

Overcoming cultural barriers to prevention of modern slavery and protection of survivors

Cultural influences and cultural competency in the prevention and protection of survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking: insights from the UK and Albania

Research Summary

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This is a summary of the report: 'Cultural Influences and Cultural Competency in the Prevention and Protection of Survivors of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: Insights from the UK and Albania', based on research conducted by the [Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse](#) in partnership with [Mary Ward Loreto](#). This study explored the importance of cultural competence and impact of culture both in terms of service delivery in the UK and prevention efforts centred on Albania. The project was funded through an open call for proposals by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC), which in turn is funded and supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The full report can be accessed on the Modern Slavery PEC website at modernslaverypec.org/resources/cultural-competency-modern-slavery-prevention-albania.

The Modern Slavery PEC has actively supported the production of this Research Summary. However, the views expressed in this summary and the full report are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Modern Slavery PEC.

Findings

On cultural competence and prevention

1. Representations of Albanian foreign nationals in the UK public debate around migration and modern slavery oversimplify complex cultural realities that drive individuals into precarious migration.
2. Migratory decisions can be influenced by close or extended family, with implications for policy and prevention.

On cultural competence in service delivery

1. There is no comprehensive approach to culturally competent care in the NRM support system and broader support provisions that extend beyond the NRM.
2. Many practitioners lack adequate understanding of the cultural background of survivors, that may result in survivors feeling misunderstood and discriminated against.
3. The deficiency of culturally competent practice is experienced as re-traumatising by survivors.
4. Survivors in shared accommodation encounter cultural barriers relating to other residents, that can give rise to miscommunications, misunderstandings, and a lack of mutual appreciation for cultural differences.

Background

Since 2018, Albanians have made up the highest number of foreign nationals entering the UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM, a mechanism used to identify and support potential victims of modern slavery), surpassing the number of UK nationals referred as potential victims in 2022¹. The continued overrepresentation of Albanians in the UK NRM has prompted several studies² looking into Albanians and modern slavery and human trafficking. This research focused on understanding **the influence of culture** on human trafficking and modern slavery prevention, as well as the potential for culturally competent approaches to support survivors within the UK.

Examining Albania as a case study, the research investigated drivers for precarious migration and gathered insights from two distinct groups: Albanian youth and parents (through focus groups); and Albanian stakeholders from various sectors (through a shared learning event). These activities revealed cultural dynamics linked to precarious migration, human trafficking and modern slavery. In the pursuit of contributing cultural insights for prevention initiatives and policymaking on precarious migration, particularly related to trafficking and exploitation, the focus of this project has been on understanding the pivotal role of family in migration decision-making.

Additionally, the study employed the concept of cultural competence to explore cultural barriers within the modern slavery sector in the UK. The model introduced in this research project, the Papadopoulos model for Culturally Competent and Compassionate Care³, goes beyond fixed notions of competence and culture. Both culture and the competence of service providers are dynamic and complex, continuously evolving. The model embraces the notion of culturally competent compassion, defined as the human quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it, using culturally appropriate and acceptable interventions, which take into consideration both the service users' and the service providers' cultural backgrounds, as well as the context in which care is given.⁴

Recognising the crucial role of culture in survivor journeys is essential for effective prevention, particularly within the country of origin, and also for delivering trauma-informed and culturally competent support to those survivors seeking refuge in the UK.

1. Gov.UK (2022). Modern Slavery National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics UK End of Year Summary 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2022/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2022>. [Accessed on 25 September 2023]

2. Asylos (2019) Albania: Trafficked boys and young men, ARC Foundation, Available at: <https://www.asylos.eu/Handlers/Download.ashx?DMF=b49e66a6-a777-47da-90f7-b2fcc14946fa>; Beddoe (2021) Into the Arms of Traffickers: An examination of how delays in asylum and trafficking decision-making increase the risks of trafficking for young asylum-seekers, Shpresa Programme, Available at: <https://miclu.org/assets/uploads/2021/10/Into-the-Arms-of-Traffickers-Main-Report.pdf>; Hestia (2023) Underground Lives: Albanian Survivors Of Modern Slavery, Available at: <https://www.hestia.org/news/new-underground-lives-report-published-on-albanian-survivors-of-modern-slavery>

