns.

### **1.3 Factors contributing to child trafficking: push factors**

Poverty and the need to earn a living combined with lack of education and employment opportunities are among the main factors that make child trafficking an imperative issue for Albanian society. The interviews, questionnaire responses and focus group meetings that are the sources of this study reveal how child trafficking in Albania is a complex problem with multi-dimensional roots.

#### *1.3.1 Poverty and the desire to earn a living*

The desire to escape poverty and improve the economic situation is one of the main factors underpinning child trafficking. Parents interviewed emphasized that the main reasons their children were trafficked were terrible poverty and inability to meet basic needs.

#### ***Case study 1: A 37 year-old mother, interviewed in Korça***

*“I was living in one small room with six children. I did not have anything to feed them. Sometimes they had to sleep without eating anything. It was so hard to see them suffer. I asked myself several times how I would survive together with them.”*

The reasons that interviewed children gave for leaving home are closely related to parental economic difficulties and the lack of ability to provide food and shelter. This conclusion was strongly supported by the results of questionnaires completed with children released from trafficking. Of 61 children, 20 children said they did not have adequate food; 27 children only sometimes had enough food and 14 children often did not have enough food.

#### *1.3.2 Unemployment:*

Most of the parents of the children victims of trafficking were unemployed, facing financial difficulties, housing problems and unhealthy living conditions. All parents and children at risk of trafficking responded that they were living in dire financial circumstances without any income or outside economic support. In these conditions, they could not satisfy even basic survival needs. Additionally, in almost all the families contacted, economic difficulties were accompanied by housing deficiencies. It was not uncommon for families to be living in cardboard houses without water, electricity, or toilet facilities.

#### ***Case study 2: A mother of three interviewed in Elbasan***

*“The situation is worsening every day. We live in a small muddy house without electricity, without water. The only solution to escape this poverty is to beg in the street. Three of my children are begging in the street.”*

In particular cases where families had a living space, it was very limited in relationship to the number of family members. In several cases more than 10 people were living in a small room. Parents and children contacted through the surveys described their housing situation as insufficient; one mother of a trafficked child in Vlora reported that she had 12 children and that they lived in just two rooms.

### ***Case study 3: A mother of four interviewed in Elbasan***

*Many stories that parents and children told during the interviews were distressing and painful. They described the pressure and dilemmas they endured before making a decision. In one of the interviews undertaken in Elbasan, a young mother full of sorrow told how she sold her baby at the moment of his birth. Even though it was a very difficult decision, she emphasized that it was the only alternative to survive:*

*"In the beginning I was shocked by the offer that was made to me, but they were so insistent and made me accept their offer. They told me that I should sell my baby because it would improve the situation for me and my other children. They did not tell me the price for my baby; meanwhile I did not have any money to feed my children. Both my husband and myself were unemployed."*

Family circumstances deteriorate when a parent or family member has health problems. The interviews and questionnaires revealed that cases of families with one invalid parent, a mother suffering high blood pressure, or two disabled children are not uncommon. Some of the parents from these families said that they saw children as a desperate solution to their dilemmas. Typically girls are obliged to drop out of school and take care of the sick parent or family member, while boys migrate and work abroad in order to help their families.

The mother of a released child interviewed in Korça said that the children are obliged to mature earlier than other children, and that "this puts many responsibilities on their shoulders". To satisfy the expectations of their families, these children start working on the streets, washing car windows, begging, selling small items, or shining shoes, mainly in Greece and Italy. Selling children is seen by parents as a last resort to survive and escape from poverty and misery.

#### ***1.3.3 Dysfunctional families***

Most families contacted were distinguished not only by difficult economic conditions, but social problems as well. A majority of the children released from trafficking belong to dysfunctional families, a characteristic closely linked to poverty.

Divorced parents; parents married more than once, sometimes joining children from different marriages; extended families living in adverse conditions, in quarrels and constant conflicts; families characterized by severe social problems such as domestic violence and paternal alcohol abuse were among the most frequent features of the dysfunctional families described. Only 33 children were living with both parents, while a considerable number were living with one parent, a stepmother/father or relatives:

- 8 children were living with a stepmother
- 10 children were living with a stepfather
- 10 children were living only with a father
- 16 children were living only with a mother
- 6 children were living with relatives (uncle, aunt, etc)

- 51 children were living in big families (6 or more people).  
(Seventeen children did not respond to the question about their families.)

#### *1.3.4 Domestic violence*

Violence in the home is one of the main social problems identified as a cause of children leaving home. One 18 year-old boy released from trafficking described his situation at home: "I could not stand my father any more. Every night he came back home drunk. After that he beat everybody at home. I just wanted to leave from there."

These problems have a great impact on the children's decision to leave. Many children interviewed yearned to escape from their situation and to live a better life. In particular, in families with domestic violence, children were afraid to return.

#### ***Case study 4: A 17 year-old boy released from trafficking, Elbasan***

*"Every day that I went home there was a lot of fighting. One day my father beat everyone at home. That time I did not go out to play for two days since my body was black and blue... Sometimes I even went to sleep at my grandmother's because I was afraid to go home."*

The family situation is exacerbated where other social problems are present, such as incest, a mother in prostitution, or a father with a criminal history.

#### *1.3.5 Low education level of parents and lack of employment opportunities*

Rudimentary education and lack of employment opportunities are closely linked. In general, the parents interviewed were both under-educated and without a profession.

There were several instances where all the family members were begging, selling clothes in the village, collecting cane and doing other casual work on the streets. In many cases more than one family member tried to emigrate. Two children talked about the way they emigrated with their father to Greece. They tried to find jobs and, when they could not, turned to begging.

The educational level of the parents was very low. Many of them had not gone to school themselves and were not keen on having their children go to school. Other parents had only a rudimentary education and no knowledge about parenting or educating their children.

During group discussions with parents of trafficked children and children at risk, parents seemed concerned about the lack of job prospects. Lack of employment opportunities without survival alternatives creates additional problems. During the focus group in Korça, some parents considered the lack of employment opportunities as, "the main obstacle to the improvement of the family situation." In addition, many people mentioned that they belonged to Roma and/or Gypsy communities, which made the situation worse.

#### *1.3.6 Low education level of children and inequality between the sexes*

Children drop out of school or do not register at all for economic reasons. The cycle of poverty continues, as parents themselves have little or no education. They are aware of the importance of educating their children but use the difficult economic situation as justification for not sending them to school. The questionnaire results show that:

- 27 children had never been registered in school;

- 28 children finished elementary school;
- 18 children finished high school;
- 10 children dropped out of school.

There is a clear gender difference in education levels:

- 18 boys (out of 57) finished elementary school compared with 6 girls (out of 26);
- 23 boys (out of 57) had never been to school, compared with 8 girls (out of 26);
- 2 boys (out of 57) had dropped out of school compared with 6 girls (out of 26).

The different attitudes of parents towards their children's education, based on gender differences, were explained not only by economic difficulties but also by religious beliefs. During an interview, the father of one child at risk claimed that his religious beliefs supported his different attitude towards his sons and daughters. Based on his assumption, his four daughters should not attend school, whereas his two sons should.

This clearly illustrates how prejudices on the basis of gender are deeply ingrained and socially constructed. As long as the inequality between the sexes is influenced and supported by discriminatory attitudes, gender differences in education will continue.

### *1.3.7 Attitude towards ethnic minorities*

In the 1990s, most of the children trafficked to Greece came from a variety of backgrounds. After the year 2000, most came from the Gypsy or Roma communities.

The questionnaires completed with the children released from trafficking indicated that a considerable number of them (35 per cent) belonged to Roma and Gypsy communities, especially to Elbasan city (87 per cent) and Korça city (47 per cent). Given the small number of interviews and questionnaires, it is not possible to generalize on the ethnicity of children trafficked, however it is clear that the children of Roma and Gypsy communities are more vulnerable to trafficking, because they are more likely to be truant children working on the streets. A 2003 report concluded that 95 per cent of the families affected by trafficking in children belong to the Gypsy communities.<sup>15</sup>

Minority rights issues are often raised in the print media. A *Shekulli* newspaper report on 2 September 2002 covered a report by the NGO Save the Children that concluded that 80 per cent of Roma children are illiterate and that "Roma children in Albania are victims of violence, trafficking and have the right to education denied them. Racism towards this minority, especially towards children, is confirmed by the teachers themselves, and certainly this promotes illiteracy. Racism is one of the main reasons why the Roma children drop out of school."

## **1.4 Factors contributing to child trafficking: pull factors**

### *1.4.1 Inadequate legislation and/or difficulties in enforcement*

Cases of non-enforcement of legislation, problems in the judicial system and no legislation for witness protection keep people from denouncing trafficking and traffickers. Most of the parents and children noted that they felt threatened by traffickers and several asked that their stories remain confidential.

During a focus-group discussion in Korça, the parents of children released from trafficking were concerned about the possibility that their children could be trafficked again. They pointed out that:

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<sup>15</sup> Terre des Hommes: *Trafficking of Children in Greece*, (2003). The report is based on the comparative experience of various partners active in Albania in the prevention of trafficking and reintegration of trafficked children.

“as long as strong penalties for traffickers do not exist, we and our children will continue to be at risk”. The same concern was shared by parents of children who had never been trafficked. They had heard about trafficking and were concerned for their children’s safety. Parents repeatedly mentioned problems with reference to Albanian legislation; the parents thought the government did not have strict rules or laws to punish traffickers.

#### *1.4.2 Lack of hope within the country and belief in a better life abroad*

The drastic changes that have taken place in Albania since 1990 have been accompanied by a lack of hope, causing emigration to be viewed as the best alternative. Neighbouring countries such Greece and Italy are most feasible because of their proximity and lower transportation costs. The idea of emigrating is accompanied by the belief that life outside the country is markedly better and more lucrative.

The belief in ‘a better life’ has also been reinforced by media images, unrealistic ideas of life abroad as well as through the influence of neighbours and relatives living out of the country. In almost all cases, children released from trafficking told of somebody – a relative or neighbour – who was a ‘guarantor’ for them to go and work abroad. Interviews with children released from trafficking and their parents underlined the fact that friends, neighbours and/or a relative encouraged the idea. Disappointment often follows.

#### ***Case study 5: The mother of a child released from trafficking in Elbasan***

*“My brother-in-law promised me that he would take my son and find him a job. I thought that this would be an opportunity for our life to improve. My husband and I were unemployed, so we did not have any other choice.”*

It is important to mention that lack of information and understanding also contribute to a context in which child trafficking occurs. Parents interviewed were rarely aware of the risks and dimensions of trafficking. The parents effectively became victims of traffickers by believing promises of an income from their children’s work abroad. Where girls were trafficked into prostitution, the victims were tricked with job offers, false marriage, or even kidnapped by pimps who used aggressive means and enticing offers.

The parents of children released from trafficking regretted the difficult experience their children had faced; life outside Albania was clearly not ‘better’.

