



# BASELINE STUDY FOR THE SAFE MIGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA PROJECT

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## **DISCLAIMER**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs conducted a baseline assessment for the Safe Migration in Central Asia project (SMICA). The study aimed to:

- Provide a more precise understanding of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) on safe migration and TIP among the populations of interest;
- Identify and recommend opportunities for leveraging linkages or collaboration with other assistance efforts so as to better meet the needs of the target populations;
- Identify problems and constraints that may occur during program implementation;
- Provide actionable recommendations and improvements to program implementation.

To address these issues, the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs conducted a targeted study using qualitative methods (focus groups and interviews) in order to study knowledge, attitudes and practices towards safe migration and TIP among three groups:

- 1) Direct beneficiaries (at-risk persons, migrants, and trafficked persons);
- 2) Businesspeople (including employment and/or recruitment agencies, business partnerships and companies, financial cooperative societies, private entrepreneurs, industry management, associations, and unions);
- 3) Specialists (academia, civil society, local government as well as national government actors).

Between July 14 and September 16, 2021, a team of nine researchers based in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic conducted 133 interviews and 36 focus groups about knowledge, attitudes and practices related to safe migration and human trafficking in Central Asia. In total, 304 individuals participated in the research. 105 of these participants were specialists: employees from relevant government organs, activists and NGO leaders working on safe migration, or other types of experts. The research also engaged with two categories of non-specialists. First, the team interviewed 149 individuals (direct beneficiaries of this project) who were either at-risk of human trafficking (migrants) or those who had experience with trafficking. Of these participants, 11 in Kazakhstan and 18 in the Kyrgyz Republic were survivors of trafficking. Overall, 58% of interviewed direct beneficiaries were women, with women making up 88% of the 29 survivors. Second, the team interviewed 50 businesspeople who employed migrants or were involved in sending migrants abroad.

## FINDINGS: THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

- All of the specialist and businesspeople respondents had a sense of what safe migration means, and they were able to identify key elements related to protections for migrants from risks to their life, health and wellbeing during all stages of the migration process. However, half of the direct beneficiaries were unaware of the term “safe migration” or were unable to explain its potential meaning. Across communities in the north and south of the country, one of the most common distinctions between safe and unsafe migration (made by three-quarters of respondents who could define safe migration) was the involvement of the state. They effectively equated safe migration with legal migration. Just under three-quarters of the businesspeople defined safe migration as determined by the existence of a valid employment agreement. Only 10 of the 108 direct beneficiaries mentioned employment agreements. However, when asked about what makes migration safe, over two-thirds did mention the need for “documents” (which could refer to either legal permission to work in the country or contracts with an employer).
- All of the direct beneficiaries expected that they would make money and be able to elevate their standard of living by migrating. In three-quarters of these cases, the experience did not live up to expectations due to lower pay, poor living conditions, and abusive employers.
- Of the direct beneficiaries, 23 respondents (21%) had not heard of or could not define TIP. All but one of the 23 people who could not define TIP were female, with just under half having migrated in some capacity. In other words, based on our limited sample, women, and those with limited experiences with migration are less likely to be aware of TIP. In general, understandings of TIP were often very limited, except among those who had experienced it themselves or were close to someone who had. While most direct beneficiaries had a sense that TIP referred to a crime that involves people being sold for profit or forced into slavery, few could elaborate in more detail. Therefore, they are unlikely to take any measures to protect themselves or their family members from TIP.
- Interviews with direct beneficiaries and potential migrants show little awareness of the dangers of TIP within Kyrgyzstan, even though internal migration is growing. Bishkek survivor and specialist interviews clearly indicate that TIP often begins within Kyrgyzstan, and that internal migrants who have relocated to the Bishkek area in search of opportunities are targeted by TIP networks for both internal and external trafficking.
- Three-quarters of female direct beneficiaries cited gendered differences in the outcomes of the migration situation as they experienced it. Women frequently cited problems related to being abandoned by their husbands, as well as difficulties with or without obtaining legal documents. Documentation for their children and access to health care or school resources are problematic, because in some cases children were born abroad and not issued proper documentation. In other cases, mothers and grandparents could not properly prove custody or power-of-attorney changes.

- Among both male and female respondents, the pressure to avoid shame, stigma, or social exclusion leads many to publicly talk about their own past migration experience as much more positive than it was.
- Both female and male respondents agreed that women faced a higher danger of stigmatization and social exclusion on return from migration no matter what their experiences had been. That is to say, communities cite stereotypes and assume that a woman had participated in sex work or been sexually exploited by an employer, leading to discrimination and social exclusion regardless of whether or not that assumption had any basis.
- Direct beneficiaries displayed a lack of trust in law enforcement across all communities.
- Over three-quarters of survivors discussed how they felt shame and had been marginalized by members of their community after they returned.
- Over three-quarters of respondents from across the groups had first-hand experience with bride kidnapping (*ala kachoo*), either as accidental witnesses, or of themselves or those in their own networks. 83% of specialist participants (68% of them men) argued that TIP and bride kidnapping are similar, while just over half of the direct beneficiaries agreed with this statement (again skewing towards more male participants). A smaller number, mostly women, felt from the woman's perspective that TIP and bride kidnapping are essentially the same, because the woman has her agency taken away in both cases. They noted that violence is frequently used in both cases. Generally, women, and those with personal experience of forced kidnapping or who had been upset by witnessing it directly, seemed more inclined to see the two as similar. Five respondents argued that bride kidnapping is worse than TIP.
- A prominent myth cited by respondents was that survivors have "only themselves to blame" if they fall into a negative situation and cannot extricate themselves. A commonly held assumption is that trafficking only happens to gullible, uneducated people. For example, just under two-thirds of businesspeople thought migrants themselves bore the primary responsibility for keeping themselves safe.
- Almost two-thirds of specialists who participated in the research argued that women are the "weaker sex," and that they are more vulnerable to TIP as a result of their gender. Three-quarters of those framing women as more vulnerable to trafficking by virtue of their weakness were men.
- Three-quarters of respondents in all regions and categories rated information currently available to facilitate safe migration as untrustworthy, and they cited a general lack of (or awareness of) information about specific work opportunities that are safe and dependable.
- In both the north and south of the country (especially in rural communities) respondents cited the importance of personal networks in determining whether information can be trusted. They often reported making migration decisions based on the experiences of neighbors or family members, while also relying on those network connections in the target countries to help find work. Direct beneficiaries primarily draw information from

word-of-mouth within their peer networks (or virtual word-of-mouth over WhatsApp or Instagram).

- Over 90% of respondents from all three groups indicate that survivors should be supported in reintegrating into their communities. However, direct beneficiaries warn that female survivors and children born abroad in particular may face stigmatization and potentially rejection from their home communities or families due to assumptions that the women are “ruined”, and their children may be illegitimate.
- Ten specialists and business respondents (16% of the total) cited the 2015 decision to abolish migration departments in local government offices while merging those staff into other departments (such as Labor/Employment) as having negatively affected the migration situation in the country.
- Just over one-third of specialists working within the government and in civil society noted that the various policy and personnel changes since the restructuring and restaffing of various departments under the government since October 2020 had disrupted various projects on TIP. Mechanisms, including the National Referral Mechanism, are not operating properly.<sup>1</sup> This assessment was corroborated by the direct beneficiaries, over three-quarters of whom negatively evaluated the work of the government in CTIP.
- There is broad agreement among specialists outside of the government and direct beneficiaries that the lack of prosecutions and distrust of police are a vicious circle that keep victims from even being willing to come forward to give evidence in the first place.
- Over three-quarters of the migrants who participated in the research were enthusiastic about interventions that would help them migrate safely.
- However, over two-thirds of the direct beneficiaries were not aware of the existence of crisis centers, hotlines or services for those in migration. There are currently 15 crisis centers in the Kyrgyz Republic. However, respondents, even specialists, were only able to name two centers.
- Three-quarters of direct beneficiaries, including 80% of the survivors of trafficking, expressed interest in participating in a survivor network, provided they had the option to remain anonymous.

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<sup>1</sup> Established in 2019, the National Referral Mechanism provides formal policies on victim identification, assistance referral, provision of social services, and protection of victims' personal data.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR SMICA:

- **Develop a Survivor Network.** Many respondents expressed a desire to use their own experiences, be they positive or negative, to help others avoid falling victim to trafficking. This could be modelled on best practices from other countries, such as the ANIRBAN survivors' network in Bangladesh, Hamro Samman in Nepal, or the Survivor Network in the USA. The network could be organized by an NGO and involve monthly wellness calls, online psychosocial support sessions, and peer to peer mentorship.
- **Improve information campaigns.** As highlighted above, there is a knowledge gap surrounding the existence of services for the support of safe migration and counter trafficking in persons. Information campaigns could be made more effective by connecting at-risk groups with available services and enhancing knowledge of safe migration. First, numerous respondents recommended the development of information campaigns on the risks of TIP that could be distributed in schools, particularly in districts with high migration rates. Second, respondents in the south argued that campaigns may be more effective if they could find a common language with the population through the prism of Islam. Lastly, respondents recommended utilizing social networks that are most popular among younger people, including Instagram and TikTok. Many respondents, particularly from the direct beneficiaries, consider survivor narratives a much more reliable form of information than other resources currently available to them. Utilizing survivor narratives, messaging on (C)TIP should clearly articulate that survivors are not to blame for being trafficked and contain narratives that challenge gender stereotypes. Using survivor accounts could help build empathy.
- **Train law enforcement to adopt more survivor-centric approaches to TIP.** Training for law enforcement in detection of TIP and developing trauma-aware approaches that focus on survivor needs could help build trust with survivors and prevent underreporting. The training could be delivered via a series of videos.
- **Focus more on internal migration.** Our research shows that many direct beneficiaries did not think they could be trafficked within the Kyrgyz Republic. SMICA should highlight that internal migration also needs to be safe in training sessions and informational campaigns.
- **Provide additional training sessions to support safe migration.** Specialists and direct beneficiaries both identified a lack of Russian language skills as a key factor that led migrants to find themselves in unsafe situations. Training sessions could be supplemented with training sessions on regulations affecting migrants in Russia and job skills training. These training sessions should be held in rural areas with high levels of migration, such as Batken, Isfana, Aravan, and Talas. Every effort should be made to invite and include women in these sessions as participants and trainers.

## **FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC:**

- **Reopen migration departments.** Respondents, particularly in the south, noted the need to reopen migration departments in the field that had been opened in 2005 and closed in 2015. Staff were laid off or transferred to other departments (such as Labor) where they no longer had remit to work on migration. In other cases, responsibilities were transferred (particularly to Labor/Employment departments) without increasing their budget or staff.
- **Increase investigations and prosecutions.** While the country has a robust legal system to deal with TIP, it is not being effectively utilized. As one respondent noted, “Yes, there are laws. There is an article through which people can be sentenced for up to 13 years, but this requires proof that these cases were indeed TIP. It is very difficult for us, because if applicants are offered money to close the case, they quickly agree and give a counter statement”. Other specialist interviews stated that they believe corruption undermines police willingness to open investigations at all. They repeatedly stated beliefs that police, or former police officials, have a financial interest in protecting sex-trafficking networks from investigation or prosecution. Low trust in law enforcement -- stemming from these perceptions extremely low levels of prosecution of TIP cases, and fears that anonymity will not be protected -- helps create a vicious circle in which victims decline to report or participate in investigations and police and prosecution services cannot initiate criminal prosecutions.
- **Create an independent body to oversee CTIP.** Specialists noted that the National Referral Mechanism is not functioning effectively because there is no centralized management. This is despite the fact that the Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for coordinating its activities. Specialists proposed establishing a specialized independent body to oversee its work. This body would not be responsible for the NRM’s day-to-day activities but would instead monitor and evaluate its activities and make recommendations on how to make the NRM more effective. This could be similar to the Kyrgyz National Center for the Prevention of Torture, which was established in 2012 to oversee law enforcement. This could help with coordination among already overburdened agencies and civil society. This independent body could serve as a national rapporteur on TIP.