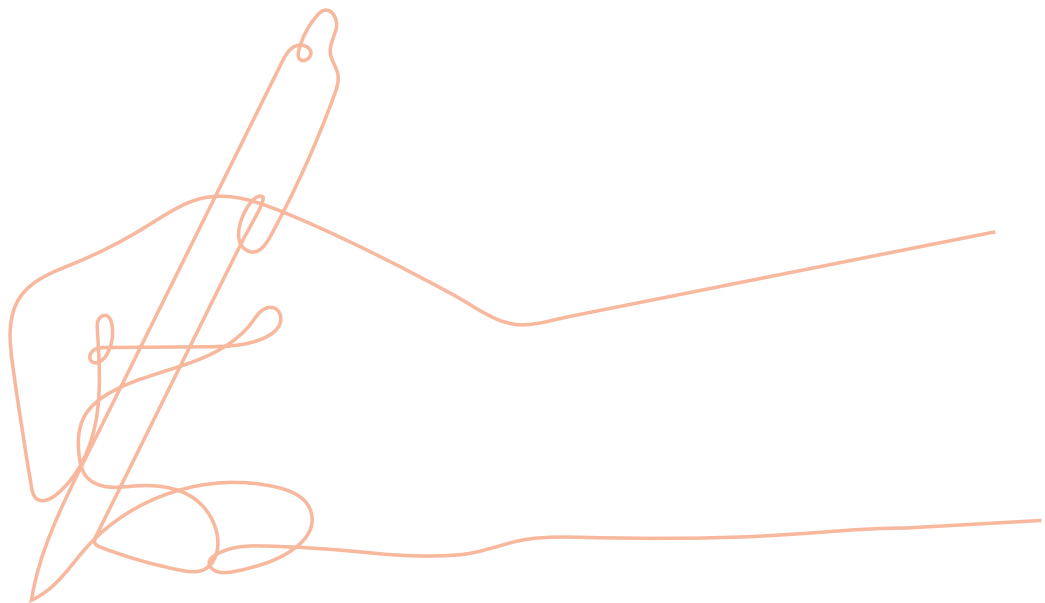
3. Papadopoulos, I. (2006). The Papadopoulos, Tilki, and Taylor model of developing cultural competence. *Transcultural Health and Social Care: Development of Culturally Competent Practitioners*, 7-24; Papadopoulos, I. (2018). *Culturally Competent Compassion: A Guide for Healthcare Students and Practitioners*. Routledge.

4. Papadopoulos, I. (2011). *Courage, compassion and cultural competence*. The 13th Anna Reynvaan Lecture. May 19.

Methodology

A multifaceted research approach was undertaken between July and November 2023, encompassing a literature review that investigated Albanian migration patterns and their intersection with modern slavery and explored cultural competence within the modern slavery context in the UK. This groundwork informed subsequent research stages, which included engaging various stakeholders in the UK and Albania.

Focus groups, a shared-learning event, an online survey, and individual consultations uncovered a diverse range of experiences from young people, parents, practitioners, and survivors. Five group consultations with UK practitioners further enriched the dataset. The culmination of this multifaceted approach resulted in the adaptation of the Culturally Competent and Compassionate Care Model for the modern slavery and human trafficking sector in the UK. Analysis involved JISC platform⁵ tools for survey data and thematic analysis for qualitative inputs from focus groups and consultations, offering a robust and insightful exploration of the subject.



5. JISC is the UK digital, data and technology agency focused on research and innovation. We used JISC platform to design and disseminate the survey used for data collection.

Findings

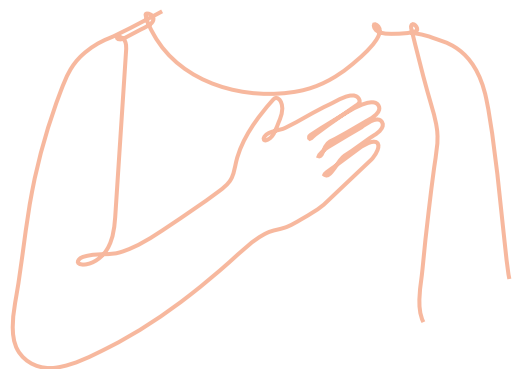
On cultural competence and prevention

1. Representations of Albanian foreign nationals in the UK public debate around migration and modern slavery oversimplify complex cultural realities that drive individuals into precarious migration.

Our findings suggest that prevailing narratives surrounding Albanian nationals in UK migration rhetoric and the UK NRM may oversimplify the intricate motivations for initial migration from Albania that may result in modern slavery. These narratives can be misinterpreted and subsequently filtered into a singular, stereotypical 'vulnerable-by-default⁶' category, satisfying predefined criteria within the NRM. This process not only diminishes agency and personal resilience, but also risks overlooking the diverse array of cultural factors, including economic, social and historical, that collectively drive individuals to embark on precarious journeys. Fostering a more accurate understanding of these complexities is necessary for creating comprehensive and culturally sensitive policies that address the root causes of precarious migration, and modern slavery and human trafficking.