## **2. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

### **2.1 Legal framework**

#### *2.1.1 International instruments*

As a member of the United Nations since 1955, Albania has ratified most international conventions and, since 1995, also those of the Council of Europe. A number of these conventions and covenants call for action against child trafficking, most notably:

- The ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138);
- The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990 (CRC) which describes the full range of children's rights, and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, 2000. Several key provisions accord with those of the ILO's child labour standards (Article 34, on protection against sexual exploitation; Article 35, on protection from abduction, sale and trafficking of children for any purpose; Article 36, on protection against all forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare);
- The United Nations Convention on the Protection of All Migrants and their Families, 1990;
- The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption, 1993;
- The United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1949; and the supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956;
- The Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 1996 and its adjunct, the Yokohama Global Commitment, 2001;
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998;
- The United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea, 2000;
- The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

#### *2.1.2 Regional instruments*

- The European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, Council of Europe;
- Recommendation (2000) 11 against trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, Council of Europe;
- Recommendation (2001) 16 concerning the protection of children against sexual exploitation;
- Commitment and Plan of Action adopted by participants from Europe and Central Asia at the Preparatory Conference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, on Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation (Budapest, 21 November 2001).

#### *2.1.3 National legislation*

**The Albanian Constitution** provides an overarching legal framework for dealing with issues raised by the CRC and contains explicit and enforceable provisions for special child protection by the state

in Article 54.<sup>16</sup> It recognizes the right to non-discrimination, the right to protection from violence, maltreatment, exploitation and use for labour that could harm health or morals or endanger life or normal development.

The Constitution of 1998 marked a significant moment in the country's democratic development and a qualitative leap for legislation. Article 116 of the Constitution defines the hierarchy of laws, listing ratified international agreements right after the Constitution. According to article 122, these agreements, ratified by law, have pre-eminence over local laws that are incompatible. This provision forces the lawmaker to make the necessary changes in national legislation in order to adapt it to international legislation, providing protection of all human rights.

The **Civil Code** guarantees children who are not yet 14 years of age the right to carry out legal actions themselves, whereas their legal representative carries out other legal measures with their consent. According to Albanian legislation, a child is an adult at 18 years of age, when full legal capability to act is assumed.

The **Labour Code** prohibits the hiring of minors under 16 years of age and anticipates a reduction of labour time to six hours a day. The employment of children includes compulsory education to age 16 years.

The **Penal Code** guarantees children special protection from crimes against them and contains provisions aimed at the protection of life, health, freedom, sexual integrity and the moral dignity of minors:

- Article 100: Sexual intercourse with a female;
- Article 101: Forced sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 14 and 18;
- Article 109: Kidnapping;
- Article 114: Prostitution exploitation under serious circumstances;
- Article 117: Pornography.

Within this general framework, the protection of minors from trafficking is also attained.

Although legislation on the subject of employment and education has been consolidated, that related to child trafficking was addressed only after 2000.

A series of important changes was made to the Penal Code in 1995, particularly relating to prostitution, and sanctions were provided in law for criminal offences directly or indirectly relating to human trafficking. For instance, the wrongful taking of children (Article 127) and exchange of children (Article 128) are considered criminal offences. Severe penalties are provided for sexual relations with minors (Article 100) as well as the maintenance, exploitation, financing and renting out of premises for prostitution, the kidnapping of a person under the age of 14, the unlawful deprivation of a person's liberty, endangering life or causing physical assault, sexual assault, removal of identification papers, falsification of identification papers, threat, and commission of criminal offences in collusion by armed or criminal organizations.

The latest changes to the penal code make the provisions of Albanian criminal law also applicable to foreign citizens dealing with human trafficking. This provides for the protection of Albanian minors against the criminal actions of foreign citizens, not only in Albania but also outside the territory. This change was made in order to protect Albanian children from trafficking, especially those living outside the country as a result of migration with their families or running away from their families.

Further changes were made to Albanian legislation after 1998 to bring it into line with ratified conventions. For the first time, in 2001, criminal procedures were put in place that enable the

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<sup>16</sup> *Constitution of the Republic of Albania*, (Tirana, 1998), p.18.

discovery, prosecution and punishment of trafficking in human beings, and considering them activities posing severe social danger. Article 110/a, 114/b and 128/b, which provide for criminal provisions, respectively for trafficking in people, women for prostitution and children, were added to the penal code. Sentences for trafficking in children are the most severe, varying from 10 to 20 years incarceration and to life imprisonment if the action leads to death.

The Penal Code is presently deficient, however, in the area of victim/witness protection. Experts interviewed in the course of the Rapid Assessment survey expressed the opinion that the Albanian Government should draft new and comprehensive legislation on trafficking (defining what constitutes ‘illegal acts’) and must not only pass witness protection legislation, but provide the means to protect those at risk.<sup>17</sup>

The Albanian Government is negotiating international cooperation for drafting, approving and signing repatriation agreements with Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Moldova, as well as for improving visa regulations in order to block channels of trafficking.

Despite some deficiencies (no definition of the term ‘trafficking in human beings’, no law for witness protection, no support for victims of trafficking, no consideration of the best interest of the repatriated child) Albanian legislation, especially through improvements made in 2001, has laid the appropriate foundations for fighting human trafficking.

There remains, however, a need to carry out a comprehensive review of existing laws and enforcement mechanisms in order to ensure that they fulfil the obligations assumed under ratified conventions. This exercise may reveal inconsistencies, inadequacies or other defects that require remedy. To ensure full compliance with the conventions, steps may need to be taken to consolidate or harmonize disparate laws, expand coverage of the law, increase penalties, provide compensation for child victims and protect them from reprisals, guarantee that all girls and boys under 18 are covered, and strengthen enforcement mechanisms.

## 2.2 National policies and institutions

As a member of the Stability Pact Initiative against Organized Crime, the Albanian Government has put trafficking high on the political agenda. Beginning in 2000, the government intensified its efforts in the fight against trafficking in human beings in general and children in particular.

The inclusion of child trafficking issues into national strategies is a matter of urgency, and should be accompanied by the review and possible reform of laws and enforcement mechanisms.

### 2.2.1 National policies

A **National Strategy for Children (2001-2005)** was approved, which defines the strategic objectives of the policy of the Albanian Government for children and the main areas of work for all institutions involved in child development and protection. It provides for raising awareness of the phenomenon of trafficking; the setting-up of municipal and communal structures for the treatment of children in need and at risk; the improvement of legislation concerning children; and includes coordinating actions of central and local governments, NGOs and international organizations for the prevention of and the fight against trafficking.

In December 2001, the Albanian Government adopted a **National Strategy for the Fight against Trafficking**. This includes a National Plan of Action listing concrete actions against trafficking and indicating the institutions responsible for them. Drafted by an inter-ministerial working group and assisted by the OSCE Mission in Albania, the Council of Europe, the US Embassy and NGOs, this strategy is aimed at increasing public awareness and improving the legal framework with regard to

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<sup>17</sup>. A. A. Aronowitz: *Anti-trafficking programmes in Albania – MSI*

preventive measures as well as direct assistance to victims. The Albanian Government is committed to taking appropriate measures to translate the strategy into specific actions. In support of this, a National Conference on Combating Child Trafficking in Albania, supported by IPEC and UNICEF, was organized in November 2001 by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Interior. This conference produced a list of recommendations for implementing the National Strategy and led to the creation of a National Focal Point Committee on child trafficking in Albania. This testifies to the importance the government attaches to child trafficking.

Albania's main political aspiration is progressive integration into European Union structures. To this aim, the opening of negotiations for the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) has been formally launched. In order to effectively respond to the Albanian situation and to assessed needs, in 2002 the government approved a **Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper** (PRSP), a comprehensive national strategy initiated by the World Bank. The PRSP process offers great potential for decent work and for mainstreaming child labour issues into national social and economic policy. The main focus on children is in connection with education, health and social policy programmes.

In 2003, efforts were under way to revise the PRSP to incorporate the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the United Nations UNDAF process through a Common Country Assessment in Albania. The *Albanian Response to the Millennium Development Goals* report includes a general situation analysis of effective activities as follow-up to the United Nations global conferences and summits of the 1990s, in order to define MDG benchmarks for monitoring and reporting, their relevance to Albania specifically and to recommend future international interventions to address identified gaps.

A **Strategy for the Development of Social Services** (March 2003) and **Strategy for Employment and Vocational Training** (February 2003) determine the focus for improving the country's economic and social conditions and mitigating the major causes of trafficking: poverty and unemployment. The strategy anticipates the establishment of social protection for children, decentralization and widening of the variety of social services available, the empowerment of residential care institutions for children in need, and cooperation with NGOs for alternative forms of social services such as SOS villages, shelters or foster families.

## 2.2.2 National and regional institutions

An **Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Fight against Trafficking of Human Beings** began functioning in January 2002. The Minister of State, under the auspices of the Prime Minister, heads this committee and is the national coordinator for anti-trafficking.

An **anti-trafficking office** has been established in the Ministry of Public Order, including a unit relating to the trafficking of children. Specialized anti-trafficking units have also been set up in 12 regional police departments, including special premises for the treatment of victims returned from trafficking. Meanwhile, the Albanian Ministry of Public Order has signed cooperation agreements with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which provide obligatory exchange of information, protection of police forces, referral of trafficking cases, and assistance for trafficking victims.

The **National Steering Committee on Child Labour** (covering child trafficking as one of the worst forms of child labour), established in November 2001 and administered by a ministerial decree, is fully operational and the **Child Labour Unit** within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs acts as its secretariat. The chairman of this committee is the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs; its members are representatives of different ministries, the President's Office, employers' and workers' organizations as well as NGOs, with the seniority and authority to speak and make commitments on behalf of their institutions.

The **directorate of social services** within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs addresses issues of child trafficking and supervises a residential receiving centre in Linza for women and children returned from trafficking. This centre was set up in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Order and IOM.

The **State Committee for Equal Opportunities** (formerly the Committee for Women and Family) includes a unit responsible for implementing the strategy for children.

Albanian authorities also cooperate with local and international NGOs on a number of anti-trafficking issues as well as with IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, ILO-IPEC, and the US, British and Dutch Embassies.

Government efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, including children, may seem piecemeal unless viewed in a regional Balkan context. The key actors in South Eastern Europe, members of the **Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings**, are coordinating their activities to effectively tackle the issue. The establishment of the Task Force in June 2000 (inaugural meeting: 18 September 2000 in Vienna), making trafficking one of the priorities within the OSCE and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, was of great importance.

One of the main objectives of the Task Force is to enhance and further strengthen regional cooperation among the various anti-trafficking actors in the Balkan region and beyond, among international organizations active in the region, and among governments of the region. It aims to help key actors in South Eastern Europe to better address human trafficking and associated human rights abuses by agreeing on priority areas of concern (awareness raising, training and capacity building, law enforcement cooperation, victim assistance and protection, return and reintegration assistance, relevant legislative reform, prevention) and by cooperating on anti-trafficking activities.

A **Regional International Centre for the Fight against Illegal Trafficking** was set up in Vlora in October 2001, with four participating countries: Germany, Italy, Greece and Albania. This centre has assumed a major role in information about problems of trafficking, including child trafficking, arms and drugs.

### **3. PROFILES OF TRAFFICKED CHILDREN AND CHILDREN AT RISK**

Frequently, trafficked children have already been working on the streets, which makes them more vulnerable. Questionnaire results from children released from trafficking revealed that 52 children had been working before they were trafficked, in activities such as selling cigarettes, begging, collecting cane and car window washing. In addition to the characteristics listed on the children profiled below, semi-structured interviews also showed that most of the trafficked children or children at risk of trafficking were boys aged 11-16 years.