## FINDINGS: KAZAKHSTAN

- Levels of knowledge about TIP and safe migration were higher in Kazakhstan than in the Kyrgyz Republic. Almost all of the respondents had heard the term safe migration or could define it. Two-thirds of respondents referred to the legal aspects of safe migration. Respondents who knew about safe migration emphasized the legal aspects of safe migration.
- Most of the respondents had heard of TIP. The predominant understanding of TIP was a crime involving the exploitation of individuals for their labor. Over three-quarters of respondents, with higher numbers from the government sector, understood this as a problem driven by lack of documentation.
- Despite levels of knowledge about TIP being relatively high among direct beneficiaries, one-third of respondents did not view themselves as survivors of TIP even though their experiences met the State Department definition of human trafficking.
- 70% of the direct beneficiaries do not possess full information about safe migration, the risks of trafficking in Kazakhstan, or which organizations they could turn to for help.
- Most of the direct beneficiaries were influenced or recruited into migration by people they knew in their country, such as a neighbor, friend, or family member. They had limited information, and they did not have pre-departure briefings by employment agencies or other institutions.
- Respondents in the business sector and victims/migrants did not seem to know about new changes to Kazakhstan's migration policy (as of January 2020). Under this new policy, Kazakhstan cancelled the practice of using migration cards that had previously required migrants to register with the migration services in Kazakhstan within a five-day period. The new policy allows migrants to enter the country and stay up to 30 days without requiring registration cards, and if needed they can extend their stay up to 90 days within a six-month period. However, the responsibility for any violations lies with those hosting or sponsoring the migrants under this new law. The fact that respondents in the business sector did not know these details (and during the interviews continued to assume that migrants were solely responsible for violations) shows that people in the business sector are not familiar with the policy changes.
- Half of the respondents from the business community think that the employer should keep their workers' passports due to stated fears that they will escape or that they may steal from them. They were not aware that this was illegal.
- Most migrants who were interviewed did not know about labor rules governing migration in Kazakhstan. They reported surrendering their passports to employers, believing that s/he will use it for registration purposes.
- Common myths reported by specialists and businesspeople included the idea that trafficking, and slavery only existed in the past or that it only takes place abroad (in distant parts of the Middle East). Other myths include the idea that only marginal segments of the population fall victim to TIP. Another commonly held idea is that

survivors themselves are to blame. Around a third of the businesspeople and one-quarter of the specialists repeated aspects of these myths in their answers to questions about vulnerability to TIP.

- In the business and specialist groups, 81% of respondents thought that women were more vulnerable to trafficking than men due to their position as the “weaker sex.”
- One-third of respondents from the business, government, and NGO sectors mentioned the importance of reaching young people in schools through specially designed programs, including lectures, plays based on real life examples, discussions, and short videos.
- Over half of the direct beneficiaries were not aware of the existence of crisis centers, hotlines, or services for migrants.
- Respondents argued that many survivors do not trust the police or government in general, as they do not believe that survivors of trafficking are treated as human beings. They are afraid of being blamed or humiliated by police, who view trafficking as a law enforcement rather than a trauma-related issue. Women are particularly afraid of the male-dominated police.
- There is a lack of cooperation and information sharing among agencies.
- Over half of the survivors of trafficking and migrants supported the creation of a national survivor network.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR SMICA:

- **Organize trauma and gender sensitivity training for stakeholders, especially law enforcement.** More training on gender and trauma sensitivity for law enforcement could help address the previously identified distrust of police. Very frequent rotation of staff in government agencies leads to new and inexperienced staff, specifically on gender and trauma sensitivity. While law enforcement was singled out as a particularly problematic actor regarding CTIP, responses also indicate that SMICA should enhance the gender and trauma sensitivity aspects of its training for other stakeholders like healthcare workers and labor inspectors.
- **Organize workshops for employers and employment agencies.** SMICA should organize training workshops to cover laws and regulations related to migration, including the illegality of seizing workers’ passports. SMICA could also organize an information campaign on social media.
- **Organize training sessions and informational campaigns for migrants.** Given that many migrants did not know about the changes to Kazakhstan's migration policy from January 2020, SMICA should organize training sessions on migration laws and regulations for migrant workers. The briefings could be supplemented by a public information campaign on social media to raise awareness of the new laws.

- **Improve information campaigns.** Research demonstrates that there is still a lack of awareness about TIP in the greater public, with many survivors themselves not knowing that their experiences meet the definition of trafficking or where to find support in crisis situations. Direct beneficiaries suggested three ways in which information campaigns could be enhanced. First, respondents noted that younger people in particular are increasingly using TikTok and Instagram as sources of information. More content should be developed for these platforms to increase the reach of information. Second, they suggested that the government and civil society conduct outreach in schools to make young people aware of the risks of TIP and practices of safe migration from a young age. Finally, they recommended that more information be posted at points of departure or transit for migrants, such as airports, borders, bus stations, and markets.
- **Create a Survivor Network.** The network could be built in partnership with the proposed network in the Kyrgyz Republic, and it could adopt a similar structure, with a local NGO coordinating activity. Survivors said that, if there was a guarantee of anonymity or no pressure to participate, they would welcome the opportunity to share experiences and coping mechanisms. Those who had migrated safely expressed a desire to give support and advice to others.
- **Provide training to labor inspectors to help them identify victims of forced labor and report potential trafficking cases to the police.** Such training sessions could increase levels of identification and connect survivors to necessary services.

## **FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF KAZAKHSTAN:**

- **Establish a National Referral Mechanism.** Numerous respondents discussed the ways in which government agencies lack coordination among themselves and with civil society. Creating a National Referral Mechanism, modelled on international best practices, would be one way to enhance coordination among stakeholders. It could also allow for greater transparency and reveal underlying explanations for why law enforcement does not initiate investigation into trafficking cases more frequently.
- **Create a centralized anti-trafficking data collection system.** The respondents lamented the fact that each government agency has its own collection system for data on TIP and migration. Standardization and centralization would allow for enhanced coordination and could be built into the National Referral Mechanism.
- **Adopt a law on trafficking in persons.** Respondents noted that there is no specific law that protects citizens from trafficking in persons in Kazakhstan. The current legal basis for the definition and punishment for TIP stems from the Constitution and the Criminal Code. A specific law could enhance protections for survivors, increase prosecutions, and align the definition of trafficking with international standards.

- **Adopt stricter punishments for traffickers.** Over half of the direct beneficiaries thought that the current system did not provide adequate justice for survivors, despite harsher punishments having been previously introduced in 2019. They called for law enforcement to increase numbers of arrests, the court system to increase convictions, and for changes in the law to increase punishments for traffickers.
- **Expand the network of shelters.** Those who had spent time in shelters were positive about the assistance they received there, and they advocated for more centers to be established across the country.

## BACKGROUND

The Safe Migration in Central Asia project uses evidence-based practices and cross-border connections to strengthen the mutual accountability and effectiveness of governments, NGOs, and the private sector to prevent trafficking in persons, protect survivors, and promote safe migration, as part of USAID's Asia-wide suite of counter-trafficking interventions. Safe Migration in Central Asia is a five-year activity implemented by Winrock International in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Safe Migration in Central Asia provides assistance in the following areas:

- Supports governments in the regulation of migration issues and prevention of human trafficking and protection of survivors;
- Reduces the vulnerability of populations to all forms of trafficking in persons;
- Expands and improves identification and assistance to survivors of human trafficking;
- Improves prosecution for crimes related to human trafficking (only in the Kyrgyz Republic).
- Collaborates with local and international organizations, governments, and civil society to combine individual country approaches into cohesive regional strategies to strengthen bilateral and multi-country actions in order to promote rights-based migration and counter trafficking in persons.

The activity uses the following cross-cutting approaches:

- Engaging youth and leadership in planning and implementation in order to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking in persons (TIP) and cultivate youth leaders as activists to address human trafficking issues.
- Adapting to changing environments and evolving priorities, while focusing on the highest impact activities through continuous learning with selective and focused interventions.
- Ensuring sustainability through collaborative implementation with government, civil society, and the private sector, and their ownership of activities.
- Connecting with and leveraging other programs to achieve the greatest impact through complementary efforts.
- Using robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes and tools to continuously gauge activity progress and effects through measurable impact.

## DEFINITIONS

By trafficking in persons, we refer to the definition used by the U.S. government.<sup>2</sup> The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:

- Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age.
- The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

A victim need not be physically transported from one location to another for the crime to fall within this definition.

Safe migration is more difficult to define. Safe migration is related to, but not synonymous with legal migration. The legal status of migrants is one aspect of what can make migration safe. But it also involves a broader range of means through which migrants are protected against risks to their health and life at all the stages of migration in the country of origin, transit and destination. Safe migration involves awareness raising, trust building and institutional support mechanisms assisting migrants.<sup>3</sup>

## THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

The Kyrgyz Republic remains highly dependent on migration, with remittances accounting for one-third of the economy in 2019. According to Oxus Society’s Central Asia Migration Tracker, an amalgamated dataset which tracked migration patterns from Central Asia between 2016 and 2019, labor migration to Russia has been growing steadily in the lead up the pandemic, from 361,875 in 2016 to 453,702 in 2019.<sup>4</sup> These official statistics do not account for the thousands of Kyrgyz citizens who work in Russia illegally. Many of the migrants are from groups that are vulnerable to TIP. Around one-third are women, in stark contrast with neighboring countries,

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<sup>2</sup> “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report,” <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<sup>3</sup> “Safe migration as an emerging anti-trafficking agenda?” OpenDemocracy, 21 May 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/safe-migration-as-emerging-antitrafficking-agenda/>

<sup>4</sup> “Introducing the Central Asia Migration Tracker,” *Oxus Society*, 15 December 2020, <https://oxussociety.org/introducing-the-central-asia-migration-tracker/>

where this figure is under 10%.<sup>5</sup> Around 48% of migrants are young people aged between 14 and 35 years old.<sup>6</sup> International organizations and NGOs reported assisting 72 survivors of TIP in 2019, 60 of whom were exploited in forced labor and 12 in sex trafficking. All but one were Kyrgyz citizens with 40 of them being men.<sup>7</sup> The government initiated 40 trafficking investigations in 2020, up from eight in 2019.<sup>8</sup> However, no one has been prosecuted for the last three years. Due to this modest improvement, the State Department upgraded the Kyrgyz Republic to a Tier 2 country in 2021.

The Kyrgyz Republic has developed relatively robust legislation to counter TIP. Its constitution prohibits slavery and human trafficking (Article 23) and it has a standalone Law on Prevention and Combatting Human Trafficking in Persons (adopted in 2005). In September 2019, the government formally adopted a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) into law, establishing policies on survivor identification and provision of social services and protection. Under the protocols of the NRM, responsibilities are allocated to multiple government agencies at both the central and regional level. However, there is no coordinating body and close coordination and standardized practice between agencies is required.<sup>9</sup> The law lacks protective measures for foreign survivors and remains little known among law enforcement agencies.

## KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan is an important destination for migrants from other countries in Central Asia, and a transit country for those headed to Russia. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, many left Kazakhstan. The population shrank from 16.1 million to 14.5 million from

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<sup>5</sup> “Kyrgyzstan: migrant women workers and a ‘lost generation’ of children,” *The Conversation*, 24 October 2017, <https://theconversation.com/kyrgyzstan-migrant-women-workers-and-a-lost-generation-of-children-85346>

<sup>6</sup> “External Youth Migration in the Countries of Central Asia: Risk Analysis and Minimization of Negative Consequences,” *International Organization for Migration*, 2019, [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/external\\_youth\\_migration\\_en.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/external_youth_migration_en.pdf), p.20.

<sup>7</sup> “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kyrgyz Republic,” *State Department*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/kyrgyz-republic/>

<sup>8</sup> “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kyrgyz Republic,” *State Department*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/kyrgyz-republic/>

<sup>9</sup> Will Russell and Aigul Kasymova, “The Challenges of Bringing Human Traffickers to Justice: A Study from Kyrgyzstan,” *Journal of Modern Slavery*, 2019, <https://slavefreetoday.org/the-challenges-of-bringing-human-traffickers-to-justice-a-study-from-kyrgyzstan/>

1990 to 2000.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Kazakhstan ran a migration deficit of 108,000 per year.<sup>11</sup> By 2003, in-migration amounted to only 16,000 people.<sup>12</sup> Migration between 2010 and 2015 had flattened out, a combination of lower out-migration and the repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs living in neighboring countries as part of the state-backed *oralman* program.<sup>13</sup> Labor migration from Kazakhstan to Russia remains low, but it has doubled since 2016 to reach 136,208 in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, Kazakhstan has become an important transit country and destination for migrants from the rest of Central Asia. In 2016, there were over 1.2 million migrants (mostly from Uzbekistan) officially registered in Kazakhstan.<sup>15</sup> This increase in migration was driven by a construction boom in Kazakhstan, the 2012 introduction of a five-year re-entry ban for those staying illegally in Russia for more than six months, and Russia's economic downturn in 2014.<sup>16</sup> Kazakhstan also became an attractive destination during the Covid-19 pandemic as border closures and high prices for plane tickets made Russia a less viable option for Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz migrants.<sup>17</sup> The official figures only tell part of the story. Previous research indicates that the majority of migrants work with an irregular status and are therefore not officially counted as migrant workers by the authorities.<sup>18</sup> Migrants typically work in construction, agriculture (particularly in the spring and summer months in the south of Kazakhstan), at markets, and in the service sector.