'I left with my family in France, and my sister and I were minors. For documents, my sister and I went and stayed at the orphanage, hoping our documents would be made. We lived away from our parents for a year and a half, and it was a great sacrifice. I have not seen my parents during that time, only once. It was not the right decision because we were alone, without parents and it still hurts me today when I remember.'

From the Focus Group with Young People



6. This refers to a tendency or assumption to categorise individuals automatically as vulnerable or at risk, often without considering the nuances of their unique situations and without a thorough assessment of their specific circumstances or resilience.

2. Migratory decisions can be influenced by close or extended family, with implications for policy and prevention.

In many cultural contexts, including Albania, the family plays a crucial role in the decision-making process around migration, both as a supportive factor and, at times, as a potential risk factor. Family-centric decision-making to migrate may be driven by economic hardships, with the aim of seeking better livelihoods and financial stability; with familial aspirations for improved educational prospects; or escape from conflict and insecurity. Acknowledging these multifaceted familial motivations is essential for policymakers seeking to create interventions that address the diverse needs and aspirations of migrants and their families.

'My daughter has graduated from the University, bachelor and masters in Physiotherapy and cannot find any job here. I do not want her to leave the country, because I know that if she goes to Germany there, she will receive a salary of 2000 euros per month. But Albania is not giving her anything. I do not want her to leave me, because I have a son in Germany and another son in Italy. My body trembles when I think about it'.

From the Focus Group with Parents

By understanding the familial dynamics that contribute to migratory choices, policymakers can develop targeted prevention strategies that address economic vulnerabilities, commit to the provision of enhanced educational opportunities⁷, and mitigate social and cultural factors that may drive individuals towards precarious migration. These strategies should take into account promoting sustainable solutions that respect the autonomy of individuals within family units and also recognise the interconnectedness of these decisions within broader societal contexts.



⁷ Education was listed as one of the key focus areas for enhancement in the UK-Albania Joint Communique of December 2022. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-albania-joint-communique-enhancing-bilateral-cooperation-in-areas-of-common-interest/uk-albania-joint-communique-enhancing-bilateral-cooperation-in-areas-of-common-interest>

On cultural competence in service delivery

1. There is no comprehensive approach to culturally competent care in the NRM support system and broader support provisions that extend beyond the NRM.

A notable challenge arises from the **lack of a comprehensive approach to culturally competent care within the NRM** and broader support provisions that extend beyond the NRM. This gap significantly impacts the well-being and support received by survivors. The current lack in culturally competent care is particularly problematic as survivors often come from diverse cultural backgrounds, each with their unique norms, values, and sensitivities. These findings highlight the need for a culturally informed and compassionate approach to ensure that support systems adequately address the diverse needs of survivors.

2. Many practitioners lack adequate understanding of the cultural background of survivors, that may result in survivors feeling misunderstood and discriminated against.

Within the NRM support system, a lack of culturally competent care can manifest in various ways, including inadequate understanding of cultural differences, potential misinterpretations of survivors' needs, and challenges in effective communication. To address these gaps, there is a critical need for the development and implementation of compulsory training and comprehensive guidelines for service deliverers that integrate cultural competency into the NRM support system and extend to broader case management frameworks. Such an approach should include the ethical involvement of survivors in the design of both support services and cultural competency training to ensure a more compassionate and effective recovery process, minimising the risk of re-traumatisation and fostering a sense of empowerment among survivors.

3. The deficiency of culturally competent practice is experienced as re-traumatising by survivors.

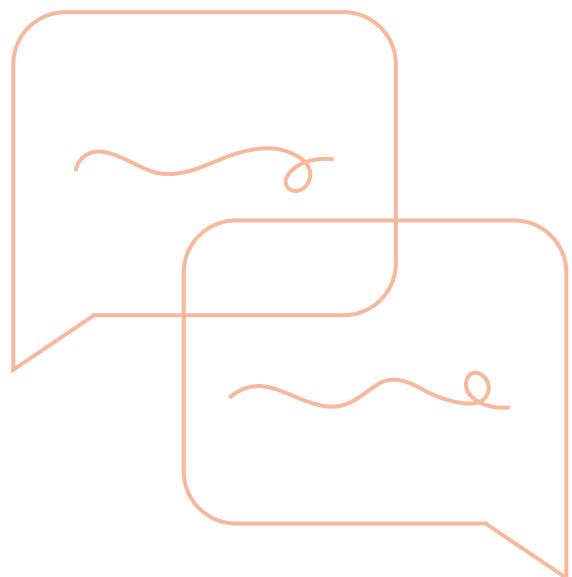
Lack of culturally competent care hampers the reflection and recovery process for survivors. It **may inadvertently perpetuate trauma** by failing to provide an inclusive and supportive environment that respects their cultural identities. Additionally, **feelings of misunderstanding or discrimination** can create barriers to accessing essential services, as survivors may be reluctant to engage with practitioners who do not appreciate the cultural nuances influencing their experiences and behaviours.