Most key informants noted that trafficking is closely related to the vulnerability of children, which in turn is linked to their lack of education and the environments in which they live. Children who have been trafficked -- within or outside Albania and in the more distant or recent past -- say that the experience of going abroad was seen as a way of earning a living and providing money for the family. For this reason, most of the children trafficked within and especially outside Albania lived with friends who had accompanied them when they left home. In a number of cases, children had been trafficked several times to Greece.

#### **3.1. Profile of trafficked children and children at risk of trafficking**

- maltreatment and neglect;
- malnourishment;
- lack of clothes;
- no education or low level of education;
- working in the streets;
- bad friendships;
- dysfunctional families;
- being orphaned;
- re-exploited through trafficking networks
- misperceptions about destination;
- dysfunctional problems due to alcoholism, unemployment, sexual abuse, or/and domestic violence;
- neighbours' children already trafficked

#### **3.2 Family profiles**

It is evident that family vulnerability leads to child vulnerability. Access to education, health and nutrition are directly linked to the family's social and economic circumstances. During the interviews and focus groups, it was obvious that trafficked children generally came from families where:

- parents do not have even minimal education;
- parents are divorced and/or remarried;
- family members live in poor conditions;
- large extended families live together;
- families are characterized by social problems such as alcoholism, health problems or domestic violence.

The research additionally suggests that children are deprived of education, nutritional food and affection if parental care, particularly the mother's, is absent. At the same time, most key informants noted that, with little education and knowledge of employment skills outside the household, most women and girls face extreme economic difficulties if a breadwinner dies, divorces or abandons them.

### **3.3 Parents' role in their children's decision to leave**

Most of the time parents were aware that their children were going to work abroad, mainly in Greece or Italy. In the interviews, there was some disparity between the responses from children and their parents regarding the parent's role in the child's decision to leave. Generally, the parents did not admit that they knew about the child's decision to leave. In contrast, the children maintained that their parents were aware of their resolve to go abroad for work. However, there the children tended to justify their parents' decisions by saying, "*We did not have anything to eat; our parents did not have any other choice*".

In general the role of parents is a function of a combination of social and economic factors, in addition to their fundamental neglect of their child's rights. These include:

- parent's marriage at an early age;
- parents' lack of skills, both general and professional;
- unemployment as a consequence of this lack of skills;
- numerous children in a family;
- difficult living conditions;
- non-registration of families with administrative structures;
- permanent instability of communities as a result of their traditions and mentality;
- lack of state social policies for economic and institutional support for children affected family dysfunction.

A correlation exists between the child's age and the parents' role in their decision to leave. In interviews, the age of trafficked children ranged from seven to 12 years for boys and nine to 12 years for girls. The younger the child was when leaving the country, the more significant the role of parents in the decision. With older children, peer pressure was a stronger factor in the decision to leave. Parents often reported they hoped their children would bring some income to the family; frequently they were not aware of the difficulties and challenges that their children would face.

#### ***Case study 6: The mother of a child released from trafficking, Vlora***

*"My heart was broken but I couldn't think of any other solution. When I told my son about the possibility of his leaving, he was hoping to earn some money so he accepted it".*

In many cases the parents trusted their children to relatives, neighbours or friends who would accompany them on the journey and 'take care' of them abroad. The exploitation of children by relatives is not uncommon. A 15 year-old girl in Tirana, never trafficked, told about her experience: "After my mother left, my grandfather forced me to go on the street and beg. I continued begging until my mother came back".

Undoubtedly, for all the parents, it was a distressing choice to make for their children to leave home especially considering that Albanian parents traditionally make great sacrifices for their children. The example given above is only one of many showing how parents suffer when they decide or agree that their child should leave. Some parents do not agree to allow their children to travel, however, for a variety of reasons.

***Case study 7: The father of a child at risk of trafficking, Tirana***

*"From the moment we came to Tirana [the family migrated from Lezhe], we had different offers to send our son to Greece. We did not accept, because he was doing well in school and he himself was against it for the same reason."*

The decision of the parents to let children drop out of school or not to send them to school in the first place increases the probability that these children will be vulnerable to trafficking. Additionally, children who go to school but get poor grades may also be vulnerable if they lose the hope of a decent future. If children demonstrate good abilities and skills for studying, and if they are getting good grades in school, then parents often hesitate before deciding to send them abroad.

Since Albanian parents, in general, seek a better education for their children in order to ensure a better future for them, good grades in school are an indicator of the likelihood of the child moving into a good profession and achieving a level of success that allows a decent life. Educating children, motivating them to go to and stay in school, and helping parents to understand the importance of a good education, will minimize the likelihood of parents accepting job offers for their children.

## **4. RECRUITMENT PROCESSES AND TRAFFICKING ROUTES**

### **4.1 Recruitment**

The recruitment process of children for both labour and sexual exploitation is similar with regards to the people involved and methods used. However, the recruitment process is also directly related to the sex and age of the victim, family conditions and the final destination of the trafficked children.

#### *4.1.1 Ways of recruitment*

Recruitment is not a sophisticated process; usually someone the family knows will convince the child's parents, relatives or guardians to send the child abroad. The same person is almost always responsible for transporting the child from the point of recruitment to the destination country. In some but not many cases, the recruiter may also supervise the child when s/he is 'working'.

In almost all cases, the recruiters promise to pay the family of the child an amount of money, either in a lump sum or periodically. Usually the first money earned by the child is taken to cover the cost of sending the child to the destination country.

Ninety per cent of the children interviewed were recruited through an agreement between the recruiter and a family member. In every case the main motivation was said to be the extremely poor conditions of the family of the trafficked child and an urgent need for money to survive.

#### ***Case study 8: A trafficked child from Korça***

*"My mother agreed with a friend of my aunt's to take me to Greece. We arrived at the border by taxi and in the evening, when it became dark, we crossed the border by climbing the mountains. After one day of walking, we were caught by the police and they deported us. Two days later we left again and the second time we were successful."*

#### *4.1.2 People involved: families, traffickers and children*

A large number of interviews with all groups affected (trafficked children, those in danger of being trafficked, children released from trafficking, those still in a trafficking situation or social workers who have been working with the children for a long time) support the conclusion that in the majority of cases the impetus for and mediators of the trafficking have been the parents themselves.

Whether or not they are encouraged by others, the parents are accomplices in the sale or exploitation of their own children. In the majority of cases, the child's wishes are not considered at all. The survey uncovered numerous cases of children leaving with relatives working abroad and parents acting as mediators. In some cases parents were the protagonists of the trafficking; finding themselves in difficult economic conditions, they opt for the easiest way out, exploiting their children in the hope that it will improve their economic condition.

When the child leaves in the company of a family relative or a known person (often a boyfriend of the children's mother), there is generally an already established deal between these people and the parents. Often this involves a cash payment at the time of departure. Parents usually negotiate a monthly income during the time the child is being exploited. However, in almost all cases, such payments are not made, at least not regularly.

In those cases where children go with their parents to work abroad, they are equally exploited. The survey brought to light the story of an eight year-old girl who left for Greece with her six year-old brother, mother and mother's boyfriend. The family had huge debts; both parents were unemployed and the mother, deceived by her boyfriend, chose the path of emigration together with her children, whom she intended to send out to work. They all settled in the house of a friend of the boyfriend and the mother and two children went out every day from dawn to dusk to beg. All the profits were initially handed to the mother at the end of the day. After some time, the police seized the mother and the children were left in the care of the boyfriend, who mistreated them and took all the money from them. The children also had to suffer ill treatment by his friend who had given them shelter. The girl was forced to do housework, cook for everyone and do the laundry. These were in addition to the exhausting work she did all day. In the morning, the children were forced to wake up early and go out and work until, one day, the police caught them and sent them back home.”

Often, after a child is repatriated, the parents refuse to send their children abroad again. In other cases, when the parents have received money over time, they keep sending their children abroad in the hope that this will improve their living conditions.

It should be noted that parents do not hide their negotiations from the community or people around them, and find no need for secret arrangements, even if they sell their children.

Only when they are disappointed and do not receive the money they expected, do they start playing the victim, saying that the trafficker deceived the child and that they had not been aware of what was happening. They do not reveal their own role when asked how the child left, although the child may have already disclosed parental involvement with the traffickers.

Sometimes, parents try to misrepresent their involvement in their children's trafficking by telling sad, moving and touching tales. They are often unreliable informants if they have themselves been involved in trafficking the child, and may seek the 'sympathy vote'.

#### ***Case study 9: Parents relate the story of their son***

*"We sent our son with our uncle and, after staying for a week in Fier at the uncle's house, he left for Greece. He had to walk across the border over the mountains. He was only nine years old and weak too, and got exhausted very quickly. He was forced to beg on the streets of Athens and was tortured in terrible ways and with terrible tool. The traffickers cut off his leg and arm so he would make more money begging. After six months, the police caught the boy, but the traffickers had prepared him for this through violence and torture. He knew he was not to tell the police who he got there with, who sent him out on the streets, who he worked for or who gave him shelter. If he did that, his life would be in danger."*

*In fact, as soon as these parents stopped receiving the money promised, they denounced the trafficker to the police. The press covered this case and contacted an organization offering social services. The parents insisted that the child be sent back, claiming that their relative had kidnapped the child and that they had never wanted the child to leave. The child, though, gave a different story.*

There are rare cases when the child leaves alone, based on her/his own decision, when the initiator is a friend of the child. The trafficker is usually more often than not someone the family knows directly or indirectly, for example the child's or parents' cousin, an aunt or uncle, the parents' friend or a neighbour. Such relationships make the negotiation and decision easier. There are cases and circumstances when the parents are not involved and the children are cheated by their friends.

### **Case study10: The mother of a boy in Elbasan**

*“The son of our neighbour convinced my son to leave. He took my son without telling me. My son was nine years old. When he came back, he said that he left with some older children who were aged between 15 and 16. My son was the youngest. He was not afraid when he crossed the border. When they arrived, the children were put up in the house of our neighbour. I only saw my son six months later when the police brought him home.”*

#### **4.1.3 Involvement of the Gypsy community**

In Albania, the Gypsy community is estimated to be as high as 10 per cent of the general population. This is one of the highest percentages for an ethnic community in Albania. The Gypsy community is often assimilated with the Roma community (or, in popular language: *arixhi*), although they are two different communities, with different origins, outlooks and traditions.

The Roma are a nomadic people. The community's origins are in the Far East, India. Centuries ago, they moved through the Middle and Near East and then dispersed into European countries. Life in a community is an important factor that has underpinned the preservation of their identity, language, customs and traditions. The Roma have their own flag.

The Gypsy community is believed to have originated from the countries of Northern Africa. They, like the Roma community, moved into Europe but over time were assimilated did not preserve their identity. They lost their language, traditions and other cultural features.

Based on informal data, it appears that the majority of trafficked children come from Gypsy families. Some 85 per cent of the trafficked children interviewed for this study had Gypsy origins. In the majority of cases the trafficked children did not attend school but spent their time on the streets of towns. In many cases, the families considered school to be a dangerous place for children. Teachers reported that Gypsy children often drop out.