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<sup>10</sup> "Migration Profiles, Kazakhstan," <https://esa.un.org/migmgprofiles/indicators/files/Kazakhstan.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Sergey Ryazantsev, "Russia and Kazakhstan in Eurasian Migration System: Development Trends, Socio-Economic Consequences of Migration and Approaches to Regulation," *CARIM-East Research Report*, 2013, [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/29930/CARIM-East\\_RR-2013-44.pdf?sequence=1](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/29930/CARIM-East_RR-2013-44.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>12</sup> "Migration and Skills in North and Central Asia," *UN*, 2015, [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2%20Migration%20and%20Skills%20Rus%20report%20v1-4-E\\_0.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2%20Migration%20and%20Skills%20Rus%20report%20v1-4-E_0.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> "Migration Profiles, Kazakhstan," <https://esa.un.org/migmgprofiles/indicators/files/Kazakhstan.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> "Introducing the Central Asia Migration Tracker," *Oxus Society*, 15 December 2020, <https://oxussociety.org/introducing-the-central-asia-migration-tracker/>

<sup>15</sup> Kazakhstan Situational Analysis, SMICA

<sup>16</sup> See, Karolina Kluczevska, "Migrants' Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation: The Tajik Story," *OSCE*, 2014, [https://osce-academy.net/upload/file/Policy\\_Brief\\_16.pdf](https://osce-academy.net/upload/file/Policy_Brief_16.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> "Central Asian Migrant Workers Choosing Kazakhstan Over Russia Despite Lower Pay," *RFE/RL*, 3 June 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-central-asia-workers/31288542.html>

<sup>18</sup> "Migrant Workers in Kazakhstan: No Status, No Rights," *FIDH*, 2016, [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/note\\_kazakhstan\\_681a\\_6\\_sept\\_2016\\_uk\\_web.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/note_kazakhstan_681a_6_sept_2016_uk_web.pdf)



The government of Kazakhstan identified 72 trafficking survivors in 2020.<sup>19</sup> This was an increase from 45 in 2019. The government prosecuted 45 human trafficking cases in 2020, compared with 67 cases in 2019, and convicted 11 sex traffickers, compared with eight in 2019.<sup>20</sup> In 2019, NGOs reported assisting 76 trafficking survivors, compared to 122 in 2018. Of these, 51 were from Uzbekistan. The government-funded and NGO-operated trafficking hotline received 1,834 phone calls in 2019 (the vast majority of which were requests for information) while 12 calls were referred to anti-trafficking police units but did not result in confirmed trafficking cases. Fearing extortion and deportation, many foreign survivors are reluctant to approach police. For these minor improvements to counter trafficking in persons (CTIP), the State Department upgraded Kazakhstan to a Tier 2 country in 2021. Given the levels of stigmatization around TIP, respondents noted that these figures are underreported.

Several articles in the Criminal Code deal with aspects of trafficking in persons, including Articles 128, 134, 135, 308, 125(3b), and 126(3b). A number of government agencies share responsibility for trafficking in persons (TIP). Within the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Migration Service devises migration policies and monitors migrants, while the Department for Criminal Police regulates the procedures of preventing, identifying, countering and investigating crimes, including crimes related to human trafficking. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection regulates labor standards. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs deals with TIP abroad. Meanwhile, more than two dozen NGOs work in CTIP, operating 10 shelters.

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<sup>19</sup> “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kazakhstan,” *State Department*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/kazakhstan/>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

The current study aims to:

- Provide a more precise understanding of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) on safe migration and TIP among the populations of interest;
- Identify and recommend opportunities for leveraging linkages or collaboration with other assistance efforts for better meeting the needs of the target populations;
- Identify problems and constraints that may occur during program implementation;
- Provide actionable recommendations and improvements to program implementation.

Prior research has identified that the risks for TIP are not evenly or randomly distributed among either the general population or the full geography of the individual countries or the region. As such, we conducted a targeted study using qualitative methods (focus groups and interviews), to explore knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards safe migration and TIP among three groups:

- 1) Direct beneficiaries (at-risk persons, migrants, and trafficked persons);
- 2) Businesspeople (including employment and/or recruitment agencies, business partnerships and companies, financial cooperative societies, private entrepreneurs, industry management, associations, and unions);
- 3) Specialists (academia, civil society, local government as well as national government actors).

We chose qualitative methods for this research, as our prior experience conducting and analyzing large-scale surveys on sensitive topics in Central Asia has shown that respondents are frequently suspicious and guarded. Out of a sense of self-preservation, they will often give the answer they believe is “correct” rather than one that reflects their own experiences. Longer and more personalized interactions (including interviews and focus groups) give the interviewer a chance to establish a rapport. This rapport will lead to more detailed information about the purpose and background of the interaction, while also earning the trust of respondents in a way that allows the research team to collect more accurate data while informing a far more accurate picture of a sensitive issue (particularly in a marginalized community).

We developed a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) question guide (see Annex II) in order to examine the existing level of knowledge and awareness of the realities of TIP, the push and pull factors for TIP, and services to protect vulnerable migrants. The guide focused on what is known, what is thought, and what is being done about TIP.

### Sample

We used purposive sampling to identify and recruit participants for the project. While the sample is not intended to be representative of the population, we strove (where possible) to achieve gender balance. While data saturation for qualitative sampling is well understood as a principle, few studies exist offering guidelines for best practices in sample size. Two relevant studies, Hennink et al (2017)<sup>21</sup> and Guest et al (2006)<sup>22</sup> among populations in the US, Nigeria, and Ghana, found that at least 70% of all coding terms (including 100% of high prevalence terms) were elaborated after ten interviews or less. Codes developed after less than ten interviews showed Cronbach's Alpha of over 0.70, and audit logs showed that over 50% of all changes to the codebook occurred following analysis of 12 interviews or less. From these findings, we determine that data saturation for an initial set of thematic codes generally occurs at 10 respondents for each disaggregated target audience, while data saturation for further elaboration of sub-themes occurs at 25 respondents (across both KII interviewees and focus group participants). We therefore had an intended sample size of minimum 10 qualitative respondents for each of the following disaggregable sub-populations of interest:

1. Direct beneficiaries (migrants, former migrants, at-risk persons)
2. Businesspeople

Due to the sensitivities involved in identification, approach, and consent, we sampled the following populations ad hoc according to the number of available individuals rather than set quotas:

- Specialists (local and national government officials)
- Specialists (academia, civil society)
- Direct beneficiaries (survivors of TIP)

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Between July 14 and September 16, 2021, a team of nine researchers based in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic conducted 133 interviews and 36 focus groups about knowledge, attitudes and practices related to safe migration and human trafficking in Central Asia. In total, 304 individuals participated in the research. Of these, 105 were specialists: employees from relevant government organs, activists and NGO leaders working on safe migration and other experts. The research also engaged with two categories of non-specialists. First, the team interviewed 139

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<sup>21</sup> Monique M. Hennink, Bonnie N. Kaiser, and Vincent C. Marconi, "Code Saturation Versus Meaning Saturation: How Many Interviews are Enough?," *Qualitative Health Research* 27(4), 2017, pg. 591-608.

<sup>22</sup> Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson, "How Many Interviews are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability," *Field Methods* 18(1), 2006, pg. 59-82.

individuals who were at-risk of human trafficking (migrants) and those who had experience with trafficking, the direct beneficiaries of the project. Of these, at least 11 in Kazakhstan and 18 in the Kyrgyz Republic were survivors of trafficking. While for ethical reasons we did not ask respondents whether they self-identified as survivors of trafficking, we used the State Department definition of trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery” to determine based on the information they volunteered whether they had experienced trafficking.<sup>23</sup> This likely means that we have undercounted the number of survivors we interviewed, as they may not have given complete answers to the questions or self-labeled as survivors. Second, the team interviewed 50 businesspeople who employed migrants or were involved in sending migrants abroad.

The team used purposive sampling to identify participants in the study, using their existing networks with government, businesses, civil society, and direct beneficiaries to recruit participants. All but three of the interviews and focus groups were recorded. They were conducted in Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh.

The refusal rate was 10% in the Kyrgyz Republic, with no real difference by gender. The most frequent reason for refusing to participate in the project was a lack of time or scheduling conflicts (for the focus groups). One NGO leader started the interview and then withdrew when the team clarified for the second time that the interview would not be published; the individual wanted to raise awareness in the media about a specific case. One TIP survivor declined to participate citing emotional trauma that an interview might cause them.

The refusal rate for Kazakhstan was 7%, with no real difference by gender. While all the specialists and businesspeople the team approached responded positively, one-quarter of the at-risk group, mostly migrants at the border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan refused to participate. Many did not trust “strangers,” especially when transiting the border. In general, the border area is chaotic, with few appropriate spaces to conduct interviews. Many were simply too distracted to want to participate in an interview.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the research, but the situation was effectively managed by the team. In the Kyrgyz Republic, one interview and one focus group (5% of respondents) were conducted online. The remaining interviews and focus groups were conducted in-person. Given the latest wave of Covid-19 in Kazakhstan, approximately 80% of the working

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<sup>23</sup> “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report,” *State Department*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

population is working remotely. As such, most of the interviews and focus groups were conducted online. The advantage of this is that the team could interview participants from all three target groups in all 14 regions of Kazakhstan.

Every effort was made to gain a broad range of perspectives from different stakeholders. While the sample was not intended to be representative, the team ensured that over half of respondents in both countries came from outside of the major cities, Bishkek, Almaty, and Nur-Sultan (see Figures 1 and 2). The team visited specific areas where vulnerability to trafficking was higher, such as the Uzbek-Kazakh border and Batken in the Kyrgyz Republic. As part of the training, the team discussed the importance of gender sensitivity. In the Kyrgyz Republic, 112 (65%) of the respondents were female and 59 males. In Kazakhstan, 90 (68%) of the respondents were female and 43 males. The gender distribution is broken out by target group below.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS**

The following tables break down the focus groups and interviews by location and the three target groups (specialists, businesspeople, direct beneficiaries):

**Figure 1: By Location, The Kyrgyz Republic**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>
Bishkek	20	8	79
Osh	12	3	28
Jalal Abad	8	2	21
Batken	0	2	12
Aravan	14	3	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>171</b>

**Figure 2: By Location, Kazakhstan**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>
Almaty	14	7	35
Shymkent	27	7	48
Nur-Sultan	18	0	18
Turkestan	13	1	16
Other Regions	7	3	16
	<b>79</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>133</b>

**Figure 3: By Group, The Kyrgyz Republic**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Specialist	30	0	30	50% Women
Non-specialist (businesspeople)	7	4	33	45% Women
Non-specialist (direct beneficiaries)	17	14	108	76% Women
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>65% Women</b>

**Figure 4: By Group, Kazakhstan**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Specialist	42	11	75	75% Women
Non-specialist (businesspeople)	11	2	17	76% Women
Non-specialist (direct beneficiaries)	26	5	41	50% Women
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>68% Women</b>

Annex I provides a full list of those interviewed.

**DATA PROTECTION**

To ensure confidentiality, Oxus Society: limited the amount of personally identifiable information that was collected, coded and redacted any such information that it collected, and ensured the security of all interview notes, transcripts, and case studies. As a traditional signed informed consent form could be problematic for direct beneficiaries, an information sheet that is similar in design to a signed consent form but does not require a signature and does not stay with the respondent was used. Names of respondents were not collected during interviews, with each respondent being given a unique ID. Any information which could provide clues to a respondent’s identity such as neighborhood, occupation, family relations, were coded in the transcripts.

Where possible, interviews and focus groups were recorded. Given the sensitivities surrounding TIP, some participants did not feel comfortable being recorded. In these cases, the field researchers took detailed notes. Interview notes were compiled, and transcripts written and uploaded to a secure and accessible platform after data collection. Only members of the research team had access to the interview transcripts.

## CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING FIELDWORK

Trust-building, especially with those in at-risk groups, proved difficult in both countries. During the sessions some participants became concerned about potential consequences based on their answers, especially migrants from Uzbekistan living in Kazakhstan. They were worried they could be questioned by border police when returning home if any of their information was published or made publicly available. The moderators reassured them once again about the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. Others were concerned about being recorded, feeling they may face consequences. Migrants from Uzbekistan in particular said they felt they had fewer opportunities than citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in terms of labor migration. This issue was not restricted to direct beneficiaries; some government officials were concerned about whether they would face consequences from their supervisors for speaking to researchers. Some participants were unsure whether the research was legal. After the team reassured them that they had permission to conduct the research and the government was aware of the SMICA project, they participated willingly.

The team in Kazakhstan faced similar issues. When the team travelled to the Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan border to interview migrants, they faced challenges convincing them to participate in the research and in building trust. The team found that migrants were more willing to participate when the team explained the nature and benefits of the research.

In addition, many of the undocumented migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic lack education, and two-thirds struggled to answer the questions or explain their answers. Many preferred the yes/no questions, as opposed to the open-ended ones, where they had to develop their points at greater length. The team overcame this challenge by reformulating questions in a simpler way or giving examples. The team used a combination of Uzbek and Russian to make themselves understood.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the participants did not have any major problems understanding the questions. Some of the experts felt like the questions were too general; the team explained to them that they were supposed to be broad to allow them to focus on specific issues and so they could be asked of officials with a broader portfolio of responsibilities. Some of the questions, such as “what do you think is the biggest misunderstanding or myth about migration” (question 14 in the module for specialists and non-specialists (businesspeople), were difficult for respondents to understand without examples. The moderators or interviewers provided examples that made it easier for participants to understand.



## **LIMITATIONS**

Prior research has identified that the risks for TIP are not evenly or randomly distributed among either the general population or the full geography of the individual countries or the region.<sup>24</sup> As a result, supported efforts to combat TIP similarly do not attempt to target the general public, but concentrate on direct beneficiaries most at-risk and key stakeholders involved in CTIP. As discussed above, qualitative methods allowed the research team to collect more valid data to inform a far more accurate picture of sensitive issues such as TIP in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Nevertheless, this study naturally has limitations. While semi-structured interviews and focus groups provided flexibility for the researchers to build a rapport with the respondents and gently probe on specific issues, given the sensitivity around the topics being discussed, it is likely that some individuals (in particular from the direct beneficiaries) did not fully divulge information in the sessions. Additionally, using interviews and focus groups did result in a more limited sample size than if we had used a survey. This renders data that is valid, but not as representative. We cannot, for example, make broad conclusions about societal attitudes towards survivors of TIP based on our data.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The teams took notes during each interview and focus group. We have supplemented these with detailed notes based on the recordings. Our team coded these notes, identifying prominent themes, examples and policy suggestions related to knowledge, attitudes and practices. Each transcript was coded separately by two individuals so as to ensure inter-coder reliability; the Field Research Coordinators, Project Manager, and Senior Research Consultant then convened to resolve any discrepancies in coding by consensus to arrive at a final coded dataset.

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example: “Fertile Fields: Trafficking in Persons in Central Asia,” IOM, 2005, [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fertile\\_fields.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fertile_fields.pdf)

## FINDINGS: THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

### KNOWLEDGE

#### MIGRATION SITUATION

As has already been well-established by other studies, levels of migration from rural communities in the Kyrgyz Republic are extremely high. Interviews and focus groups have been conducted by our team in the south of the country as part of different research projects. These interviews and groups found that the levels of migration (among both men and women) are so high that many respondents believe it has a destructive effect.<sup>25</sup> Respondents see this effect in dwindling social cohesion, as well as in the effects on children separated from both parents for long periods and thus raised by grandparents. Some of these grandparents also have health issues or are experiencing burnout themselves. One of the respondents in Jalal Abad stated:

Our country survives on migration. There is someone in migration in almost every family -- not just one, often several members. Before, young people participated in weddings and funerals, but they are missing from these now. They are all in migration. We are losing our young generation.

Some respondents stated that in the villages where they live, there are simply “no men” because every able-bodied male is in migration for most of the year. Respondents in the south, where labor migration has occurred as a stable flow for many years, emphasized that there are some positives to migration. The financial resources offered by migration are positive, as is the chance some migrants have to build homes, support their families, and invest in the needs of their community. Many cited the contributions that migrants had made to specific needs (especially in rural areas), whether paying for operations and medical treatment or building community centers and sports fields for children. Northern communities, especially internal migrants in marginalized *novostroiki* (newly built) suburbs around Bishkek, did not generally cite any such positive long-term benefits from migration.

Three-quarters of female direct beneficiaries cited gendered differences in the outcomes of the migration situation as they experienced it. Women frequently cited problems related to being

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<sup>25</sup> Noah Tucker, “What Happens When Your Town Becomes an ISIS Recruiting Ground? Lessons from Central Asia about Vulnerability, Resistance, and the Danger of Ignoring Perceived Injustice” George Washington University Central Asia Program *CAP Papers*, #209. July 2018; United States Institute of Peace Violent Extremism Computational Modeling Project, focus groups and interviews conducted January-February 2021 (unpublished). Similar to the results for this study, respondents in focus groups in some rural villages in Aravan district reported that effectively all working age males were in at least seasonal migration.

abandoned by their husbands, as well as difficulties with or without obtaining legal documents. Documentation for their children and access to health care or school resources are problematic, because in some cases children were born abroad and were not issued proper documentation. In other cases, mothers and grandparents could not properly prove custody or power-of-attorney changes.

Both female and male respondents agreed that women faced a higher danger of stigmatization and social exclusion on return from migration, regardless of what their actual experiences had been. That is to say, communities cite stereotypes and assume that a woman had participated in sex work or been sexually exploited by an employer, leading to discrimination and social exclusion, regardless of whether or not that assumption had any basis. Respondents from all three groups (specialist, businesspeople, direct beneficiaries) noted that so many women were in migration that this was not a universal danger or occurrence but represented a difference in the way the migration situation affected men and women.

Overall, respondents in the north and south agreed overwhelmingly that the current migration situation in the country is both excessive and chaotic. Ten specialists and businesspersons cited the 2015 decision to abolish the migration departments in local government offices as especially contributing to this problem. In some areas, staff were merged, or their responsibilities shifted to other departments, such as Labor/Employment [*zanyatosti*]. This was done without adding funding or additional staff (in some cases) to that department, which was viewed as having negatively affected the migration situation in the country. In other cases, especially in the south, respondents report that staff were simply laid off. The recent re-organization of migration projects at the national level is similarly cited by many Bishkek officials as adding to a chaotic and ineffective situation for TIP prevention and regulated migration at the present time.

Our two focus groups in Batken, which included individuals displaced by the April 2021 conflict at border, noted that the situation there is particularly dire. Internal and external migration from Batken is on the rise, a result of the combination of the conflict, uncertainty surrounding its resumption, and the drought that affected the region in the summer of 2021.

Both specialists and direct beneficiaries consistently cited low pay and lack of job opportunities as reasons that drive mass migration, and they believed that those most economically desperate were most likely to engage in risky migration and become survivors of trafficking and other negative outcomes. Many in both the north and south most typically described the current migration process as choosing a target country or city, and simply buying a ticket for that place in the hope of being able to use contacts with other migrants there to find work on arrival. Upon going into migration for the first time, all of the direct beneficiaries expected that they would make money and be able to elevate their standard of living. However, in three-quarters of cases,

the experience did not live up to expectations, due to lower pay, poor living conditions, and abusive employers. Specialists in particular noted that this made migrants far more vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, and other negative outcomes, having already made an initial investment for travel. Migrants were under considerable financial and sometimes family pressure to accept any job they could find upon arrival, a situation they believed employers took advantage of in target countries.

## **KNOWLEDGE OF SAFE MIGRATION**

All of the specialists and businesspeople had a sense of what safe migration means. However, half of the direct beneficiary groups were unaware of the term or unable to explain its potential meaning. Across communities in the north and south, one of the most common distinctions between safe and unsafe migration, made by three-quarters of respondents, was state involvement. They effectively equated safe migration with legal migration. Respondents across all three groups, especially in the south, felt migration was safer when the government played a more active role in vetting employers, connecting migrants with employers, assuring their legal rights, and also in keeping track of where citizens were traveling in order to be able to locate them if they needed assistance. Unsurprisingly, 73% of the businesspeople defined safe migration as determined by the existence of a valid employment agreement. Just under two-thirds of businesspeople thought migrants themselves bore the primary responsibility for keeping themselves safe. Only 10 of the 108 direct beneficiaries mentioned employment agreements, although over two-thirds did mention the need for “documents,” which could refer to either legal permission to work in the country or contracts with an employer.

Specialists contrasted the work of migration departments in the past to the present situation as a way of explaining what safe migration had looked like in the recent past:

In 2005 migration departments were created, in each city there was a specialist. They had a list of firms that were licensed and also a list of specialist positions that needed to be filled. That migration department specialist could arrange work for local residents in Dubai, Korea, Russia, Kazakhstan. [A migrant] would leave the country with a contract, they knew where they were doing and who they would be working with, and how much they would earn.

While ideas about how the government should be involved in the migration process varied widely, one of the most consistent recurring themes among respondents was that the government should be more involved in the process. Many cited the need for that involvement to begin at the

most local level possible -- the *ayl okmotu* (the lowest level of local government in the Kyrgyz Republic) or *mahalla* (local informal committee that regulates community life). If the government plays a leading role, many respondents saw this as a way to make migration safe: a typical and concise answer to how a respondent understands safe migration was “it’s when citizens of our country go abroad, but they go with direction from the government to do a specific job”.

Specialists and businesspeople often cited a wide range of factors like legal literacy, lack of corruption, effective legislation, language competency, and employer policies, that likely reflect previous involvement in safe migration training. However, respondents in rural areas in both the north and south emphasized two aspects about safe migration. First, having possession of your travel documents and having real (as opposed to counterfeit) registration documents in the target country. Second, being paid consistently and on time according to the often-verbal agreement made with the employer. Many other respondents, especially from the direct beneficiaries, cited the importance of having trusted contacts in the target country and former migrants in their social networks who could help arrange work and could share their own experiences. That is to say, having those reliable personal networks could help make migration safer and also provide support in the event of a conflict with an employer or predatory behavior at the hands of police/people pretending to be police.

Direct beneficiaries were split in whether they had paid (or thought it was a good idea to pay) employment agencies to find work, with half ruling it out. Those who had paid had mixed experiences, with two-thirds saying they found work and the rest not finding work. Emphasis on “having all your documents” and having “real” documents was often made, especially in focus groups, with reference to the experience many shared of being “constantly checked” and often stopped on the street and asked to present identity and registration documents (especially in Russia). Over three-quarters of direct beneficiaries who had been in migration cited frequent experiences of marginalization and discrimination from both employers and especially from law enforcement, and they cited possession of travel documents and genuine registration as an important protective factor from predatory behavior from law enforcement rather than just potential employers.

Particularly in the south, just over one-third of respondents from across the groups were skeptical that migration *can be* safe. Many saw the effects of current migration levels as a net negative, especially with regard to the social consequences that they believe mass migration has created. They believed that the safest migration is no migration at all, and the best policy toward ensuring safe migration would be to create jobs at home as alternatives to migration.

## KNOWLEDGE OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Similar to understandings of safe migration, definitions of TIP varied widely between specialists/business respondents and direct beneficiaries. Specialist answers in particular reflected past experience with training sessions but also significant experience with TIP, with an emphasis on labor exploitation, violation of the terms of contracts, limited mobility, seizure of passports and other registration documents, failure to pay salaries, sexual exploitation especially of women by employers, particularly in domestic employment like cleaning and nannyng), and including forced sex work in less common, but more traumatic, cases.

Of the direct beneficiaries, 23 people (21%) had not heard of or could not define TIP. All but one was female, with just under half having been in migration. In general, understanding of TIP was often very limited except among those who had experienced it themselves or were close to someone who had. While most direct beneficiaries had a sense that TIP referred to a crime that involves people being sold for profit or forced into slavery, few could elaborate in more detail. For these respondents, the most common answers reflected the absence of positive factors cited in response to the question on safe migration -- lack of documents or having documents taken away by employers, making men in particular vulnerable to predatory behavior by law enforcement and others, and making women vulnerable to sexual advances or predatory behavior, especially in domestic and informal employment.