4. Survivors in shared accommodation encounter cultural barriers relating to other residents, that can give rise to miscommunications, misunderstandings, and a lack of mutual appreciation for cultural differences.

Survivors residing in shared accommodation face cultural barriers relating to other residents, that can give rise to miscommunications, misunderstandings, and a lack of mutual appreciation for cultural differences, which may impact their ability to comprehend and embrace diverse cultures. This finding suggests that the absence of effective strategies to address these cultural barriers may contribute to an environment where survivors feel isolated, uncomfortable, or excluded and can exacerbate the challenges survivors already face in their recovery journey.

Can we ask survivors what is true for them? We are also integrating the willingness to share power with survivors in order to learn from them. So, it's important. What do I know about this? What do I think? When we are able to acknowledge our own experiences, we make room to understand other cultures, and we are able to collaborate with the people we are working with. So, we can ask questions like, "Is this true for you?"

Survivor Consultant



Recommendations

For UK policymakers

1. Integrate family-focused considerations into migration policies, taking into account the role of culture and family in influencing decisions related to migration.

The findings in this study – and those of pre-existing studies – reveal that the decisions to migrate (precariously or otherwise) are often influenced by familial ties and aspirations. Overlooking these influences in policy frameworks can result in a lack of alignment with the lived experiences of migrants, which may reduce how effective they are at addressing exploitation risk because they do not consider the reality of migration-related decision-making. As part of this, the Home Office should consider engaging with experts, NGOs, and communities to understand the role of the family in the migration process.

2. Recognise that precarious migration can contribute to the risk of modern slavery and human trafficking and advocate for the adoption of a ‘harm on a continuum’ perspective. This perspective recognises that harm is not a one-time event but exists on a continuum, involving various exposures to risk, forms of exploitation and vulnerabilities throughout the migration journey.

As part of this, the Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office should consider incorporating this perspective into existing migration policies (including upstream migration), emphasising the various risks associated with different stages of the migration process.

The Home Office Modern Slavery Unit should consider implementing mandatory training for decision-makers in the Single Competent Authority and the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority to enhance cultural competency in NRM decision-making.

These recommendations are substantiated by the need for a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals vulnerable to modern slavery and human trafficking. By fostering discussions centred on this continuum perspective, stakeholders can engage in more comprehensive dialogues, leading to the development of culturally nuanced strategies that address the diverse and interconnected issues associated with modern slavery and human trafficking within the context of precarious migration. These discussions could take the form of working groups, sector-wide stakeholder engagement meetings, or other appropriate

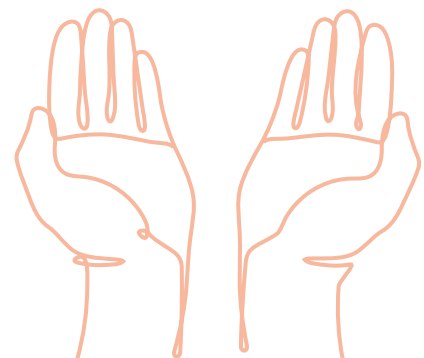
platforms, ensuring the active involvement of key actors, policymakers, and NRM decision-makers.

With regards to Albania specifically, there is a need to reshape the discourse surrounding Albanian nationals' migration and their representation in the NRM, and acknowledge the diverse cultural realities shaping individuals' decisions. A more nuanced and culturally informed approach to discussing and understanding precarious migration can lead to more effective policies and interventions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by Albanians. This requires moving beyond simplistic representations in rhetoric and embracing a more nuanced and accurate portrayal that recognises the rich mosaic of cultural influences on migration dynamics.

For UK practitioners

1. Adopt the Culturally Competent and Compassionate Care model⁸ adapted for the modern slavery sector, to design and introduce compulsory Cultural Competency training for practitioners.