Social workers, NGO representatives and teachers advised that there are very few cases of trafficked children being Roma and even fewer cases of trafficking of so-called ‘white’ Roma children.

Usually traffickers belong to the community from which they recruit. They choose children from families with obvious problems and are almost certain of the success of the recruitment. They know the customs, traditions, mentality and reactions of families in the community, and the parents of children are easily duped.

The large proportion of involvement of Gypsy children in the process of trafficking is a result of several different factors. For a long time, this community has been marginalized and treated as servants. The Gypsies have always been considered by other Albanians to be simple and ignorant. During the communist years, the community gained special attention, but they remained despised and marginalized. After the 1990s, this marginalization became even more striking.

In general, Gypsy families experience acute social problems. In the Gypsy tradition, unlike that of the ‘white’ Albanian or Roma family, connections between family members are not very strong. Gypsy families in general have an unstable family structure. The majority of trafficked children come from families whose parents are separated: the children may not know their parents, or the mother does not know who the child’s father is. The feeling of responsibility toward the family is weak or non-existent. “It is easy for traffickers to recruit from these families,” teachers and social workers say, “because often parents do not assume their responsibilities and the child just idles around in the street, without any protection”.

The Gypsy community in general suffers from a feeling of inferiority, which it displays openly in a variety of situations. It is a fact that many have had very little or no education. This has long been the case in Albania, both because the state has not demonstrated proper care towards this community, and because the community itself in general has not shown interest. It is not surprising that the Gypsy community has low self-esteem. In general, expectations are limited, which has made seemingly simple ‘alternatives’ more acceptable to the community. Young people often respond negatively to suggestions concerning education and employment. Often, when told that if they study and are successful in school, they may continue their studies, they respond: “Who would send me to school? I am a Gypsy.” Suggestions that they might look for a job where there is a chance of being hired are answered by, “Who will want to hire me? They want white hands”.

#### 4.1.4 Border crossings

The preferred country for traffickers of Albanian children is Greece. This is because it is easier to cross the border, inexpensive and, in most cases, there is no need to prepare documents for the child; the greatest expense is for travel costs to the border. Trafficking to Italy is more difficult. The traffickers must collaborate with networks that prepare false documents or hide the child on the ferry; the risk of discovery is high because there are frequent police inspections.

#### **Case study 11: A child from Korça**

*“A friend of our oldest brother arranged everything: how to cross the border and where to work. After two days we had to leave our family. A person came by car to our house with two other children and a woman. Close to the customs, only we, the children, got out of the car. A young boy took us and ordered us to follow him without talking. It was dark and the road was very difficult. The other two children, who were smaller than me, were exhausted. After midnight we met up with the person again, and the woman. They were waiting for us with another taxi, this time with a Greek licence. They accompanied us to Thessalonica.”*

The interviews show that often families and traffickers make repeated attempts before succeeding. In all the cases of children returned by police to their home country, the traffickers arranged for them to travel again.

In almost all the cases, the traffickers accompany the children from their home to the destination. This is because the family of the child knows the trafficker, so s/he feels obliged to promise to accompany the child to the place of ‘work’. There are very few cases where the trafficker only accompanies the child to the border and then another person takes care for the rest of the journey.

## **5. WORKING CONDITIONS AND OTHER EXPLOITATIVE OUTCOMES OF TRAFFICKING**

### **5.1 Children's living conditions**

Trafficked children live under arduous conditions. Research shows that these children are considered merely tools for profit; they are generally given only minimal food and lodging. There are no social, entertainment, schooling or training activities in their lives. No gift or positive reinforcement is given for the work they do, no matter how challenging it is.

Based on responses from the children who had been trafficked and released (83 children), and group discussions with released children in Tirana and Elbasan, it became evident that, despite their age, the children's daily life consisted entirely of work. After working hours, only a few hours of sleep were allowed so that they would be able to start again the next day or night.

This high intensity exploitation is related to their bosses' interest in generating as much profit as possible within a short period of time. They have learned from experience that things have changed since the early 1990s: groups of children are not stable because either the children escape themselves, are caught by police or helped by NGOs from Albania or the country the children are trafficked to.

The time the children spend in a situation of trafficking varies from three to six months. In very few cases children stay for up to a year. Children interviewed in Tirana, Elbasan and Korça said that they had started work immediately upon arrival at their destination, following only a very brief rest that was insufficient given the exhausting journey they had made.

If they fall sick, the children receive no medical care. The children said they were not taken to hospital when they got sick and, furthermore, there were even cases of children being abandoned when they became ill.

There are also cases where the bosses mutilated the children in order to increase their 'value' as beggars. "I was told: cut your arm off as you will make much more money," one of the children reported. Parents tell of cases where children have returned from trafficking traumatized, with scars, asthma and amputated limbs.

### **5.2 Nature of work**

The children are engaged in a range of activities that have been proven profitable for the traffickers. The youngest children, between six and 11 years of age, are engaged entirely in begging. There is a strong correlation between this activity and age and ethnic background. Most of the children who beg are Roma or Gypsy. This is also true more generally of children who are exploited within Albania.

Most of the children end up begging or selling things on the streets of Greece, usually handkerchiefs or flowers. The children say they did the same thing before leaving Albania, with more varied articles such as cigarettes, lighters, pre-paid mobile phone cards, almonds or seeds.

Some children are also involved in illegal activities such as theft and a smaller group is involved with drugs.

**Table 2: Types of Work**

	Gender		Age		
	Male	Female	9-12	13-16	Over 16
<b>Sexual services</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	-	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Massage</b>	-	1	-	-	1
<b>Begging</b>	17	7	5	12	7
<b>Street hawking</b>	11	2	2	8	3
<b>Waiter</b>	1	-	-	-	1
<b>Domestic work</b>	2	1	1	2	-
<b>Agriculture</b>	5	-	-	4	1
<b>Drug peddling</b>	2	1	-	-	3
<b>Other</b>	5	2	3	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>

Only 17 per cent of the children interviewed said they had been involved in sexual services (girls). However, from interviews with parents of trafficked children and group discussions with parents in Vlora and Tirana, it became apparent that many of their daughters, sisters, relatives or acquaintances (13 to 17 year-olds) had been involved in prostitution in Italy, Greece or Belgium. Parents or family members confirm they have no contact whatsoever with their daughters or sisters. They were reluctant to discuss this issue in detail, but the fact that they were willing to discuss it at all suggests that their silence had more to do with fear of the consequences of disclosure than a feeling of shame. The situation remains dangerous for victims of prostitution, both the trafficked person and her relatives or denouncers and witnesses.

Other children were engaged a variety of jobs: in agriculture, as waiters, running games of luck (boys only), housework, washing cars on the street (girls and boys) and other such activities.

Some of the interviewees said they knew they were going to work, but 20 of them said the work they ended up doing was not what they had been told before their departure; 30 of the children did not know the kind of work they were going to do. As a rule, others made decisions for them and they were not consulted.

#### ***Case study 12: 13 year-old Klodi, Elbasan***

*Klodi had been promised agricultural work. Instead, he was obliged to earn money begging or stealing. He managed to make 30,000 drachmas a day. He was not given any of it.*

### **5.3 Hours of work**

The number of hours children have to work in a day and the number of days they work each week is an important indicator not only of exploitation, but also of control over the children. Research shows that children worked on average between three and 18 hours (only one respondent for each extreme). Only three children worked fewer than six hours a week; most worked an average 10-12 hours a day.

Of the children who had been trafficked and released, 65 per cent worked seven days a week. Working hours depend to some extent on the type of work: children who beg or sell things on the streets tell of even longer working hours.

Both work and sleep were controlled. In a group discussion, children noted that they were only allowed to sleep for five hours. Among the released children, 34 per cent said they worked at night; these were mainly children involved in providing sexual services, drug dealing, or working as waiters or thieves. Eight of the children said they worked seven nights a week.

The working day is longer for children who have been trafficked and released than for children who have never been trafficked but work in Albania (street children). These children note that, if they get tired, they can leave or decide for themselves when and where to work. However, this has to be looked at in the context also of reports that there are criminal networks inside the country that exploit street children for long working hours and that the children are afraid to admit this.

#### **5.4 Remuneration and control of earnings**

The profits of child labour are under the total control of the bosses. A large number of the children interviewed were not provided with everything their ‘contracts’ had stated: food, lodging and clothes. Some of the children testified that they had to sleep in tents in very rough conditions.

Some of the released children said they did not know how much money they made. This was because some of them were uneducated and could not distinguish different bills and also because the person supervising them (beggars and vendors) would collect whatever they had made several times during the day. Most children thought that a portion of the remuneration for their work was sent to their families or parents, but when they returned they found out this was not true. Of all those interviewed, only 21 respondents (34 per cent), said that their parents did receive something (17 cash and four other forms of payment).

The parents, most of whom had agreed to their children going abroad to work, said that the experience had been disappointing. They did not pay anything for the children’s travel, but they had been promised part of the working profit on a regular basis. At best this happened in the first two or three months and then payments would stop. The amount of money received was between 5,000 and 15,000 *lek* a month and only for a short time.

#### ***Case study 13: Shekulli newspaper report of April 2003***

*“A child returned to a small town in the Elbasan region, from Greece where he had been trafficked and worked for four years. He earned a lot of money for his boss. The child denounced the boss because the man had not kept his promise to give the boy’s family their due. The child, now 16 years old, said he had earned a great deal by begging. The denunciation served to uncover a network of traffickers, one well known in the city as president of the local football club.”*

The released children say they can make more money by begging in Tirana or Durrës, where they can make between 200 and 800 *lek* a day, or in street work such as selling plastic bags, prepaid mobile phone cards, cigarettes or seeds. Washing cars on the street or working in iron dump sites can bring in between 1,200 and 1,600 *lek* a day. This is because they ‘work on their own, do not become part of a group and have no boss to control or force them to work, punish them or take the money. Some can earn more; a 13 year-old girl in prostitution in Tirana said she could make 2,500 *lek* a day.

## **5.5 Children's relations with families and others**

Contact with families was not allowed. In rare cases, when traffickers were under pressure of being denounced by parents, the children would be allowed to make a brief telephone call to the family, always under supervision.

Official reports<sup>18</sup> show that 95 per cent of children have been trafficked as a result of an informal agreement between parents and the traffickers. Therefore denunciations of traffickers are rare. Because the parents are acquainted with the traffickers, they generally did not have difficulties contacting them or putting pressure on them, not only for information on the children but also to be able to phone them. Otherwise parents threaten to denounce the 'deal', even if this implicates them too.

Children report that outside the country they feel powerless, constantly threatened, supervised and controlled at every step. Half of the children testified that they could only move around accompanied, whereas 25 per cent could move around by themselves. This kind of 'freedom' depends on the age of the child and the type of work. Children aged between nine and 12 and those selling items on the streets are generally able to move about more freely. Others felt more controlled and isolated.