Men in particular cited labor exploitation, unpaid labor, and being paid significantly less than what they were promised. They cited that both lack of legal documentation (though less often contracts, because some specifically cited that expecting to receive a legal contract was unrealistic) and the lack of other alternatives for more stable or safe employment (they frequently cite the world *bezizhodnosty* -- need created by desperation) as creating vulnerability to TIP or unsafe migration in general.

For those with direct experience of TIP (in particular including several cases of ethnic Kyrgyz women from provincial areas who had migrated to the unofficial suburbs of Bishkek looking for work before seeking work in Kazakhstan in the early 2000s), this definition and their experiences began with having documents taken away and legal registration lapsing, as well as extreme geographic isolation doing farm labor in remote areas in Kazakhstan. Several experienced forced marriages and/or were forced into long-term relationships with employers with whom they had several children whose births were not documented. In these cases, respondents described their experience as human slavery that they escaped, in some cases by swimming across the Chui river with their children which separates Kazakhstan from the Kyrgyz Republic.

Differences in understandings of TIP were also significant between the north and south. Southern respondents commented on situations that were most often contained within Russia and encountered because of circumstances there: migrants arrived in Russia on their own and only there fell into an exploitative situation. In interviews with specialists and focus groups in the north, several examples emerged: of corrupt or fake commercial employment agencies or go-betweens who took payments for arranging work in beauty salons in Turkey that proved to be a sex-trafficking operation, or for employers in Dubai or the Arab Emirates who then took away women's documents and pressured them enter into involuntary marriages. One of these cases similarly resulted in multiple children and multi-year situations of effective enslavement legalized by marriage. These circumstances are especially difficult for women to escape since they lack legal independence or access to even basic documents for their children. They would be likely to lose custody or even face potential prosecution if they attempted to return home with their children. In several cases, women also cited female relatives or in-laws of their "husband" who took an active role in pressuring them to remain in the situation and accept their fate.

In southern regions that were mostly oriented toward migration to Russia or Turkey, the most common response to the question of TIP within their own country was "this doesn't exist" or "maybe we had a problem like that before but don't anymore." One-fifth of businesspeople, all of them in Aravan and Osh, claimed that TIP was not an issue in the Kyrgyz Republic, either denying its existence entirely or saying it was an issue only affecting Kyrgyz citizens overseas. However, respondents from Batken reported increasingly seeking internal migration options as well as external ones. Those from northern communities also reported internal migration to the Bishkek area as often the first option tried before migrating abroad, and they cited TIP abuses within the country as well. Domestic actors including deceptive commercial employment agents played a key role in some of these cases.

Direct beneficiaries who had experienced abuses and specialists identified sex work exploitation of internal migrants happening within Bishkek -- in one case, a respondent claimed she could identify a bordello right across the street from a police station. Respondents complained that in such cases the "police knew all about it" but did not react or would do nothing to stop it. Several respondents hinted that this indicated either corruption or direct involvement of retired senior police officers in acting as a *krysha* (protection) for these trafficking schemes. While many of these suspicions about police involvement or corruption are based on assumptions or speculation (none of these respondents were able or willing to provide evidence or specific names), it is a highly significant finding that southern communities were largely unaware of internal TIP and therefore unlikely to take any measures to protect themselves or their family members from it. Direct beneficiaries in the north were partially aware of cases like this from media reporting but

were more likely to only take it into consideration if they knew someone who had experienced it directly.

## **FACTORS OF VULNERABILITY TO TRAFFICKING**

Respondents across all groups emphasized that the lack of Russian language skills was a key vulnerability, making it difficult for migrants to find official employment in Russia and/ either fully understand what terms were being offered or seek help when those terms were not honored (other abuses occurred). A second frequently cited vulnerability across all groups and geographic areas was the lack of legal documentation, including travel documents or access to passports and travel documents.

Survivors, based on their own experiences, noted the following factors that cause vulnerability to TIP:

- Financial desperation making them migrate and luring them into situations where they have been trafficked.
- Being tricked by friends or extended family members into situations that they did not agree to. One participant in a focus group in Jalal Abad described how her daughter was tricked into forced labor in Russia. Told by the participant's friend that she would work in a grocery shop, her daughter was enslaved at home for two months, with the friend telling everyone she had married her son. Another participant in the same group described how his friend was sold by his own uncle into forced labor in Kazakhstan.
- Fear of the police leads migrants to remain in exploitative situations, with their "employers" leveraging this fear to threaten survivors with punishment should they try to escape or inform the police.

Other factors cited across the groups included:

- Family conflicts that similarly push people out of their home communities into a situation that may be risky but offers a chance to escape a conflict at home.
- In the case of Batken, physical insecurity and conflict is increasingly driving people to migrate and accept situations that may be risky because it at least offers a chance for improved basic security. This has increased since the summer of 2021, when the region experienced drought and a border conflict.
- Gullibility was cited as a risk factor by 20% of the businesspeople and 17% of the specialists.
- Political instability within the country that drives whole families to emigrate, including relatively middle-class and educated respondents in Bishkek who don't see a future for their children and are seeking permanent relocation to Western countries or to Turkey.



- Among both male and female direct beneficiaries, respondents noted that they believed pressure to avoid shame, stigma or social exclusion resulted in many former migrants painting their own past migration experience as much more positive than it was: men are reluctant to admit they earned very little money or even lost money after paying for travel and expenses, and so they will lie to their friends and claim that the city where they migrated has good opportunities. Women will reportedly hide vulnerabilities they found such as lack of any documentation for domestic unofficial employment as cooks or nannies, and they are especially incentivized to hide sexual exploitation in those situations because of the fear of stigma. This leads other women in their social network or communities to continue to travel to those same cities seeking the fairy-tale version of the story that their female peers told.
- Lack of trust in law enforcement across all communities, and especially true among marginalized groups in the south -- they perceive any interaction with police as more likely to bring them harm than help both at home and while in Russia in particular.
- Lack of access to government or consular services while abroad.
- Lack of trust in civil society organizations who might help with prevention resources and education, especially among Islamic minority communities in the south, some of whom even questioned the research team for this project and accused them of participating in conspiracies or being funded by what they imagine to be malevolent external groups.
- Failure to enforce laws that currently exist.
- Failure on the part of the government to create a program that would systematically evaluate the outflow of migrants, gather data on where they were going and how they were finding work (an input particularly from the specialist interviews).
- Demographically, most respondents were aware that men are more often survivors of TIP than women, though they were often careful to add that women are more vulnerable to long-term consequences because it was believed they were more often exploited sexually and more likely to be stigmatized at home, while men were exploited for forced labor.

## **TRAFFICKING AND ALA KACHOO (BRIDE KIDNAPPING)**

Responses to this question varied widely. Over three-quarters of respondents from across the groups had first-hand experience with *ala kachoo*, either as accidental witnesses or of themselves or those in their own networks. However, responses were split on whether or not there were similarities between the two phenomena. Over three-quarters of respondents said that TIP and *ala kachoo* are different, with most citing that the goals, profit and marriage mean they should be considered as separate. While 83% of specialists interviewed, 68% of them men, argued the two are similar, just over half of the direct beneficiaries agreed, skewed again in favor of men. Others framed *ala kachoo* as a tradition, a part of Kyrgyz culture, unlike TIP. They emphasized that

since *ala kachoo* is often not literally practiced but is performed only as a nod to tradition (the bride and groom and their families agree first -- they believed the two are very different. In some cases, respondents also believed that even women who are survivors of forced kidnapping have a better chance of escaping from that situation -- and can get more help from their families, who are usually in the same region -- than women who are survivors of trafficking. They also noted that the law in the Kyrgyz Republic considers them as different crimes.

A smaller number, mostly women, felt from the woman's perspective that TIP and bride kidnapping are essentially the same, because the woman has her agency taken away in both cases. They noted that violence is frequently used in both cases. Generally, women, and those with personal experience of forced kidnapping or who had been upset by witnessing it directly, seemed more inclined to see the two as similar. Five respondents argued that bride kidnapping is worse. According to one direct beneficiary in Jalal Abad:

On the one hand they are similar. But in slavery, a person goes consciously, he is offered a high salary, he makes a decision himself. And with *ala kachoo* [bride kidnapping], girls have no choice. For example, a girl is educated, but a guy is not, and he knows that she will not voluntarily come out to him, and he steals her.

## **ACCESS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Overall, respondents in all regions and categories overwhelmingly rated information currently available to facilitate safe migration as untrustworthy, and they cited a general lack of (awareness of) information about specific work opportunities that are safe and dependable. As above, they frequently cited the lack of involvement from the government as a primary cause of this situation. Both specialists and direct beneficiaries noted that even while there is some good information available, including mobile phone apps, or groups (for example Кыргызстанцы зарубежом - Facebook group, Telegram channel - @emigrantschannel - Эмигранты, <https://vk.com/workiru>, <https://ok.ru/rabotaru>, <https://ok.ru/app/rabota>, <https://blog.finder.vc/telegram-kanali>, <https://freelance.ru/>, <https://hh.ru/>) that allow for job searches and give detailed information about employment opportunities. These resources sometimes do not reach the target audience, who primarily draw information from word-of-mouth within their peer networks (or virtual word of mouth over WhatsApp or Instagram). As a result, they mistrust commercial employment agencies and information available on the internet in general.

In both north and south, especially in rural communities, respondents cited the importance of personal networks in determining whether information can be trusted, and often reported making migration decisions based on the experiences of neighbors or family members and also relying on those network connections in the target countries to help find work. A typical job search process for migrants from the south, for example, was to travel to a target city in Russia where they had relatives or people from the same district and then ask those fellow migrants for help finding reliable employment. Many direct beneficiaries reported having very little information about where they were going or what kind of work they might do, including simple things like how to get from the airport to the city.

In northern *novostroiki* where large numbers of former and future migrants congregate, respondents cited little access to internet-based information. They stated that they continue to get most of their information about events in the world from Kyrgyz language television channels or YouTube videos that are recommended by their peers.

Very few direct beneficiaries could cite a non-government resource they could turn to or a commercial agency they felt they could trust. Others who had more experience of migration did cite working with “go-betweens” to help them find and arrange work or negotiate with a potential employer, especially in Russia and were not opposed to paying a fee for someone who could arrange reliable and safe work.

Many ethnic Uzbek respondents favorably cited informational resources that are available from Uzbekistan, including television programs (specifically including one called “Zirapcha”) as well as internet resources, that are devoted to safe migration awareness. They compared the resources available for Uzbekistan very favorably with those currently available within the Kyrgyz Republic.

## **ATTITUDES**

### **HOW SHOULD SURVIVOR'S BE TREATED?**

For direct beneficiaries, answers to how survivors of TIP should be received were overwhelmingly focused on compassion, reintegration, financial justice, support, and offering emotional, medical, and psychological help. Many respondents' answers suggested they were aware that survivors of TIP may have mental health-related issues, including depression, and suggested resources they believe were appropriate for that, such as “neuropsychologists.” In related research on resources available for patients who have experienced severe trauma, the

involvement of neuropathologists often indicates the presence of somatic symptoms of PTSD that supporting communities or even medical professionals misdiagnose because of lack of awareness of trauma-informed care.

While respondents across all three groups are supportive and indicate that survivors should be supported in reintegrating into their communities, they warn that female survivors and children born abroad in particular may face stigmatization and potentially rejection from their home communities or families due to assumptions that the women are “ruined”, and their children may be illegitimate. In focus groups in Issyk Kul province, one female participant -- herself a survivor of TIP -- recounted her own experience of being not only rejected by her home community, but by an entirely new village she moved to in an attempt to escape the stigma at home. In one case from Bishkek, a husband found out that his wife was in sexual slavery and did not forgive her, although he used the money she was sending home. While psychologists and staff from the shelter talked to him, explaining the situation, he did not want her back due to the humiliation she had suffered.