As evidenced by key findings from this research, this recommendation is driven by the pressing need to establish a consistently culturally competent framework within the sector. This model, originally designed for and utilised in the health sector, highlights the significance of cultural competency and compassion in providing care and support. By adapting this well-established model for application within the modern slavery sector, there is an opportunity to bring a standardised and successful approach to addressing the specific cultural needs of survivors. The model underlines the importance of being aware of varied cultural backgrounds, fostering compassion, and customising care to individual experiences. This alignment is particularly crucial given the complex challenges inherent in the aftermath of modern slavery. Its implementation ensures a more culturally sensitive and compassionate approach in supporting survivors, promoting an environment favourable to healing and reintegration.



8. Listed as Appendix A in the full report.

2. Foster cultural humility among survivors to build understanding and mutual respect between communities.

Fostering cultural humility among survivors, a self-explorative approach encouraging an open and respectful attitude towards diverse cultural perspectives, is vital for building understanding and mutual respect between communities. Integrating cultural humility into survivor support initiatives contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and culturally sensitive community, assisting the healing and integration of survivors.

Practitioners should promote cultural humility within shared accommodation spaces, creating an inclusive environment and facilitating peer learning and knowledge exchange to support cultural exchanges and cross-cultural and open communication. It could also include the creation and dissemination of training and guidelines for those managing shared accommodation, focusing on cultural sensitivity, encouraging residents to learn about and respect each other's backgrounds.

For funders⁹ and knowledge brokers

1. Facilitate cross-country sharing of insights and lessons on trafficking intervention.

Our research shows that human trafficking is a transnational issue, and collaborative efforts across countries can bring about understanding cultural barriers. Cross-country sharing becomes essential to address cultural knowledge gaps. Instances of successful interventions, as well as challenges faced, can be shared and analysed, contributing to a more comprehensive and effective transnational response.

2. Promote cross-cultural awareness through educational and community engagement projects.

The promotion of cross-cultural awareness through in-country educational and community engagement projects aligns with the need for a holistic approach to addressing precarious migration and modern slavery and human trafficking, through awareness of diverse cultural, historical and societal contexts. Fostering understanding, communities become better equipped to recognise and address the root causes of precarious migration, and how it might lead to trafficking. Educational initiatives can also function as a preventative measure, empowering individuals with knowledge and increasing their awareness of potential risks.

9. The recommendations presented in this section are intended for consideration by a diverse range of potential funders, including governmental departments, such as the FCD0, non-governmental organisations, international development bodies, and philanthropic organisations specialising in issues related to migration and/or MSHT. These recommendations would align with the interests of funders seeking to support initiatives that promote collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, cultural exchanges, and community-based interventions to address challenges mentioned in the report.

3. Establishment of fora in both Albania¹⁰ and the UK that foster trust through open dialogue and community building.

These fora would serve as platforms for the cross-country sharing of insights and facilitate educational projects that promote cross-cultural awareness. By creating spaces for dialogue and community building, trust is cultivated, allowing for collaborative efforts in addressing modern slavery and human trafficking challenges and implementing inclusive and effective interventions.

In summary, these recommendations are interlinked as they collectively emphasise the importance of collaboration, cultural understanding, and open dialogue in the transnational efforts to address precarious migration and modern slavery and human trafficking. Facilitating cross-country sharing, promoting cross-cultural awareness, and establishing trust-building fora contribute to a more holistic and interconnected approach to addressing the complexities of modern slavery and human trafficking.

Areas for further research

Future research should contribute to understanding how cultural factors shape migration decisions, and how different communities may be more susceptible to trafficking and exploitation due to their cultural and societal contexts allowing for the development of targeted, culturally competent prevention strategies.

Furthermore, the importance of cultural competence extends beyond prevention to support services for survivors. Future research should prioritise evaluating the impact and effectiveness of culturally competent interventions for survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking and the impact on addressing the unique needs of survivors from diverse cultural backgrounds. This requires a nuanced examination of such interventions across diverse survivor communities. Acknowledging and accommodating cultural nuances in the NRM support system is integral to fostering resilience and facilitating successful reintegration into society. Moreover, a comprehensive examination of interpretation services within the modern slavery sector is crucial. Future research should focus on the accessibility, quality, and cultural competency of available interpreter services, as well as the adequacy of training programs designed to enhance cultural competency among interpreters. A thorough understanding of these elements will contribute to enhancing communication and addressing the crucial language barriers most foreign national survivors encounter when they first enter the NRM and asylum processes.

¹⁰. And other countries represented in the NRM.

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The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-creates high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

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