In such conditions, it is difficult for children to ask for help or contact the police. While a very small number managed to contact the police (although not in a premeditated way), 40 of the children interviewed did not ask for help from anybody. They gave different reasons for this, including the fact that they did not have information on where to go; communication difficulties because they did not speak the language of the country they were trafficked to; fear of failure in attempting to get free and being punished severely as a result; and the fact that they felt they had no protection from their friends, who usually were younger or the same age.

While they worked, overseers would control the money but also protect children from assault by the police. They would generally work apart from each other, the degree of isolation depending on the type of work. It was greater for those in sexual services and home services, whereas those involved in drugs and robbery would work in groups. Between these categories were the street beggars and vendors. The bosses would stop them from speaking Albanian or communicating with each other. Any violation of the rules would be followed by violent reprisals; should they attempt escape, they were threatened with murder or the death of their loved ones. Children were also scared of each other and did not dare discuss or decide anything together. There was only one case of a boy and a girl from Korça who made a deal to escape from their boss together.

## **5.6 Relationship to the 'bosses' and control**

Control is an important element in the life and work of trafficked children. The level of control depends largely on the type of work and the working conditions of the child, that is whether they work out in the open, on the street or in closed quarters, the way things have been forced upon them, deals made, and the child's age or sex.

Half of the children surveyed said that they had not been forced to do the work they did; the exceptions were mainly children who had worked in agriculture. At one extreme, however, were children who had been involved in drug dealing, who said that they had done this under duress. This may reflect the fact that, once returned, they realized that what they had done was punishable in law. Half of the children engaged in illegal activities said that they had been forced to do this, most of them physically forced.

The forms of physical violence used were clarified in the semi-structured interviews with 20 released children and their parents. Some children said their exploiters refused to give them food. Some said

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Public Order: *Study on trafficking of human beings in Albania*, (Tirana, June 2001), p.35.

they were beaten, burned on their stomachs with cigarettes, burned with a hot iron, immersed naked in cold water, beaten with a washing machine hose, and forced to swallow shampoo. The children were threatened and told that they would be killed if they ran away or that their tongues would be cut off.

There was only one instance where the child said she had received good treatment from the person supervising her. This girl had sold flowers on the streets of Thessalonica. The children also testified to the involvement of women as mediators and supervisors of their work and profits. In prostitution, a larger number of women control the exploitation of girls.

#### ***Case study 14: The story of Sokol, Korça***

*Sokol was born and raised in Korça. He is ten years old and lives with his mother, his 12 year-old stepsister and two younger stepbrothers, aged six and one and a half. The family is among the poorest in the area of Korça, and faces deep economic and social hardship. All the children have been born out of wedlock; their mother does not know who their fathers are. She is unemployed.*

*Although Sokol has been trafficked four times to Greece, he thinks this is quite normal. Most of his peers are trapped in the same cycle. "You don't earn much money here," Sokol says. While in Albania, he spends most of his time begging out on the streets. He has never attended school.*

*Sokol usually crosses over the mountains to get to Greece. He says that other children are normally part of the group. The trip is tiresome and long, and the children have to try and keep out of sight of police. Generally they were met by a stranger, who will take them to a house where other children live. During his stay in Greece, Sokol begs, sells, steals and works from sunrise to sunset. "We had better food than in Albania and get dressed better," he says. Although he was obliged to give an assigned portion of his money to the trafficker, he was able to hide some extra 'profits' by burying them in a park.*

*Sokol admits the children were treated badly. They were beaten with a belt, taken to hot showers, or burned with cigarettes. He was not supposed to meet anyone else during his stay in Greece. The group would change locations every month so that they could not be traced. Sokol says he has been apprehended by the police and was imprisoned for one month in Greece.*

*Sokol is not the only child trafficked in his family. His older stepsister has been trafficked to Greece, at the same time and in the same place. Their mother has always been involved in trafficking her children. Every time they were trafficked, she was aware of it. She even entered into negotiations with the traffickers and received money. She reveals that the traffickers are her neighbours, but she is reluctant to disclose names because of fear and possible threats. She has also had a number of abortions; in one case she made a deal with traffickers to give birth to her child in Greece, and then to hand the child over to be trafficked.*

*When he returned to Albania, Sokol was approached by a local NGO in Korça called Help for Children (HFC). HFC wanted him to start attending school so he could meet other children. They did not force him to go. At first, he caused trouble in class, got into fights and made a lot of noise. His teachers complained it was difficult to work with him at first. He was also evasive and avoided answering questions.*

*His teacher and social assistant had to establish a bond of trust in order to get him to talk. Little by little, working with HIF and in regular contacts with teachers, peers and his mother, he has drastically changed. He has become friendlier, has a sense of humour, sings beautifully and is endowed with an impressive wit. "I want to be a driver, when I become an adult," he says, and smiles.*

## **6. THE PROCESS AND CONDITIONS OF WITHDRAWAL AND REINTEGRATION**

### **6.1 Return of trafficked children**

Most of the children released from trafficking interviewed for the survey had been returned home by the police. Thirty-one children had been arrested; 16 decided to leave by themselves and found a way to escape; six children returned home with somebody's help; and eight children did not give an explanation for their release from trafficking.

If children are caught and arrested in Greece they are treated differently according to their age. If they are 12 years old or over, they are kept in jail and, when there are enough children to fill up a lorry or bus, they are returned to the Albanian border. There they are usually re-trafficked.

Children below 12 years of age are placed in an orphanage. The National Centre for the Protection of Children in Greece, which tries to identify families in Albania and return the children, reports that out of 272 children found in this situation in 1999, only two were returned to their families.<sup>19</sup>

The decision to return to the same living conditions, maybe to a violent home, to a stepfather who is alcoholic, is not an easy one. Sometimes, the responsibility that the children feel towards their parents and other family members, who are expecting some income from them, has a great impact on their decision to return. In addition, the number of children returned to their families is small because of the lack of appropriate social services to help them and their families.

Most of the children released from trafficking continued working on the streets after they had returned home. During a group discussion in Tirana with 10 children (eight boys and two girls), all of them said they wanted to leave again. They explained that their parents had fights and were not able to fill their basic needs. The same results emerged in group discussions in Elbasan with children released from trafficking.

At the same time, the children's experiences during the time they were trafficked strongly influenced their decisions whether or not to return to work abroad. The way they were treated by the traffickers, the kind of work they had to do, whether they were able to keep in touch with their families and the way in which they returned all make their experiences different. Based on these factors and of course more individual ones, the children released from trafficking decide to go or not to go abroad.

The types of work done and the conditions in which they are carried out are harmful to the children's physical and mental health. Nevertheless, one-third of the children said that if they could have had another job they would have stayed. This reflected the difficulties they faced on their return: continued poverty, family problems, inability to go to school (lacking money for books and clothes) and no job to put them on the track of a normal life. Seven children said that they would like to go back.

Most of the children released from trafficking categorically stated that they did not want to go abroad again. One 17-year-old boy from Korça released from trafficking said: "After the difficult experience that I had in Greece, I would never go back". Another boy from Korça, who is doing well in school, found a good reason not to go back and said: "I am doing well in school and I don't think any more about working abroad".

When the children (both those released from trafficking and those at risk of being trafficked) were asked what they wanted to do, they answered in several ways depending on their past experiences. Usually children who had good results in school, wanted to go back to study. Children whose results were not so good, or who had not attended school, wanted to learn a profession. There are several factors that influence children's decision to go and work abroad. These include a difficult or unbearable situation at home; parents' expectations that they will bring in income ; a lack of hope and opportunities at home; and a hope of working for themselves without bosses. During the

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<sup>19</sup> B. Limanowska: *Trafficking in human beings in South Eastern Europe*, (2002).

interviews many children released from trafficking did not express any particular interest with respect to their future. It is quite understandable that their painful and difficult experiences, sometimes traumatic, may have created confusion and made them feel unable to explain what they really wanted to do. However, based on the interviews, some generalizations can be made:

- 34 children wanted to go to school;
- 17 children wanted to learn a profession, such as smithy, builder, musician, hairdresser, tailor/dressmaker, or driver;
- 4 children said that for the moment they would like to stay with their parents;
- 14 children wanted to work abroad,
- 14 children did not express any particular preference.

## 6.2 Reintegration processes and challenges

The reintegration process is particularly important because it can create new opportunities for children who exit trafficking and can help them to reintegrate into their family and community life. If these cannot be achieved, the context in which trafficking occurred will continue to exist and children will be at risk of being trafficked again.

In Albania, open social services, adoptive families and specialized programmes are generally considered areas for action by national and international NGOs. With the support of the international community, some NGOs have developed activities for social and school reintegration. These intervention models are being taken into consideration more and more by the ministries concerned: Social Affairs and Education.<sup>20</sup>

The reaction of parents to their child's return is a very important factor in the child's reintegration. As the survey shows, however, parents react differently. Where parents do not welcome the return of the child, this plays a negative role in the future of the child. There are cases where the negative attitude of a parent has played a large part in the children's leaving home or being re-trafficked.

### ***Case study 15: A 17 year-old boy released from trafficking in Korça***

*"When I came back home, I did not feel really welcome. They (the parents) already knew that I had escaped from the exploiter. He called and threatened them, asking them to give back the money he had spent on my trip to Greece if I did not go back. My father was angry because he could not see a way to pay him back."*

In the group discussions with parents of trafficked and released children, there were even cases where parents blamed their children's return from trafficking for their difficult economic situation. One father interviewed in Tirana explained that his son had been returned by the Greek police but was begging on the streets because he had no alternative. This boy, of course, was at risk of being trafficked again.

Because the trafficking experience is extremely harsh and painful, there are many consequences for children who have been victims. These consequences are felt by the children themselves, their families as well as the whole community. The parents of released children and key informants expressed their concern. One physician working for NGOs in Vlora explained that the community,

<sup>20</sup> Terre des Hommes: *The trafficking of children in Greece*, (2003)

for example, suffers even from hearing about the trauma that the children have faced during the trafficking event. And the mother of a girl released from trafficking and returned to her home in Vlora said that her daughter was thinner and had lost her smile; although she seemed to have missed her family, she isolated herself from them after her return and was like a ‘foreigner’.

In general, the parents of released children find it difficult to fully understand their children’s trauma because of their low level of education and a lack of information. Parents can more easily identify physical injury or health problems and for this reason the psycho-emotional damage of trafficking may become lasting because it goes untreated.

#### ***Case study 16: The mother of trafficked children in Elbasan***

*“The last time my son left for Greece, he walked for seven days and was caught by Greek soldiers. The whole group was returned home. When my son came back he was so exhausted that he couldn’t walk for a week. Since that time I decided that my son would not go abroad again even if we are starving.”*

The consequences and subsequent needs of children are even more serious where drugs are involved. Children used as drug couriers are sometimes maltreated and abused when, for example, the traffickers test drugs on the children. After such painful experiences, many of the children refuse to talk and ask for their stories to remain confidential. These children need specialized support when they exit trafficking.

The children released from trafficking expressed their desire to go and work in Greece again, but this time for themselves and through legal means. They would no longer agree to work for others or be exploited. A few of the children released from trafficking abroad started working in other cities of Albania. Some moved to Tirana and live on the streets; when they go home, they stay with their families.

