



**MONITORING  
THE REINTEGRATION  
OF TRAFFICKING  
SURVIVORS**

**STUDY AND TOOLKIT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# MONITORING THE REINTEGRATION OF TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This study and toolkit was prepared by a team of researchers at Samuel Hall, with oversight by Rebecca Frischkorn, Cathy Zimmerman, Nassim Majidi and Marion Guillaume, and overall research coordination by Edith Arrat and Mickaela Churchill, with contributions from Ovigwe Eguegu in Nigeria, Siddiqur Rahman in Bangladesh, Wafa Touihri in Tunisia and Natalia Vladicescu in Georgia, who led the fieldwork and data collection.





# METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

Many reintegration programmes targeting trafficking survivors fail to integrate survivors' expertise and perceptions surrounding their experience<sup>1</sup> – a shortcoming that is compounded by a lack of data on survivors' return to normalcy in settings that are often ill equipped to support their reintegration and can further increase their vulnerabilities. This study attempts to bridge this gap and introduces an innovative toolkit to monitor – and not evaluate – trafficking survivors' reintegration experiences.

This research and the accompanying toolkit are the result of a collaboration between IOM, the Cooperation on Migration and Partnerships for Sustainable Solutions (COMPASS) initiative and Samuel Hall, encompassing interviews with 100 trafficking survivors and 40 individuals with ties to or expertise in reintegration programming. To ensure that the monitoring toolkit could be applied across a range of contexts, particular attention was paid to understanding and analysing local risks and protective factors, as well as elements of language and translation, in four countries with a significant profiles of internationally returned victims of trafficking (VoTs) (supported by IOM and other partners) with various trafficking and reintegration experiences, namely **Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Republic of Moldova** and **Tunisia**.

The purpose of this study is threefold:

1. **Understand trafficking survivors' experience of reintegration**, through an analysis of the risk and protective factors, at the national, community, and individual or household levels, as well as of survivors' reflections on reintegration services and associated good outcomes.
2. **Assess programming and monitoring approaches' strengths and weaknesses**, through discussions with reintegration stakeholders around what they have identified as good practices and shortcomings and their suggestions for improvements.
3. **Introduce a monitoring toolkit** that is easy to understand, tackles reintegration aspects relevant to survivors and can be replicated with minor adjustments across contexts.

The research placed survivors' input and feedback at the centre of the tool design. This survivor-centred approach was premised on the understanding that survivors bring invaluable insight and expertise, due to their lived experiences, and that they are uniquely placed to describe what works and what is needed for their reintegration.

Trafficking survivors' experience of reintegration	Reflecting on opportunities to strengthen programming and monitoring	Introducing and launching the monitoring toolkit
<i>What risk and protective factors influence survivors' reintegration? What evidence exists around what survivors perceive as critical to their successful reintegration?</i>	<i>How can programming better respond to survivors' needs? How can survivors' reintegration best be monitored?</i>	<i>Which tools, methods, and indicators are adequate and relevant to monitor trafficking survivors' reintegration?</i>

The main report<sup>2</sup> provides an analysis of survivors' accounts on what it means to return home, a reflection on existing programming and monitoring approaches, a presentation of the reintegration monitoring toolkit, as well as a set of recommendations to improve reintegration programming, strengthen monitoring and carry out further research.

<sup>1</sup> Denise Brennan and Sine Plambech, Editorial: Moving forward—life after trafficking, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 10:7 (2018). Available at [https://gaatw.org/ATR/Anti-TraffickingReview\\_issue10.pdf](https://gaatw.org/ATR/Anti-TraffickingReview_issue10.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The main report is available in English and can be accessed at <https://publications.iom.int/books/monitoring-reintegration-trafficking-survivors-study-and-toolkit>.

# KEY FINDINGS: SURVIVORS RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROCESS

Survivors' accounts of their return experience and reflections on their reintegration process highlighted nine trends specific to individuals who have undergone trafficking abroad.

## **1. Women's experiences are at the centre of the struggles of reintegration.**

The majority of VoT respondents in this research are women who were trafficked for sexual exploitation. As such, several of the themes and associated challenges are analysed through the lens of sex trafficking survivors' experience. This is notably the case for aspects, such as stigmatization and alienation within the community of return, as well as psychological trauma sustained during the trafficking experience, and exposure to domestic violence and abuse when back "home". While these challenges can affect every VoT, regardless of what the type of trafficking they went through, they were consistently brought up by women who were trafficked for sexual exploitation and bear the stigma of what they endured upon return.

## **2. Financial instability leads to cycles of harmful coping strategies.**

Upon returning to their countries of origin, trafficking survivors struggle to become economically self-sufficient; these struggles often act as a precursor to their trafficking experience and make survivors vulnerable to being re trafficked and to forced labour. Survivors often feel that they cannot provide for themselves and their families, which forces them to rely on individuals outside of the nuclear family circle for support.