Almost two-thirds of specialists who participated in the research exhibited gender stereotypes, framing women as the “weaker sex,” more vulnerable to TIP as a result of their gender. Of those framing women as more vulnerable to trafficking by virtue of their weakness, three quarters were men. The sense of shame, particularly felt by women who are the survivors of sexual exploitation, was cited by many respondents, including those who had been trafficked, as a major reason that TIP is underreported in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Beyond societal stigmatization, direct beneficiaries in the *novostroiki* of Bishkek and in the south reported that law enforcement was part of the problem, not the solution. As one respondent, a survivor of trafficking, stated, “our society does not help, we wanted to turn to the police for help, we were intimidated and told that it would be bad for us. We were threatened. We do not believe in the protection of the state, therefore we are forced to get out ourselves”. In another case, a female survivor of trafficking reported to the police, but they refused to believe her and said she had left voluntarily. These findings support the earlier findings in MVector’s report for SMICA on barriers to survivors of trafficking reporting crimes in the Kyrgyz Republic. This research pointed to a widely held belief that law enforcement officers are corrupt and unable to provide them with survivor-centered support.

Over three-quarters of survivors discussed how they felt shame and had been marginalized by members of their community after they returned. Survivors were generally distrustful towards law enforcement. One former migrant, now 40 years old, was invited to work in Khabarovsk. She was recruited with a group of about 10 people, all Kyrgyz citizens from the southern region and promised a large salary. In reality she worked for no wages. She had no connection with the

outside world for four months. “Our society does not help. I wanted to turn to the police for help. I was intimidated and told that it would be bad for me. I was threatened. I do not believe in the protection of the state, therefore I was forced to get out myself”. She eventually managed to run away and get home with the help of relatives.

Respondents from all groups often emphasized that survivors should be offered financial support and re-training for specializations that would provide either small business opportunities or local employment and prevent additional migration.

## **MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SAFE MIGRATION**

Businesspeople and specialists were asked about common misconceptions associated with TIP and safe migration. A myth cited by over half of the specialists and one-third of the businesspeople in response to this question was that TIP is that survivors have “only themselves to blame” if they fall into a negative situation and cannot extricate themselves. Others within these two groups as well as the direct beneficiaries unwittingly relayed this misconception when asked about what drives TIP. The view that survivors have themselves to blame was held most strongly by the businesspeople interviewed, 30% of whom blamed the survivors, with all but one of them being men. A commonly held assumption is that it only happens to gullible, uneducated people. As one respondent said, “they themselves must bear responsibility because they were naive”. Survivor-blaming in these communities is a phenomenon the research team had encountered on a variety of other projects in the south of the Kyrgyz Republic examining women and children who travelled to Syria and Iraq, and it seems to reflect a broad lack of vocabulary and political or social freedom to talk about inequality, opportunity structures, or to consider gendered experiences. In many cases, however, the function of survivor-blaming seems to be to reassure the speaker that the situation is preventable and that they can protect themselves from experiencing it (rather than a lack of empathy toward those who return as survivors or lack of support for survivor assistance programs).<sup>26</sup>

While this was the primary myth cited by respondents, responses to other questions indicate the presence of other myths, including that migrants themselves are in control of their situation and that “the person himself, first of all, ensures his own safety”. While this is a fine principle, there

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<sup>26</sup> Shermer, Michael. “Patternicity: Finding Meaningful Patterns in Meaningless Noise.” *Scientific American*, November 2008; Shermer, Michael. “Agenticity. Why People Believe That Invisible Agents Control the World.” *Scientific American*, May 2009.

was a tendency from the respondents, particularly those with migration experience in the south, to downplay the role played by factors other than the individual. Another common myth is that there is no TIP happening inside the Kyrgyz Republic and that it is something that happens “far away” in the Gulf countries, Russia, or Turkey (as discussed above).

## PRACTICES

### INTERVENTIONS: DIRECT BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVES

- **Half of the direct beneficiaries lacked knowledge about real-life TIP experiences.** This is reflected not only in the lack of TIP awareness reflected in some of the focus groups, but also the widespread belief in the south that TIP doesn’t happen within the Kyrgyz Republic (only to those in migration in Russia or elsewhere). According to many respondents, this also reflects the pressure on survivors and their families to hide their stories. For example, in one focus group in a northern suburb of Bishkek, a participant identified herself as a survivor of TIP during the focus group and told her story, much to the shock of her neighbors and even one of her relatives who also participated in the group. Though they saw her every day and knew she had long been in migration, she had been afraid to tell her story even to her relatives because of the fear of stigma and shaming behavior. Once she shared her story, her neighbors and relatives were supportive (at least within the focus group). Members of the research team believe this indicates that many survivors are hiding in plain sight, and that many communities are unaware of how exposed they are to danger because of the lack of survivor stories.
- **Many respondents cite that they consider survivor narratives a much more reliable form of information than other resources currently available to them.** In response to the question about under what circumstances they might be willing to participate in CTIP activities, for example, a direct beneficiary said: “On the condition that it will be honest information, that they will give real-life stories and examples”. But direct beneficiaries cited a lack of access to such information because in many cases survivors fear speaking up publicly.
- **The best migration is facilitated by realistic migration alternatives.** Over one-third of the direct beneficiaries noted that those who fall into risky migration situations are often those who see no potential alternative, and thus accept risks. Risks can include surrendering ID documents to employers, taking a wage lower than advertised, working without a legal contract, and buying dubious registration documents or paying unknown go-betweens for work opportunities. They accept risks because they feel like they have no other choice. For many respondents, safe migration is no migration. Without a local economy that can support them in the long term, safer migration and TIP prevention

could be facilitated by offering other opportunities at home, creating the conditions for current migrants to invest their earnings into business venture at home that will create new employment opportunities, supporting them with access to credit, and also skills training that would allow people to migrate with specializations that give them access to better, more stable, and safer jobs. Chief among the list of these resources cited by respondents is language training.

- **Consulates can do more.** While half of respondents identified consulates as a source of support for those who had or were currently trafficked, they said that the Kyrgyz consulate in Russia did not work effectively. For example, one survivor noted that “the consulate does not always answer phone calls, and when you personally apply, you have to stand in line for several days. Therefore, I was helped by relatives, friends and acquaintances”.
- **National government needs to play a more active role.** In specialist responses, perhaps unsurprisingly, many recommended that the national government should take primary responsibility for supporting survivors of TIP and emphasized the importance of support resources housed in local government offices, including in particular at the *ayul-okmotu* level in rural areas and small villages. While many specialists acknowledge that NGOs and civil society organizations are currently the only entities providing any support in these areas, they believe the problem is large enough that it needs a systematic response that would create cooperative relationships between civil society organizations and local government officials. This includes training of *ayul-okmotu* or *mahalla* committee members to work in both prevention and re-integration for TIP, since they have the most direct and consistent access to both survivors and vulnerable communities.

## INTERVENTIONS: SPECIALIST AND BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

- **The best migration is “no migration.”** Perhaps more than vulnerable communities, (whose primary goal is to earn enough money to support their families and who view migration as the best possible route to achieving that), specialists (especially practitioners, rather than political appointees) interviewed in both the north and south agree that providing alternatives to migration and creating the conditions for migrants to invest the capital they earn abroad at home represent the best solutions to the current situation. While perhaps hyperbolic in order to support an argument, emphasis here is also on creating employment opportunities in rural areas in order to ease economic and social pressures created by internal migration as well (especially in the north). Conditions in the *novostroiki* around Bishkek are extremely poor, many families have difficulty formulating the documents they need for their children to have access to education and health care, and the eventual pathway to external migration signifies that internal migration is not a real solution to the economic challenges families face. Investment in

jobs, skills training, and support for safe migration particularly in rural or peripheral areas was recommended by most specialists interviewed. However, most of the migrants themselves who participated in the research preferred interventions that would help them migrate safely.

- **The disruptive effects of changes in government.** Specialists working within the government and civil society noted that the various policy and personnel changes since October 2020 had disrupted various projects on TIP. Mechanisms, including the National Referral Mechanism, are not operating properly. With low salaries, the government struggles to attract qualified professionals. Coordination between government stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has reportedly broken down due to the recent changes in leadership. Unlike in Kazakhstan, respondents working for the government often reported these issues. Although the government should view civil society as an ally in countering TIP (especially under the new government), civil society has come under pressure from the government, which does not want negative publicity.

## **FINDINGS: KAZAKHSTAN**

### **KNOWLEDGE**

#### **MIGRATION SITUATION**

To a greater extent than the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan is a country of origin, transit state, and destination for migrants. Respondents that work for the government described the migration situation in Kazakhstan overall as positive, stable and “now controllable,” referring to the lower number of migrants crossing the border due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They mentioned that migrants from many countries, including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic can freely enter the country. Some respondents took pride in their country’s status as a destination for neighboring states, framing it as a signal of Kazakhstan’s success. Specialists from the non-governmental sector described the migration situation as challenging and built on overly restrictive and corrupt policies:

Of late, migration policies have been very strict toward violators, and very often the judicial system does not use alternative methods of administrative liability in the form of warnings and penalties. More often than not, harsh methods, such as deportations, are used.



Specialists described the complexities of the migration situation. Where regions that border Russia, such as Petropavlovsk, have an outflow of Kazakh migrants to Russia, in other parts of the country a constant rural-urban movement leaves village empty, and finally there is an influx of migrants, especially in South Kazakhstan. Turkestan region, which includes the city of Shymkent, borders Uzbekistan and is the entry point for thousands of migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

It is a very difficult situation. People [migrants] constantly change their locations to have a better life. I would like to note that in our city [Shymkent], the migration system is a little complicated because people cannot get an accurate explanation of the necessary paperwork.

When discussing the advantages of the migration, most specialists and businesspeople saw incoming migrants as improving and supporting the economy of the country, and they believe that they do work that Kazakh citizens will not agree to do for a cheaper price. Some respondents mentioned that incoming migrants can also have specialized skills that Kazakhs do not have. Specialists from the non-governmental sector cited a major advantage of migration as an influx of new labor force that creates competition among citizens that will result in locals enhancing their job skills to remain competitive on the job market. Under one-quarter of respondents from among the specialists saw incoming migrants as stealing jobs from local people. One-third of the specialists were concerned that migrants in Kazakhstan do not pay taxes and send money home that creates “financial outflow for our country [Kazakhstan]”. Others mentioned that in return they are contributing to infrastructure development and building roads and other construction projects. There was no significant difference between men and women’s description of the migration situation in Kazakhstan. Most of the responses referred to people in migration as ‘migrants,’ ‘people,’ or ‘foreigners,’ without referring to their gender.

Some respondents mentioned that the flow of migrants has reduced since February 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially via land border crossings between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (which have been closed to migrants). The Covid-19 pandemic has placed additional strains on the remaining migrant community. For example, a (non-representative) survey conducted by SMICA with 358 migrants in the summer of 2020, indicated that two-thirds of respondents had no income, with over half not having enough to eat.

Awareness of the laws regulating migration, even among specialists, remained relatively low, with only four respondents, all specialists, naming specific articles of the Criminal Code related to TIP. A notable gap in knowledge is related to the recent (2020) policy adopted by the president of Kazakhstan, which removed the requirement for foreign citizens to register with the

migration office for the duration of his/her stay in the country.<sup>27</sup> It was cancelled to ensure that migrants do not find various creative ways to extend registration. Now, citizens of these countries do not need registration, however, they need to enter the country based on a labor agreement made between a migrant and employer in Kazakhstan. All but two of the respondents from the business group do not know at all or have heard about the new policy and have workers from Uzbekistan. It is clear that none of the respondents from the private sector hired migrants based on the recently adopted law.

## **KNOWLEDGE OF SAFE MIGRATION**

Almost all of the respondents had heard the term safe migration or could at least vaguely define it. Two-thirds of respondents referred to the legal aspects of safe migration. This understanding prevailed in particular among government employees and businesspeople. For them, safe migration is associated with having all the necessary documents to reside legally in the country, or having a “green” status, leaving the country and crossing borders legally. Seven out of 17 government respondents mentioned that it is a migrant’s responsibility to keep documents in order and legally cross borders. Four respondents mentioned that safe migration is when the government provides safety and conditions to incoming migrants. According to one government employee, “the government must create all conditions to make migration safe. Before leaving the country they [migrants] should be informed”.

Business sector respondents referred to having proper agreements with employers and other documents as being the key to safe migration. However, none of the business sector respondents knew the correct procedures for employing foreign citizens in their country. Four out of 10 business respondents mentioned that migrants are responsible for having legal documents, medical records, and not creating problems for employers:

Migrants should not think about themselves. They should have proper documents, so employers do not have issues as a consequence. [...] They should be healthy and not bring infections, especially for my business as it is related to food. [...] They may spread [the infection] among my clients and I will have to worry about the safety of my customers. Only healthy people should be allowed to come, so they don’t ask for sick leave”.