Among the children surveyed, some had positive experiences in Greece, when the police sent them to Greek institutions for street children. Here they adapted well, making it difficult to return to their poor families in Albania. In these cases, the experience of coming back was shocking as the children compared their home with the institutions.

#### ***Case study 17: The mother of a child released from trafficking, Tirana***

*“Because of the economic situation, I sent my 11 year-old son to Greece. Two of my other children suffer some mental health problems. After my son left the streets, he went into an institution for street children, ‘Smile child’, in Greece. He stayed there for eighteen months and adjusted very well. After that we asked him to come back. When he returned he had many problems in communication; he had poor appetite; and he could not stand his father when he was beating his siblings.”*

The reintegration of a child released from trafficking is long and complex, although when victims return there are often NGOs that try to help them. Various linked factors have to be taken into consideration during the reintegration process:

First, when the children come back, they realize that the situation in their families has not improved; on the contrary it seems worse. In most cases the parents are still unemployed, fight or argue and

the father is still violent and continues to abuse alcohol. The parents' position towards the possibility of their children being trafficked varies. Some never want their children to suffer this experience again; some are afraid their children will become victims of trafficking again; but some see the children working abroad as their only choice.

***Case study 18: The father of a trafficked child who has returned, Tirana***

*"We cannot stop our child from being trafficked again. He doesn't even listen to us. Now he is 14 years old and has started smoking. He leaves home without even saying anything. All these things are concerning us but we cannot do anything. We are even thinking of all leaving and going to Greece."*

Second, some communities to which the children return do not offer many opportunities for reintegration. This is particularly true if they are Roma or Gypsy communities. Stigmatization of the children and family, and negative attitudes towards children returning from trafficking, make the situation more difficult. In some cases, when the children register for school, they are older and have to restart school in the grade they were in before they left. In these cases the children feel embarrassed because they are not studying with classmates of the same age.

***Case study 19: A girl released from trafficking, Korça***

*"In the beginning the teacher put me in the last desk since I am older than my classmates. My classmates did not talk to me in the beginning because of my age. Now it has changed, the teacher and my friends love me."*

Unfortunately, children released from trafficking who are doing well in school and have started a 'normal' life are few and far between. The majority of children remain at risk of being trafficked because their vulnerabilities remain.

## **7. ACTIONS TO COMBAT CHILD TRAFFICKING**

During the transition period, there have been a number of national and international organizations and institutions contributing in one way or another to combating child trafficking and child abuse in Albania. In recent years more and more attention has been paid to the issue of child trafficking by the Albanian Government and by other actors, and it is becoming clear that such a complex and difficult problem can be resolved only through aggressive and coordinated actions.

### **7.1 Albanian Government actions**

ILO Convention No.182 requires that member States should implement “immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency”. The first step for states that have ratified this convention is to set priorities for national action against these worst forms, including child trafficking.

The government of Albania has responded to the problem of trafficking of human beings in general and child trafficking in particular through serious programmatic measures.

In this context, it has approved two important programmatic documents: the *National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings* and the *National Strategy for Children*. The National Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings was drafted by the Ministry of Public Order in cooperation with representatives of other relevant ministries, the General Prosecutor’s Office and the National Intelligence Service, and in consultation with international institutions and local NGOs. This document was approved by the Parliament in December 2001 as medium-term strategy, covering three years, with the mission to establish principal directions of efforts for achieving:

- prevention and ending of trafficking of human beings,
- protection and help for victims of trafficking, and
- measures for their reintegration into society.

The most important part of the government’s strategy is the national Plan of Action and Coordination, which defines the objectives, activities, responsible institutions and the related budget. The strategy puts emphasis on all categories of children, including children at risk of trafficking into commercial sexual exploitation, for organ harvesting or criminal activities. Although the Strategies have created a strong platform for action, implementation is slow and is facing difficulties.

Four main directions are defined in the strategy for further action: Prevention through increased awareness and access to education; protection; return; and reintegration.

Also, child trafficking has been the focus of many discussions and conferences organized by the government. The most important was the first national conference on child trafficking, under the title *All together in the fight against child trafficking*, held in Tirana on 6 November 2001. This inter-ministerial meeting aimed to mobilize policy makers and rally public opinion concerning child trafficking; to put child trafficking high on the political agenda; to submit concrete child trafficking recommendations for the National Strategy on Trafficking in Human Beings; and to set up a joint National Focal Point Committee on child trafficking for all institutions and NGOs dealing with this issue.

The policy, institutional and legal measures undertaken by the government are generally considered to be largely appropriate to fight crime and trafficking, but implementation is still slow and not sound. The government needs to take the lead in coordinating all initiatives and interventions related to trafficking so that they are implemented quickly and efficiently.

## 7.2 Comprehensive programme interventions

The donor community and different specialized international organizations in Albania have supported a wide range of activities to combat child trafficking. A number of programmes in different parts of the country have efficiently tackled issues linked to trafficking and have clarified the need to make further broad-based and comprehensive interventions. The implementation of these programmes has shown that the success of intervention can be achieved only where there are strong links among actions, and close coordination among prevention, protection, repatriation and reintegration actions.

It has also become clear that repatriation is successful only when the child is reintegrated within his family and community and protected from the risk of being re-trafficked. The implementation of these projects has resulted in successful methodologies and activities to be disseminated and replicated based on needs. They have proved that the effort to combat child trafficking and abuse needs to be supported by every single member of society and by strong cooperation not only within the country, but also among countries that are affected by trafficking.

### 7.2.1 Prevention

Considering the importance of prevention in addressing the root causes of child trafficking, there are projects that support children at risk and their families; provide educational opportunities for girls in particular, since they are often discriminated against and are the first to fall prey to traffickers; and organize community mobilization and awareness raising in vulnerable areas.

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe** (OSCE) has supported the Women's Rights and Anti-Trafficking Education project (WRATE), which began in November 2000 with the goal of raising awareness in Albania of women's rights under international human rights conventions and domestic law.<sup>21</sup> The project includes training of trainers and curriculum development. OSCE has also coordinated anti-trafficking activities among the international organizations and has supported local NGOs, including through capacity building.

The NGO **Terre des Hommes** (TDH) has implemented a prevention programme named PRAEVE: 'Prevention, Reintegration and Assistance for Child Victims of Exile' together with Help for Children (NPF, a local NGO), with the agreement of the Albanian authorities and support from UNICEF Tirana and the OAK Foundation based in Geneva. The objectives of the programme were to prevent the risks of exile by making 3,000 children of the Elbasan and Korça regions aware of the problem and, with the support of schools and parents, to set up a recording and detection system for children at risk, as well as a system of direct intervention for high-risk children. Various activities were planned to meet the objectives of the PRAEVE programme, such as the production and distribution of materials (booklets, posters, videos.) to make people more aware of the problem, and the creation of a photo identification file for each child. Teaching materials about school drop-out and the risks of street life have been prepared for teachers.

The **International Organization for Migration** (IOM) is carrying out a project on 'Prevention of women and girls' trafficking through awareness raising and institutional capacity building'. This focuses on prevention through an awareness-raising campaign including radio and television, public announcements, printing and dissemination of posters and leaflets, materials for schools on gender/domestic violence and trafficking.

**International Social Service** (ISS) is also involved in the prevention of child trafficking by identifying high-risk families with children. ISS offered vocational courses to 50 young people (hairdressing, tailoring, mechanics, electrical services, and plumbing) for a period of five to six months in Tirana.

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that many children fall under the category 'women', because many girls between the age of majority and the internationally recognized childhood threshold of 18 are trafficked. These girls are often 'present' in data and programmes related to the trafficking of women.

### **7.2.2 Protection**

The projects in the field of protection involve different activities such as collaboration with legal authorities for law enforcement, training of social workers, identification of mechanisms to assist children with psychosocial needs, physical protection for children at risk through shelter centres, setting up foster families for children at risk, and advocacy to the general prosecutor.

There remains a shortage of prevention actions compared to the size of the problem.

**IOM** and the **Legal Clinic for Minors** are implementing capacity-building activities of the judiciary and prosecutors as well as teachers concerning law enforcement, in order to help them to understand the trafficking phenomenon, prosecute traffickers, decrease the criminalization of victims and help in prevention.

### **7.2.3 Withdrawal and repatriation**

It is important to identify and locate trafficked children, evaluate their needs, protect them from further abuse and remove them from their exploitative situation in a carefully planned and sensitive manner. Known mechanisms for effective withdrawal and repatriation of trafficked children include: (i) involvement and collaboration of law enforcement and legal authorities to treat children sensitively, protect them from traffickers and employers, and safely return them to their countries of origin; (ii) establishment of transit centres that have an important role in responding to the immediate needs of children on their way back home; (iii) implementation of programmes that seek to sensitize, train and strengthen the capacities of national partners; (iv) organization of bilateral and regional cooperation to harmonize anti-trafficking legislation in order to facilitate both the repatriation of children and prosecution of traffickers.

**ISS Albania**, in collaboration with ISS Italy, has a project supporting unaccompanied minors. ISS has experience treating problems related to abandoned unaccompanied children who are exposed to trafficking; from 1992 to the end of 2002, ISS intervened in 4,457 cases. When possible, they facilitate the return of the child and then take measures toward reintegration.

**Terre des Hommes** has been implementing a repatriation pilot project (RSA Project). Since the beginning of the bilateral partnership between Albania and Greece, with the close cooperation of **Arsis**, a Greek NGO, and with the **Filoxenia Centre** of Thessalonica, some 15 children have been returned to their families in Albania and have now benefited from adapted programmes. Since 2001, the children and families, beneficiaries of TDH programs in Albania, will be registered and photographed so that they can more easily be traced if they disappear.

### **7.2.4 Reintegration**

Reintegration programmes are at the heart of anti-trafficking strategies because they aim to help the child to rebuild a safer life and are, in this way, effectively also protection. They generally take two forms: (i) social reintegration activities such as reintegration within families, integration within foster families and integration in shelters or other half-way homes, and (ii) economic reintegration activities. Other activities include support services for children who return, including medical care, psychosocial rehabilitation schemes, legal counselling, formal or non-formal education and vocational training.

Whenever possible, children who are very young are reintegrated into their families. Successful reintegration schemes are long-term endeavours that require monitoring and regular follow-up of each child after the child has left the programme. Economic reintegration means that financial support to families must be coordinated through economic support programmes and assistance to families in approaching prospective employers in both public and private sectors. The aim is to improve the family context that may underlie the child's vulnerability to trafficking, through actions designed to generate income or prepare adult members of the family to increase income.

**IOM** has run two projects: ‘Voluntary return and reintegration of illegal migrants and victims of trafficking stranded in Albania’ and ‘Reintegration assistance to Albanian victims of trafficking through capacity building of national reintegration support network’. A Reintegration Centre was opened in mid-February 2002 to provide temporary protection, medical and psychosocial counselling and return and reintegration assistance to Albanian victims of trafficking. Also, IOM and the **International Catholic Migration Committee** (ICMC) have implemented the IARS project, ‘Inter-Agency Referral System for Return and Reintegration Assistance to Victims of Trafficking’. ICMC manages a shelter for foreign victims of trafficking who are being helped by IOM to return home. The shelter accepts those who will voluntarily return home, offering medical and social services provided by IOM.