## **3. Economic reintegration support fails to consider survivors' needs.**

While the reception of economic support upon return, in the form of training and business grants, initially provides relief and hope, survivors often reallocate part or all of the money meant to help them invest in a business towards more immediate needs, such as health care or food. The types of support available to trafficking survivors typically do not fully take into account the family's ability to support returning survivors or their existing levels of indebtedness and psychological trauma.

## **4. Indebtedness undermines survivors' stability and social relationships.**

Survivors often take on debt upon return; this is especially the case for survivors who invested all their savings and/or sold assets to fund their migration journey or who do not have a support system to go back to. These debts are typically to pay for basic household items and commodities. While a less frequent occurrence, outstanding debts, sustained with traffickers at the onset of survivors' migration journey, may also trap them into re trafficking situations, as they or their families may be threatened by traffickers if the debt is not repaid.

## **5. Stigmatization and shunning threaten survivors' social capital.**

Survivors are confronted with a fear of stigmatization, which they either experience themselves or as a projection from family and community members. Feelings of shame and humiliation are common among survivors of all genders who have been intercepted and forced to return empty-handed, while their families expect them to financially provide for them. Broader societal disapproval of what is seen as a failed migration experience and/or



of the type of work they undertook while trafficked puts survivors at risk of being alienated and isolated.

#### **6. Sex trafficking survivors are sentenced to silence to avoid discrimination.**

Women are at a heightened risk of facing discrimination due to real or presumed experience with sexual exploitation, which also puts their families at risk of being ostracized and stems from harmful gender norms and expectations placed on them by society. This is particularly the case in Bangladesh and Nigeria, where women are de facto assumed to have engaged in sex work while abroad and may not request reintegration support for fear that their communities or families will find out what they did. In both countries, several survivors reported having nowhere to go upon return because their families feared they would be stigmatized.

#### **7. High prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression affect readiness for reintegration support.**

Psychological trauma, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety, associated with feelings of shame and hopelessness, affect a majority of survivors. Some respondents opened up about the suicidal thoughts and attempts they had gone through since returning to their countries of origin.

#### **8. When “home” is a place of trauma and abuse.**

Survivors' mental health issues are compounded by the fact that few of them appear to be in an accommodation that shelters them from risks of domestic violence and abuse. Most survivors share housing with family members who can resent them for returning empty-handed or are ashamed of what they went through, which may fuel outbursts of violence. Previous studies highlighted that many survivors suffered from physical and sexual abuse from family members, partners or others prior to being trafficked – an abuse that they are vulnerable to once again upon return.<sup>3</sup> Patterns of domestic violence are apparent in multiple examples from this research and create definite obstacles to sustainable reintegration. This is notably the case for women who have been sexually exploited and struggle to find work due to stigmatization; they tend to heavily rely on their partners as a result, which prevents them from leaving a situation of domestic violence.<sup>4</sup>

#### **9. The path to seeking justice and obtaining reparation for survivors is long and winding.**

Family or community members sometimes act as the first chain link of trafficking, particularly in settings where trafficking is deeply entrenched within various levels of society, such as Nigeria and Bangladesh. Traffickers operate within government and community structures, which challenges law enforcement efforts to discourage and punish human trafficking and provides grim compensation outlooks for survivors. Several survivors sought justice against their trafficker(s), or those who enabled their trafficking, to no avail. In Bangladesh, survivors' lives are often threatened if they seek justice against their trafficker(s); while in the Republic of Moldova survivors lack access to free legal representation – those who sued their trafficker(s) often paid hundreds of euros to lawyers, only to lose their case.

<sup>3</sup> Livia Ottisova, Stacey Hemmings, Louise M. Howard, Cathy Zimmerman and Siân Oram, Prevalence and risk of violence and the mental, physical and sexual health problems associated with human trafficking: an updated systematic review, *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 25(4):317–341 (August 2016). DOI: 10.1017/S2045796016000135.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Cordisco Tsai, Family financial roles assumed by sex trafficking survivors upon community re-entry: findings from a financial diaries study in the Philippines, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 27(4):334–345 (19 May 2017). DOI: 10.1080/10911359.2017.1288193.

# RECOMMENDATIONS: ADDRESSING PROGRAMMING GAPS AND CHALLENGES

The recommendations are situated in existing standards and requirements for programming around reintegration broadly and survivors of trafficking especially. They follow and further operationalize previous recommendations<sup>5,6</sup> while linking to current programming and monitoring efforts.

## ASSESS CONDITIONS IN COMMUNITIES OF RETURN

1. **Evaluate the adequacy of living conditions in the community of return** through an assessment of survivors' return environment, to verify whether it is conducive to reintegration. Such assessment aims to identify potential cases of domestic abuse or violence, evaluate hosting family members' financial capacity to care for survivors and determine whether their housing meets basic living standards.
2. **Map service providers for health, education, vocational training and employment support**, as survivors often lack information on and access to these service providers. Mapping service providers, such as public entities and institutions, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and private sector actors, would provide reintegration stakeholders with an understanding of both gaps and opportunities to improve the range of solutions available to trafficking survivors and to strengthen linkages and coordination between service providers.
3. **Identify and enforce referral services and provide a reporting system for survivors** to ensure that referrals are conducive to the provision of assistance, that survivors know who they can reach out to and that survivors can report issues through dedicated feedback channels. Referral and reporting mechanisms should abide by strict safeguarding protocols to protect survivors' right to anonymity and confidentiality.