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<sup>27</sup> “Kazakhstan Cancels Mandatory Registration for Foreigners Visiting up to 30 Days,” New Europe, 2 January 2020, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/kazakhstan-cancels-mandatory-registration-for-foreigners-visiting-up-to-30-days/>

Over half of the direct beneficiaries, particularly those who were either in migration or had been migrants, mentioned that knowledge about policies in the destination country or of their own country is also important. For example, one respondent did not know that he needed to register at the Embassy of Uzbekistan every three years while in Kazakhstan, and as a result he lost his citizenship when attempting to change his passport through the Uzbek Consulate. Finding jobs with a safe environment and stable pay that allows migrants to freely move and find their own accommodation was also associated with safe migration. Just over half of respondents from the direct beneficiaries mentioned it is important to notify family members about one's whereabouts and contacts to be safe.

Migrants and survivors of trafficking relied on their experience when describing safe migration. Their experience is based on their lack of knowledge of policies and migration rules, trusting people about employment without verifying the details, and unmet expectations for the conditions facing migrants:

Based on my own experience, safe migration is awareness of policies, and knowledge of rules when crossing the border to Kazakhstan. One cannot lack awareness about migration policies, including the length of stay in the country, types of documents needed, types of agreements you need to sign.

When someone calls you to work, one should not trust them. It is very important to notify family members where you are going. One cannot trust people's deceitful statements, promising high salaries.

I think it [safe migration] is when you arrive in a foreign country, you can find yourself a job, a safe job. You receive money for your work, get accommodation, or you can find your own accommodation, and can move freely from one place to another.

Specialists from the government in particular mentioned that it is imperative to increase border control and to get more information about migrants. Several respondents mentioned that there should be a full control of foreigners for the entire period of their stay in the country. The law enforcement representatives mentioned:

Safe migration is when the influx of foreign citizens is regulated [...] Everyone should be photographed and entered into the databases for the security and safety of foreigners. But there should be specific controls over a foreigner for the entire period of their being in Kazakhstan.

Foreigners arrive and we need to increase control, register them. They need to be checked more often; it is normal. [...] They [migrants] need to ensure their own safety.

In response to the question of what is being done by the government to improve the situation on safe migration and trafficking, a respondent from the government supported the government's strict policies to control foreigners, while another recommended adopting even stricter controls:

They [the government] make strict policies, increasing border control. Even though we have police, we also have a local inspector to check foreigners. They check the addresses of residence.

They [the government] need to take even stronger control over them [migrants] and check them more often.

Respondents in this group also discussed safe migration with reference to Kazakh citizens abroad. They mentioned that it is important to provide medical care and good conditions for the migrants from other countries. Also, the government respondents shifted some of the responsibility to migrants, who should be informed about policies and rules of the countries they are migrating to. The government-sector respondents' responses above indicate that they believe there should be even stronger control developed by the government. However, several respondents in this sector mentioned the importance of having better policies, improving the situation in government-run shelters, and collaborating with civil society organizations:

I think it is important to adopt a separate law on fighting trafficking in persons. Second, they can improve conditions in the government shelters. The majority of migrants are citizens of different countries, and the government shelters have limitations to host them. Also, there should be some sort of medical support available for foreign citizens migrants [...] And we should of course make sure government representatives respond to every call they receive from victims or potential victims.

Among specialists from the government and businesspeople, over half stated that migrants should be responsible for coming to the country legally, having proper medical immunizations, and registering with the authorities:

They should protect themselves. If they do not protect themselves, they will not be able to enter and exit. They should have a full package of documents, including passport, medical analysis, and all necessary certifications (*spravki*).

First of all, they [migrants] have to receive a passport to travel abroad, must collect all medical documents, and register in the country.

Honestly, let's face the truth, a foreigner is a person who came to us [Kazakhstan] to work. He needs to register legally, so he can go to the police when something happens to him.

I think that a migrant before entering any foreign country should learn about the policies related to employment, where he will be working, and what type of work s/he will do. For example, I have a *brigadir* [an individual who leads a work group and acts as an intermediary with the employer] in Uzbekistan and *brigadir* in Kazakhstan. They opened an employment agency that officially looks for workers. I can speak with them before the workers arrive. It is very important, because sometimes you expect a worker that can do the job and get someone who does not understand anything in construction. That's why having this agency is very helpful. They chose people who understand the work and help to prepare their documentation package. Hiring a foreigner is a very complicated process because policies change every year.

Businesspeople understand safe migration as being synonymous with legal migration; if migrants follow the rules of the host country, then they will be safe. They explained that the government of Kazakhstan provides necessary conditions for safe migration, even medical assistance and legal support if needed. It is migrants who “fully need to be prepared so they do not get deceived.” Some also adopted an epidemiological understanding of safe migration; migrants should be tested for diseases and only healthy people should come to work. A few respondents mentioned the importance of having a signed work agreement or contract as being a prerequisite for safe migration.

Civil society specialists tended to offer a more holistic understanding of safe migration, focused primarily on the safety of migrants themselves, rather than the national security concerns prioritized by the government respondents. According to one NGO worker, “safe migration is a process that preserves the rights of a migrant and allows him, at first, to ensure, say, the satisfaction of the necessary needs, housing, nutrition, health, that is, access to medical services. Others noted a lack of legal literacy. A number of specialists noted the complexities of the migration system in Kazakhstan and other countries as a source of confusion, often leading to migrants finding themselves in vulnerable situations.

## KNOWLEDGE OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Most of the respondents from all three groups had heard of TIP. The predominant understanding of TIP was a crime involving exploiting individuals for their labor. Over three-quarters of respondents, with higher numbers from the government sector, understood this as a problem driven by lack of documentation. At least one-quarter of the direct beneficiaries have been survivors of trafficking, both sexual and labor exploitation. They responded to the questions based on their own stories and experiences. They were migrants from Uzbekistan and Russia in Kazakhstan, and Kazakhs who had spent time as migrants in Russia.

11 out of 28 direct beneficiary respondents (40 percent) had been survivors of trafficking, both sexual and labor exploitation, with nine of the 11 being women. They responded to the questions based on their own stories and experiences. They were migrants from Uzbekistan and Russia in Kazakhstan. The direct beneficiaries perceived trafficking as sexual and labor exploitation, a human right abuse exploiting human labor through coercion and force.

From my own experience it [TIP] is when they deceitfully take someone to another country, promising payment, good conditions, and food and when they arrive, they deceitfully take their passport to “make a contract.” I was told that I will be cleaning hotel rooms, but as a result they forced me to “serve” clients. They did not listen to my opinion and what I wanted to do, they just beat me, and I was forced to do what they wanted.

My experience started when I found a job with a salary that satisfied me. They took my documents, took me 300 kilometers away; it was at the end of November. I was not alone there. We were about eight people. I cooked for the workers as we agreed. However, they did not pay the money they promised, my documents remained there. I fled.

The agency promised to take care of the contract and that they would ensure we have a place to live, food, and salary. It's important to know where you are going and to whom you are speaking. I think the blame lies with our own people from Uzbekistan. Those who are Kazakhs did not reject us but helped us. And those who brought us here through work deceived us. They told us that documents are important to prepare for registration, and we gave our passports. I trusted the employer after he showed me all the documents, including taxes he paid. I was deceived.

It was a difficult time for my family, and I decided to make some money abroad. I found a job through Telegram. I spoke with the employer and a middleman. They promised good conditions and at least \$500 dollars per month salary. It was an announcement for hiring workers, painters, concrete workers, and welders. The advertised salary was good, and I decided to go to Kazakhstan. I was only able to send money to my family once. Then I could not send any more because I wasn't paid a salary. Now I know that it is important to check the labor agency itself to ensure they are legal and will not cheat.

Like in the Kyrgyz Republic, few vulnerable migrants or survivors understood that they were trafficked. At-risk migrants and survivors of trafficking mostly do not have higher education, do not possess professional skills, and work in low-income jobs. It was challenging for these respondents to respond to open ended questions, and they provided answers from their own experiences. Some preferred short answers such as "Yes/No/I do not know." Observations from the interviews and analysis of answers show that 70 percent of respondents in at-risk groups and survivors do not possess full information about safe migration, the situation with trafficking in Kazakhstan, and which organizations are working with these problems.

The direct beneficiaries perceived trafficking primarily as sexual and labor exploitation, a human right abuse exploiting human labor through coercion and force. Some respondents mentioned that forced sexual exploitation is particularly prominent in southern Kazakhstan due to its proximity with neighboring Uzbekistan and high migrant population. Respondents among the government representatives mentioned that sex trafficking may be a consequence of not following migration regulations, and overstaying registration or visa.

All respondents left their country for economic reasons - to provide for their families and for better opportunities. Respondents who became survivors of trafficking did not expect that they would be forced to work against their will. Most of them had some person from their own country, a family member or recruiter, who organized or helped them move to another country. Respondents mentioned that they did not know the regulations on work agreement and registration or visa issues in the countries they moved to. Most of the respondents were influenced or recruited by people they knew in their country, such as a neighbor, friend or family member. They had limited information and did not have pre-departure briefings by employment agencies or other institutions. These respondents mentioned that it is important to know policies of the country of residence related to foreign workers and verifying employers before departure. Mostly, they recommended broad information campaigns nationally and organized by non-governmental organizations in specific localities. Among respondents, there were survivors who were in "slavery" for between 11 years and four months. Some mentioned that their traffickers

had subjected many others to forced labor, both women and men, that the respondents lived or worked with. Respondents who were survivors of trafficking described their trafficker's attitude to them as inhumane. Most spoke about psychological trauma that remained after beatings and being humiliated. These respondents expressed that psychologists working with them were very understanding and supportive.

Some specialists from the government perceive trafficking as a consequence of illegal migration to Kazakhstan. As one official said, "they do not want to leave timely and... someone promises them jobs, but then does not pay [...] I heard that somewhere in our country [Kazakhstan], in the areas far from towns there are fields where people are forced to work and kept". Another respondent compared trafficking to the 17th century in the United States, stating "it is a modern form of slavery [...] Girls are deceitfully attracted to the countries in the East where they are forced into prostitution". The respondents noted that many women, mainly single moms [*materi odinochki*] are being trafficked. One respondent mentioned "it is easier for men, they can work in the field, or construction".

More respondents across all the groups thought that women are more vulnerable to become survivors of trafficking. Five out of 17 government sector respondents said that both men and women can be trafficked at the same rate, while four respondents said more men are trafficked, 8 respondents assured that women are trafficked the most. 15 out 23 respondents from the non-governmental sector said that women are more vulnerable to sex exploitation and trafficking. They mentioned several factors as the reason, including the "mentality" of people toward women and of women in Central Asia, and that women are mothers, physically weak, and women can be easily threatened. Consequences that survivors of trafficking have are mainly psychological trauma, which then leads to health issues, social issues, and lack of trust. One respondent points out the importance of providing psychological support adequate and timely is important, since law enforcement and other agencies need survivor-focused approaches when reinstating her/his documents and during other procedures. The respondent also mentioned to ensure systemic support to the survivor from the labor department to help find jobs, overall, so that the survivor constantly receives attention during the process.

Most of the respondents who work in business described trafficking as the exploitation of persons and referred to stories they watched on TV, including trafficking women from neighboring countries to Kazakhstan, and trafficking women from Kazakhstan to U.A.E., Bahrain, and Kuwait. One respondent knew a person who was in "domestic slavery" for ten years and told that he was exploited but was afraid to go to police.



## **FACTORS OF VULNERABILITY TO TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**

Respondents across all groups emphasized that a lack of legal documentation, low levels of language competency, and legal illiteracy were the main factors that make people vulnerable to being trafficked. According to the respondents, the majority of the recent migrant influx as described in the background section are from Uzbekistan, while migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Russia work mainly in construction. A specialist from an NGO noted that “there is a group within the migrant population that is being formed who are “banned” from entering Russia and cannot go back to their home countries. They mainly work in markets and construction and are very vulnerable to forced labor”. They identified other at-risk groups as “women who come from Uzbekistan without documents who marry Kazakh men and never register officially. They give birth to children who become citizens of Kazakhstan. However, mostly due to domestic abuse, women run away from home without. This makes them vulnerable to trafficking. Other respondents mentioned that lack of legal knowledge makes many migrants an easy target for people who want to take advantage and exploit them.