**Help for Children** (NPF, a local NGO), through UNICEF support, holds reintegration classes for street children, the majority of whom have been commercially and sexually exploited in Greece. With ILO-IPEC support, the NGO also undertakes capacity building on child labour issues. Already more than 1,000 children have been reintegrated into the regular curriculum in the four original target cities of Tirana, Korça, Elbasan and Berat. In 2002 the programme was extended to Pogradec, Kuçova and Cërrrik. This organization is also working on the reintegration of children returning from Greece. The programme includes: assessment of the situation in Greece in cooperation with Greek organizations; monitoring of informal repatriation; reintegration of children into schools; development of a legal model for the protection of trafficked children; and lobbying for children’s rights.

**Save the Children** prepared a report on child trafficking in Albania in 2001, providing information on trafficking in young girls for prostitution and, primarily, boys for begging and labour. In 2001, Save the Children helped a national NGO, **The Hearth**, to establish the first shelter for trafficked Albanian girls and women in Vlora. Save the Children also participates in a witness protection task group, which helps women at risk who have given evidence against their traffickers. Save the Children also supports the establishment of youth activity centres in Cërrrik and Kuçova. Each centre has a library and sports and musical facilities (table tennis, keep-fit equipment, computer, sound systems and musical instruments). If the centres are shown to make a difference to the lives of young people over the longer term, Save the Children will consider supporting local groups to open centres in other small towns.

An NGO coalition called BKTF (se **Bashku Kunder Trafikimit te Femijeve** – All Together Against Trafficking) on child trafficking was set up in 2002 bringing together nine local and international NGOs and UNICEF, ILO-IPEC and IOM as advisors. This coalition “is determined and committed to act according to the principle of the best interest of the child in combining efforts and experience in order to protect Albanian children from trafficking in the light of the CRC and other international and national legislation and mechanisms”<sup>22</sup>.

### 7.3 Difficulties in implementation

To date, programmes have faced a number of challenges during implementation at different levels. Despite good results, there is still room for improvement and there is also a need for other kinds of response, in particular more targeted actions designed on the basis of a growing understanding of the complexity of the trafficking phenomenon.

Prevention actions, in particular, are crucial in addressing the root causes of child trafficking, but have faced many difficulties at different levels of intervention:

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<sup>22</sup> *The trafficking of Albanian children in Greece, op.cit.*

- A lack of follow-up in direct support given to children at risk and their families through income-generating activities; in most of the cases there is no follow-up by concerned government structures in order to assure continuity of intervention;
- The educational system is not sufficiently responsive to the risk of children dropping out of school and falling prey to traffickers; teachers do not react or take adequate responsibility in relation to this risk;
- The community at large still ignores and avoids the phenomenon and is not involved sufficiently in actions against it.
- Marginalized families are still discriminated against in the system: their positive values are ignored by most people;
- The institutional structures are not active participants during project implementation.

The difficulties in protection are related to:

- Gaps in the law concerning child trafficking: there is no mechanism for witness protection, no law against child traffickers;
- A lack of standardized and specialized mechanisms for children with psychosocial needs; different actors operate according to their own experience and practice;
- A low level of physical protection for children at risk; many children fall prey to traffickers again after exiting trafficking (the same child may be trafficked several times);
- Lack of involvement of police for minors structure in protecting children at risk;
- Lack of coordination at an international level, for example in the creation of transnational case files.

The repatriation component seems to be the most difficult area in which to obtain good results:

- Intervening in destination countries is problematic for actors operating in the country of origin; coordination with other organizations in the destination country is the key here;
- A lack of involvement of government structures, police, social services and other concerned structures during the repatriation process; often NGOs are the only actor carrying out a repatriation activity;
- Often the repatriation process is not sufficiently prepared; it has to be safe, legal, quick and well coordinated;
- Lack of repatriation standards different actors operate according to their own practice, and there is no system of coordination or sharing;
- Lack of coordination among different structures and actors; activities are mostly implemented separately and are not coordinated at different phases of the repatriation process;
- Lack of standards in transit centres; often children escape from these centres because of the poor living conditions there;
- Lack of bilateral and regional cooperation; there have been many efforts but there is still a strong need for cooperation between countries of origin, transit countries and countries of destination.

Reintegration is closely linked to other areas of intervention because successful reintegration is effectively also a prevention and protection outcome.

- Lack of follow-up within families; insufficient following-up of the child in the family, or psychological support for the child and family, provided for too short a time;
- Lack of involvement of government structures; concerned government structures are not involved in the repatriation process and activities are mostly implemented by NGO partners;

- Poor prospects of family employment; interventions are not adequately targeted to increasing employment possibilities for the families of trafficked children.

Experience show that even where positive results are obtained in the different fields of intervention, there is a need for coordination among the different actors and programmes. There are attempts to do this, but it is acknowledged that the lead must be taken by government if it is to be effective and efficient. Only government has the standing and continuity that allows for sustainability and responsiveness.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although great strides have been made in Albania in recent years towards addressing the causes and the consequences of trafficking, the problem of child trafficking is still a long way from being solved.

The results of this Rapid Assessment survey do not give cause for optimism. There has been no dramatic decrease in the number of trafficked children. The root causes that fuel trafficking: poverty, unemployment, corruption, organized crime and lack of prosecution or adequate sentencing for perpetrators, continue to prevail in the country. There is a high ratio of supply to demand and disdain for victims in the destination countries.

Some progress has been made in the areas of:

- Raising public awareness and encouraging policy makers to consider child trafficking as an important issue;
- Enforcing legislation concerning trafficking in general and of children in particular;
- Formulating policy which contributes, directly or indirectly, to addressing trafficking;
- Establishing and supporting state institutions to counter trafficking; and
- Strengthening NGO networks engaged in this field.

To fight effectively against trafficking, extreme sensitivity on the part of all stakeholders is required. There must be comprehensive data on the number of unaccompanied migrating and trafficked children, as well as identification of street children at risk for trafficking. Both governmental and non-governmental institutions need to enhance their capabilities. Regional cooperation will help to obstruct trafficking routes.

On the basis of the survey, the following recommendations are offered, targeting four principal areas of concern in combating child trafficking: prevention, protection, repatriation and reintegration.

### **8.1 Recommendations relating to prevention**

- Improve legislation relating to child traffickers and strengthen enforcement of existing laws;
- Increase opportunities for legal migration for employment or vocational training;
- Support family reunification for children with migrant parents;
- Reinforce borders to prevent illegal crossings and coordinate police operations with neighbouring countries;
- Organize and fund awareness campaigns;
- Integrate information on child trafficking into the educational system through textbooks and curriculum;
- Establish municipal structures to identify and be concerned with orphans, poor children and other high-risk groups, particularly in rural areas;
- Encourage return to school for street children, rural girls and other marginalized children through social and financial incentives;
- Support collaboration between local institutions and NGOs for assistance programmes to poor families;
- Undertake capacity building for the main stakeholders related to child trafficking issues (police, teachers, local authorities, trade unions).

## **8.2 Recommendations relating to protection**

- Improve the legal framework to establish criminal, civil and administrative liability for all those involved in child trafficking;
- Provide a child protection system in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Pass the draft law on witness protection, including relocation;
- Conduct public awareness campaigns in destination countries, highlighting the conditions of exploited Albanian children;
- Intensify the fight against corruption within the judiciary;
- Fortify bilateral and regional agreements to improve judicial cooperation among countries.

## **8.3 Recommendations relating to repatriation**

- Establish a legal framework and national benchmarks for repatriation of trafficked children;
- Coordinate state agencies and their Italian and Greek counterparts for return of children;
- Encourage establishment of reception centres in all major trafficking cities of Albania.

## **8.4 Recommendations relating to reintegration**

- Create new rehabilitation centres for repatriated children while strengthening existing ones;
- Provide sufficient anti-trafficking training to NGOs and government agencies;
- Coordinate and synchronize donor activities to avoid overlap and ensure sustainability of NGO activities;
- Support efforts of NGOs with government policies and funding.

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## **ANNEX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

ILO-IPEC's subregional programme: 'Prevention and reintegration programme to combat trafficking of children for labour and sexual exploitation in the Balkans and Ukraine' is divided into two phases:

- Phase I aims to identify a strategy for concerted action through situation analysis and appraisal of existing responses in the four participating countries through Rapid Assessment surveys;
- Phase II sees the implementation of a comprehensive programme for prevention of child trafficking and reintegration of child trafficking victims in the Balkans and Ukraine.

In the framework of this study, definitions of the main operational terms: 'human trafficking', 'child labour' and 'worst forms of child labour' are as follows:

*Human trafficking* is the recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons either by means of threat or use of kidnapping, force, fraud, deception or coercion or by the giving or receiving of unlawful payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour.<sup>23</sup>

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000 (also known as the Palermo Protocol) states that, as far as children are concerned, "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in the definition".

*Child labour* refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and
- interferes with their schooling:
  - by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
  - by obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
  - by requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work".<sup>24</sup>

The *worst forms of child labour* include:

- "All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, as well as forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- The use, procurement or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties; and
- Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children, such harmful work to be determined by national authorities."<sup>25</sup>

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23 This is the definition given in the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Article 3). It represents a direct attempt at comprehensively defining trafficking in international law.

24 *Eliminating the worst forms of child labour: A practical guide to IO Convention No.182* (Handbook for Parliamentarians No.3-2002, (ILO, Geneva, 2002).

25 ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

The main objective is to provide a rapid assessment of the current situation concerning child trafficking from Albania to other countries for labour or sexual exploitation by means of qualitative techniques.

This study is an element of the first, exploratory phase of the IPEC subregional programme, and focuses on the following:

- Determination of push and pull factors influencing child trafficking;
- Sketching of profiles of different categories of children who have been trafficked or risk being trafficked;
- Clarification of the trafficking process: recruitment, transaction, agents, transport;
- Ways of exploiting children through depiction of the daily life of trafficked children, work done, control exerted by traffickers;
- Ways of escaping the trafficking net and the process of rehabilitation and social reintegration of children withdrawn from trafficking.

In addition the study provides:

- an overview of Albanian legislation on trafficking with a focus on children;
- current government and non-government policies addressing child trafficking;
- institutions concerned with implementation of anti-trafficking policies;
- the characteristics of children most vulnerable to trafficking;
- experiences of trafficked children.

## **Methodology**

The study is guided by the methodology of the *Manual for Rapid Assessment on Trafficking in Children for Labour and Sexual Exploitation in the Balkans and Ukraine*, prepared by the FAFO Institute for Applied International Studies.

The methodology developed for the present rapid evaluation survey did not allow production of representative data, in a statistical sense, as samples were chosen by non-probability protocol. The objective of the present survey is to produce significant data concerning the trafficking of children.

Research methodology and tools were designed in these stages:

- 1) Tools were modified based on results from the pilot testing; with the new set submitted to researchers before training for comment and review;
- 2) Tools were modified according to the researchers' suggestions;
- 3) Questionnaires and interview guidelines were reviewed during the training workshop for researchers in Budapest.

## **Categories of respondents**

Trafficked children who had returned to Albania were the core, but not the only group of respondents. Three main groups were interviewed: children, parents or caretakers, and key informants.