## EMPOWER SURVIVORS AND COMMUNITIES AS CHANGE AGENTS

4. **Co-create programmes and solutions with survivors themselves**, empowering them to make decisions about their own life paths by advocating for the type of immediate and longer-term support they feel they need, completed by an assessment of its adequacy and feasibility within the environment of return.
5. **Empower family and community members' ability to be key actors of reintegration** by raising awareness within survivors' ecosystems of the difficulties they face and how those challenges impact them, as well as by assessing the ecosystem's capacity and preparedness to financially and psychologically care for survivors.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Anti-Slavery International recommendations regarding the return and reintegration of victims of trafficking, in: *Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons* (New York, United Nations, 2008). Available at [www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Toolkit-files/08-58296\\_tool\\_7-7.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Toolkit-files/08-58296_tool_7-7.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Cristina Talens and Cecile Landman, *Good Practices on (Re)Integration of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in Six European Countries* (The Hague, Oxfam Netherlands; Amsterdam, Humanitas; London, Change; Oxford, Oxfam GB, 2003). Available at <https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/doc-center/1143/good-practices-on-reintegration-of-victims-of-trafficking-in-human-beings-in-six-european-countries>.

6. **Link with and sensitize potential employers and labour unions** (where available) by coordinating with private sector actors to implement survivor-sensitive employment pathways, as opposed to conducting vocational training courses that fail to account for job market realities and to provide survivors with a durable, sufficient source of income.

### IDENTIFY OPTIONS FOR LONG-TERM CARE

7. **Strengthen existing services and build the capacities of local actors** who are critical vectors of reintegration but may not be equipped to deal with survivors. Following an assessment of local actors' capacity, constraints, gaps and challenges, they can be trained to deliver tailored assistance to survivors in a way that accounts for survivors' difficulties and needs.
8. **Mainstream reintegration and protection services into existing public services** by mapping available services, assessing whether these are tailored to survivors' needs, and identifying barriers or enablers to access these services before proceeding to required adjustments.
9. **Propose long-term psychological support and case management** to survivors who request it or demonstrate signs of psychosocial struggles. Psychological support should encompass a variety of methods, beyond speech therapy, to account for survivors who are unable to describe what they went through.

### IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION, COUNSELLING AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

10. **Improve access to subsidized judicial support and protection for survivors** who lack access to or awareness of such assistance and may find themselves trapped in debt repayment to lawyers or threatened by their trafficker(s). For survivors who need the State to acknowledge their status as someone who has undergone trafficking, prior to receiving public assistance, reintegration stakeholders should ensure that these survivors receive support until they receive that assistance.



## PURPOSE AND ADDED VALUE OF THE MONITORING TOOLKIT

The monitoring toolkit builds on recent initiatives by IOM and Samuel Hall to develop reintegration frameworks to support standard-setting for integrated approaches to reintegration. These initiatives include the 2017 Reintegration Sustainability Survey,<sup>7</sup> which uses a set of core indicators on economic, social and psychosocial well-being to calculate a reintegration score for adult returnees, and the 2020 Child Reintegration Monitoring Toolkit, which provides tailored reintegration monitoring approaches for child returnees.<sup>8</sup>

This monitoring toolkit responds to the lack of systemized data collection and monitoring of trafficking survivors' reintegration outcomes, compounded by a lack of widely agreed upon core indicators to measure them. The purpose of the toolkit is to use field-tested tools to strengthen the evidence base on the determinants of successful reintegration by gathering longitudinal data on survivors of trafficking reintegration outcomes, tracked through a set of indicators that will be used to develop a reintegration score. The toolkit is not designed to evaluate reintegration programming but to track post-return outcomes to improve care and programming for survivors and can be used with survivors who have received support from reintegration stakeholders, as well as with survivors who have not.

The toolkit is composed of four separate tools, including two that are specifically geared for survivors – the survey and the case study – and two designed for key stakeholders, experts and informants – the key informant interview and community advisory group discussion guidelines. The survey and the case study tools centre around the three dimensions of reintegration – economic, social and psychosocial – and reflect inputs from survivors on the level of difficulty of questions and concepts discussed, their relevance and appropriateness, and the need for wording adaptations.

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Hall and IOM, *Setting Standards for an Integrated Approach to Reintegration: Summary Report* (Nairobi and Geneva, 2017). Available at <https://returnandreintegration.iom.int/en/resources/report/setting-standards-integrated-approach-reintegration-summary-report>.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Hall and IOM, *Development of a Monitoring Toolkit and Review of Good Practices for the Sustainable Reintegration of Child Returnees: Final Report* (Nairobi and Geneva, 2021). Available at <https://returnandreintegration.iom.int/en/resources/kmh-research-study-study/research-study-1-development-monitoring-toolkit-and-review-good>.





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