### *Children*

Respondents were boys and girls under 18 years of age and/or boys or girls over 18 who had been trafficked before the age of 18.

In addition to returned trafficked children, children who had never been trafficked were interviewed. Among this group, children were targeted with similar backgrounds to those who were trafficked, ie who experienced conditions that were presumed to expose them to trafficking. The objective of interviewing these children was to understand:

- to what extent they had been exposed to trafficking or approached by traffickers or coerced;
- reasons why these particular children had not been trafficked;
- their knowledge and awareness of trafficking; and
- their attitudes towards children who were trafficked.

### *Parents*

Parents were included because of the presumed key role they may play in prevention and reintegration, and their possible implication, voluntary or not, in the trafficking of their children.

Three categories of parents were interviewed:

1. Parents of trafficked children who had returned;
2. Parents of currently trafficked children;
3. Parents of children who had never been trafficked.

Among parents of children who had never been trafficked, those with similar socio-economic status to parents of trafficked children were targeted. Interviewing parents in this category aimed at:

- exploring whether they had attempted to find work for their children;
- assessing to what extent their children had been exposed to traffickers; and
- assessing their knowledge about and perception of trafficked children.

### *Key informants*

These included people, professionals or otherwise, who were either directly involved in the lives of children trafficked or at risk of being trafficked, or who had particular knowledge of trafficking. They were representatives of political and administrative authorities, assistance organization staff, health, education and other social service personnel, local community leaders, academics, or anyone with specific relevant knowledge of trafficking.

Through interviewing key informants, the aims were to:

- get feedback and discuss preliminary findings;
- expose various scenarios, situations, arguments;
- gather information about what is done to prevent, release and reintegrate trafficked children;
- find out what works, what does not work, what could work under which conditions; and
- explore limitations and challenges.

Key informants, including social workers, government representatives, NGO leaders, teachers, medical doctors and senior police officials were selected by researchers according to their level of knowledge concerning trafficking.

## Research tools

The description and analysis of trafficking of children is based on:

- Standardized information from questionnaires;
- Qualitative information from semi-structured interviews (with both individuals and groups);
- Existing information, especially a review of programmes for prevention of trafficking and reintegration of trafficked children.

### *Standardized information: the questionnaires*

Eighty-three (61+22) questionnaires provided standardized information designed to reveal the relationship between important variables, allowing presentation of analysis and comparison of different locations through data and tables.

**Table 3: Age by gender by district for children never trafficked**

Age	Gender		Location			
	Male	Female	Elbasan	Korça	Tirana	Vlora
10	1					1
11	3			1	1	1
12	4	2	1	3	1	1
13	5	2	4	2	1	
15	2	2	1		1	2
16		1				1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 4: Age by gender by district for children returned from trafficking**

Age	Gender		Location			
	Male	Female	Elbasan	Korça	Tirana	Vlora
9	1					1
10	2			1	1	
11	3	1	1	2	1	
12	5	1	2	3	1	
13	5	1	1	2	3	
14	5	1	1	3	1	1
15	6	1	4	2	1	

	Gender		Location			
	Male	Female	Elbasan	Korça	Tirana	Vlora
	16	4	3	2	2	3
17	2	4	2		2	2
18	4	2	2		1	3
19	2	2	1		.	3
20	2	1			1	2
21	1	1				2
22		1				1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>

*Qualitative information: semi-structured interviews*

The main objective of semi-structured interviews was to delve deeper into information provided by the questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews enabled researchers to take into account specific details, for example of the respondent or the scenario of recruitment. This also allowed discussion of topics not addressed in questionnaires, particularly sensitive issues that might be avoided by the respondent if they appeared in a questionnaire.

Interviews were conducted in four Albanian cities: Tirana, Elbasan, Vlora and Korça. The selection was based on the following criteria:

- geography,
- demographics,
- living standard,
- level of unemployment,
- internal migration and emigration,
- presence of Roma and Gypsy communities,
- the spread of the trafficking phenomenon and street children, and
- the presence of NGOs involved in combating trafficking of children.



**Availability sampling** was mainly used for the interviewees. Among those interviewed were children who live in rehabilitation centres, children working on the streets or who have been withdrawn from trafficking and work on the streets, and children's parents who agreed to collaborate (living mainly in suburban areas).

#### *Qualitative information: group discussions*

Compared with other methods of gathering information, group discussions had three advantages:

- Opinions and rationalizations were more informative and intelligible;
- Opportunity to test preliminary findings and hypotheses and receive feedback;
- Topics of relevance that were not included in questionnaires and interview guidelines came out since the group dynamic makes discussion less structured than interviewing an individual.

A total of twelve focus group discussions were organized, mainly in Tirana. Group discussions were conducted with several categories of respondents: returned trafficked children, parents of still-trafficked children, parents of children never trafficked, and children who had never been trafficked.

Three case studies were developed. One focused on a child who was trafficked, the second on the relations between parents and the trafficking phenomenon and the third on the Roma and Gypsy population.

## Tools and respondents

**Table 5: Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and group discussions**

	Questionnaires	Semi-structured interviews	Group discussions
Returned trafficked Children	61	20	2
Children never trafficked	22	10	4
Parents of returned trafficked children		10	2
Parents of trafficked Children		5	
Parents of children never trafficked		10	4
Key informants		8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>12</b>

The choice of tools and corresponding categories of respondents was based on information gathered from pilot testing done in Moldova, relevant fieldwork, and on a training workshop for researchers that took place in Budapest (28 October - 1 November 2002).

## **Preparatory phase of the research**

### *Training*

One representative of the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and one representative of Terre des Hommes received a five-day training course in Budapest, Hungary. This course covered various aspects of the survey:

- Objectives - final output and rules for doing research with children;
- Tools - review of questionnaires and interview guidelines;
- Respondents - selection criteria;
- Reporting information - interview notes, résumés, case studies.

Questionnaires and interview guidelines were made available to the national team one week before the training for comments and suggestions.

Interviewers received a one-day training from representatives of the NGOs selected as implementers of the project in the field: Enfants du Monde Tirana, Help for Children Korça and Elbasan, and The Hearth, Vlora.

Researchers made sure that the interviewers were given proper training and instructions for the use of the tools before beginning fieldwork, and special weight was given to the ethical aspects involved in a survey of this kind.

### *Background information*

The consultants of the national team initially collected background information to gain deeper insight into details of trafficking in Albania. This included both written sources and information obtained through discussions with experts, local NGOs, United Nations agencies together with semi-structured interviews with key informants.

The written, or secondary data material included:

- Published work on trafficking;
- Reports and documents available from NGOs and other institutions;
- Newspaper clippings and articles in newspapers;
- National laws and regulations on trafficking human beings in general and on children in particular.

Numerous documents were used to complement the information, including reports and publications of local and international NGOs, conference materials, studies conducted by the Ministry of Public Order, information from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, various articles regarding relevant legislation as well as data from the Albanian daily press.

## **Field interviews**

Fieldwork was based on the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and group discussions. Trafficked children who had returned and children who had never been trafficked at risk of trafficking completed 83 questionnaires. In addition, 63 semi-structured interviews were carried out with returned trafficked children, children never trafficked, parents of trafficked and never-trafficked children, and key informants. Twelve group discussions were held in Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan and Korça.

## **Data analysis and report writing**

Statistical information was processed cross-referencing different variables in order to ensure a more profound analysis. Data collected from interviews was qualitatively interpreted.

The results of the questionnaires reflect various mechanisms involved in the trafficking of children, rather than the situation in the country as a whole. In a survey with a representative sample of respondents, the percentages derived from data files make sense to the extent that presumptions can be made about the sample population.

## **Problems and limitations**

The procedure used for the selection of interviewees was that of non-probable sampling, due to the fact that accurate data on trafficking is lacking; the population of children withdrawn from trafficking cannot be fully identified, and girls exploited for prostitution are especially difficult to reach. The level of difficulty increased during the identification process because the children are mobile; some of them are re-trafficked or cross borders illegally.

The researchers had difficulty with published data not always corresponding to the reality of the situation or varying from one institution to another. There is also a disparity between the data gathered from official government sources and that of NGOs. Additionally, there is a lack of accurate data on internal migration and emigration. Incomplete information at the local level leaves gaps with regard to living standards, levels of unemployment and housing situation of the populace of the chosen cities.

There were difficulties in conducting interviews, especially with the 61 children returned from trafficking, because the questionnaire was long and often tiresome; interruptions did not guarantee resumption the next day. Another hindrance was the lack of familiarity with the interviewing technique and the low education and cultural level of those interviewed, especially the parents. This was a handicap to obtaining useful results from group discussions.

Oftentimes, the interviewers noted tension and fear ‘to speak out’, mostly because of the presence of participants. This was particularly true when talking about trafficking for prostitution; for this reason data is scarcer on this aspect of exploitation.

Some shortcomings were also the result of limitations in the methodology itself: the subjectivity of the interviewer in selecting individuals is high.

## **Research team**

**Ms. Saemira Gjipali (Pino)**, Doctor of Social Sciences, with 25 years of teaching and research experience at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana. She is a specialist in family and gender problems and the author and co-author of several publications of a sociological nature. She has been the diploma thesis advisor for sociology students and the advisor of candidates for the doctoral science degree. She participated in several research projects on poverty, social needs and gender equality.

**Ms. Eglantina Gjermen**i, has a Masters in Social Work from Grand Valley State University, Michigan, US. Since 1995, she has been a lecturer in the Social Work department of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tirana University. She has abundant experience as a trainer on gender and development issues, and has participated in various research and programme evaluations. She is executive director of the Women’s Centre in Tirana, which deals with women and gender issues in Albanian society.

**Ms. Lindita Xhillari**, Doctor of Economic Sciences (1996), Master of Arts in Economics (1993). Professor at the Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana since 1988. She is author, co-author or contributor to many publications in Albania and abroad, Executive Director of the Human

Development Promotion Centre, which is an independent NGO focused on human development issues in Albania.

**Mr. Fatjon Lungu**, graduated from the University of Amman, Jordan, in Computer Sciences. He is currently working at INSTAT in Albania and has had extensive experience on different research projects.

**Miss Anila Hazizi**, graduated from Tirana University, Department of Foreign Languages. Since 1999, she has contributed in the humanitarian field within the country and abroad, participating in different humanitarian projects. She works as National Coordinator for the Swiss NGO Terre des Hommes' mission in Albania, whose main objective is the fight against child trafficking.

**Table 6: List of field social workers for the Rapid Assessment survey**

Name	City	NGO
Rudina Lako	Korça	NPF (Help for Children)
Entela Fejzo	Korça	NPF (Help for Children)
Namik Shehaj	Elbasan	NPF (Help for Children)
Angjelina Gega	Elbasan	NPF (Help for Children)
Nerenxa Beqiri	Elbasan	NPF (Help for Children)
Ardiola Lipo	Vlora	Vatra Centre
Esmeralda Gorishova	Vlora	Vatra Centre
Irma Loka	Tirana	EMDH (Enfants du Monde-Droits de l'Homme)
Leonard Guni	Tirana	EMDH (Enfants du Monde-Droits de l'Homme)

**[www.ilo.org/childlabour](http://www.ilo.org/childlabour)**

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