Other factors cited across the groups included:

- Poverty driving people to make decisions that are risky;
- Lack of trust in law enforcement across all communities, and especially among migrants who perceive police as part of the problem not the solution;
- Lack of awareness or access to government, civil society or consular services while abroad;
- Failure to enforce laws that currently exist.

## **KNOWLEDGE OF NEW MIGRATION POLICIES**

Of the specialists, 31% referred to the recently adopted migration policy adopted in 2020 that cancelled temporary registration for all categories of foreign citizens staying in Kazakhstan for up to 30 days. Some government officials knew about the policy. When speaking about the migrants, they kept referring to previous cases where migrants overstayed their registration under the previous (no longer relevant) legislation. In the business sector, most of the respondents knew one element of the new policy, that an agreement between the employer from Kazakhstan and the migrant should be made for the process to be legal. Even though some mentioned that they have an agreement, they also showed distrust towards migrant laborers and were undecided whether to make payments in small amounts or in one installment.

## ACCESS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Direct beneficiaries reported that they mostly gained their information from friendship networks, often shared via social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram (particularly popular for Uzbek migrants). Most had not been exposed to information about TIP, although some had read or seen stories. One-third of the direct beneficiaries mentioned hotlines and the organizations that they received support from. For example, for one respondent “an organization in Nur-Sultan helped me when I called from Russia. I learned about them from the internet [...] These girls [from the organization] are very knowledgeable and experts, and I will always try to receive information from them and people like them”. However, most of the direct beneficiaries did not know about hotlines or other services. This seems to confirm one expert’s conclusion that “we spend so much money on information campaigns, we have all regions in the media, articles in newspapers, but young people don't watch it, don't read it and don't know anything about human trafficking”. Access to the internet, even 4G, is limited in some remote rural areas, including the farms in southern Kazakhstan where trafficked individuals are working. Several respondents from the business, government and NGO sectors mentioned it is important to reach youth from who are at school through specially designed programs, including lectures, plays, life example discussions and short videos:

We need to talk and write about this issue [TIP] and show programs for schools, so that children [schoolchildren] will be taught about the issue and different situations that potentially migrants face, including giving up their passports.

This topic is discussed on TV. However, young people do not watch it. I think we should include this topic into the curriculum at schools and even kindergartens. At least 30 minutes learning through play may have a big impact.

Short informative videos should be developed to reach young people in colleges and schools. That's an important age because young people start thinking about leaving the country when they are in school. Lectures can be delivered to young people so they can talk about them in their homes, disseminate booklets, and organize discussions. Some real-life examples can be used by bringing people who faced these issues, so they can talk about the importance of filling in proper documents, registering in the country and not violating migration policies.

The specialist respondents were divided over how effective and what form information campaigns should take. Where government respondents claimed that government sources of information are the most effective, many experts and representatives disagreed, claiming that their information is too jargon-filled and underreports the problem. According to one respondent, “the [government] information is reliable, but it is truncated. It is given very narrowly and very little, no information is given about the causes and problems. To educate the population, there must be wider information”. Representatives of NGOs claimed that their information is more accurate.

Respondents in government and business sectors spoke about migrants and trafficking survivors as “the others.” Very few mentioned that they knew or met trafficking survivors. Most of the respondents referred to the TV news, documentaries, and other TV shows as sources where they learned about cases of trafficking.

To ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of information, respondents checked the organization or account spreading the information while also checking the record of their work. Some cited news distributed by the independent media as more trustworthy, while others preferred websites like the consulate, embassy, and other government sources.

## **ATTITUDES**

### **HOW SHOULD SURVIVORS BE TREATED?**

While all of the respondents agreed that survivors in TIP need material and psychological support, they disagreed over who was best placed to provide this. The government respondents were positive about the effectiveness of measures against TIP in their country, framing it primarily as a law enforcement and security issue best solved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs or Committee on National Security (KNB). They advocated for a securitized approach, including strengthening border controls and surveillance on migrants.

Likewise, businesspeople tended to see the police as the primary agency dealing with TIP. All of those interviewed said they would go to the police first. They also advocated for survivors to go to the police, with one respondent stating that “of course, if he is legally registered, he can contact the police at any time”. Respondents in the business sector tended to hold migrants from other countries accountable for creating legal issues that affected employers. However, they expressed more sympathy when speaking about migrants from Kazakhstan leaving to other countries.

For the direct beneficiaries, like in the Kyrgyz Republic, law enforcement was viewed negatively - part of the problem rather than a body to rely on for help. Many were scared that if they approached the police, they would be arrested and deported for violating the migration regulations. As one migrant stated, “in our country, the police act not as an assistant, but as a repressive body”. A survivor of trafficking stated that she did not want to deal with police to avoid being traumatized:

After returning home I did not address law enforcement, because what happened to me was very terrifying, I just wanted to forget about it. If I address any organs [law enforcement bodies] all will start digging and pulling dirt, and I was not ready at that moment, I mostly worked with a psychologist, and did not want to dig the dirt up”.

This supports the previous research by SMICA in Kazakhstan in the summer of 2020, which indicates that in crisis situations migrants rely first on fellow nationals before NGOs and government.

## **MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SAFE MIGRATION**

The respondents themselves unwittingly repeated various myths or relayed them as myths. These included the idea that trafficking, and slavery only existed historically or that it only takes place abroad, in distant parts of the Middle East. Other myths include the idea that only marginal segments of the population fall victim to TIP. Another commonly held idea is that the survivors themselves are to blame. In some iterations, they knew the reality, and deliberately went to become a survivor of exploitation. In other versions, the survivor is to blame because they were ill-prepared or naive. Such survivor-blaming was particularly prominent among the government respondents. As one respondent stated, “first of all, the person is to blame for the fact that either he lost his documents, or he was deceived” and that “they [the survivor] must ensure their own safety”. Some considered TIP to only be sexual in nature. One gendered narrative claim that women fall victim because they have led an immoral lifestyle.

Many respondents, particularly those in government, repeated gender stereotypes, stating that “I think that the female sex is more susceptible, the weaker sex” or that “a woman breaks down faster than a man”. While most respondents in the business, beneficiary and government groups thought that women were more vulnerable than men, some respondents said that both men and women are equally vulnerable to trafficking overall.

## PRACTICES

### INTERVENTIONS: BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVES

- **Lack of trust in government.** Most survivors do not trust the police, or government more generally, because they do not believe they are treated as human beings. They are afraid of being blamed or humiliated by police, who view this as law enforcement rather than a trauma-related issue.
- **Positive experiences with support networks.** At least three trafficking survivors who are receiving support from NGOs and other social programs mentioned that social workers and police supported them significantly. They mentioned that they did not expect such support from the police in particular.
- **Lack of awareness of available services.** Just over two-thirds of the direct beneficiaries were not aware of the existence of crisis centers, hotlines or services for those in migration.

### INTERVENTIONS: SPECIALIST AND BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

- **Government officials are reluctant to give recommendations.** All of the government officials who participated in this research refused to give recommendations, either claiming they did not have authority to do so or that they thought that everything was being managed effectively. The interviews with the government officials were made possible only with the approval of the head supervisor. All respondents in this group were cautious and did not want to provide answers related to the policies and practices by the government.
- **Lack of investigation and prosecution of TIP.** NGOs continued to report that investigators closed or decided not to open some criminal cases due to a perceived lack of evidence, despite the available testimony of trafficking survivors. They continued to focus on investigating cases involving sex trafficking to the exclusion of those involving forced labor.
- **The business community often keeps workers' passports.** Half of the respondents in the business sector reported keeping their workers' passports for both safety purposes, and to be sure that they do not run away. Respondents described this practice from a very practical standpoint that works for them. "We don't know what kind of people are coming. If they leave after receiving money, I will be bankrupt," one respondent reported. A respondent who was previously arrested for violating the Labor Code tried to

justify the importance of keeping migrants' passports. He said "sometimes they ask us [for our passports] themselves. They [migrants] say "Bro can we leave our passports with you, we [migrants] think it is safer in your possession". One respondent mentioned his bad experience when the workers escaped after receiving the initial payment. From now on he said, "I always tell my workers to let me know beforehand, 10 or 15 days prior, if they want to leave, so I can prepare their payments and documents".

- **It is much cheaper and more effective to carry out preventive measures.** The specialists echoed the direct beneficiaries in highlighting how lack of awareness about TIP is one of the main drivers of trafficking. They made similar recommendations about designing effective information campaigns. While structural drivers of migration remain, TIP will continue to be an issue. However, informational campaigns can go some way to reducing TIP risks and enhancing safe migration. The evidence about the effectiveness of information campaigns to induce behavioral change is mixed.<sup>28</sup> With that being said, the evidence shows that targeted campaigns that grab people's attention and deliver credible and clear messages using trusted voices in a sustained manner are the most effective.
- **Lessons Learned from Covid-19.** According to one respondent, the Covid-19 pandemic "taught us a big lesson and many people and organizations became aware and are learning how to deal with the complexities when thousands of migrants stuck at the border of Kazakhstan last year [...] Especially NGOs became more sustainable in their work with migrants". A few specialists mentioned that government officials became more willing to work on migration and trafficking issues, as noted in the 2021 State Department report on trafficking in Kazakhstan.<sup>29</sup> For example, government officials have been looking at migrants as vulnerable or at-risk groups. Moreover, they started listening to NGOs "...before they [law enforcement] did not consider migrants as at-risk groups when interviewing them or working on the cases...now they see them as a vulnerable group."
- **Working with the government is becoming 'possible.'** Some respondents noted that working with some local governments became more 'possible' than before. For example, migration procedures became relatively easier. "In thirty minutes, a migrant can receive all the necessary services, such as going through the medical checkup and receiving necessary documents. It all happens in one place where a migration police and all other entities working with migration issues". "Migration police have been mainly focused on registration, we [NGO] work with migrants if they lose documents and offer

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<sup>28</sup> Janet A. Weiss & Mary Tschirhart, "Public Information Campaigns as Policy Instruments," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 13, (1), (1994), 82-119; Caitlin McCulloch & Stephen Watts,

"Evaluating the Effectiveness of Public Communication Campaigns and Their Implications for Strategic Competition with Russia," RAND, June 2021, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA412-2.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA412-2.html)

<sup>29</sup> "2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kazakhstan," *State Department*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/kazakhstan/>

shelter...migrants are more aware about services that the government and we provide. The migration service has a database including our oblast as well...We also have very good connections with the consulates of Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan... with the Russian Consulate it is a bit challenging, but we are trying to work with them as well”.

- **Poor coordination between government stakeholders.** Several specialists from civil society noted that the government agencies lack cooperation among themselves and with civil society. As one respondent said, “our problem is that we have vertical power, everything goes from top to bottom, there is no solution to the problem on a horizontal level”. There is a lack of cooperation and information sharing among agencies. Echoing earlier reports, the respondents lamented the fact that each government agency has its own collection system for data on TIP and migration.
- **Investigation, Survivor Identification, and Transnational Cooperation.** The State Department Report on Trafficking 2021 reported that the Government of Kazakhstan demonstrated overall increasing efforts when compared to the previous reporting period. Taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity, Kazakhstan was upgraded to Tier 2.<sup>30</sup> These efforts included investigating more trafficking cases and identifying more survivors of sex trafficking and forced labor than the previous year; increasing the number of trafficking convictions for the first time in five years; and achieving the first convictions for forced labor crimes in three years. Among the respondents, a few could point out that the government officials became more committed and improved procedures in administrative court. Most of the respondents, especially the direct beneficiaries and specialists, repeatedly mentioned that trafficking cases are not investigated enough, and if there is an investigation it does not reach trial. Moreover, issues with survivor identification were mentioned on several occasions among respondents from direct beneficiaries and the specialist group. They were concerned that police cannot and do not want to take responsible steps to identify survivors. Moreover, some respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration and transnational policies between countries of origin and destination countries, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## COMPARING THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC AND KAZAKHSTAN

The situations in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic vary substantially. While the Kyrgyz Republic is one of the most migration dependent countries in the world (with remittances making up one-third of the economy), Kazakhstan has become a net importer of migrants. To a greater extent than the Kyrgyz Republic, it is a country of origin, transit state, and destination for migrants. With a GDP per capita of around \$9,000, Kazakhstan is more affluent than the Kyrgyz Republic, where the GDP per capita is just over \$1,100.

In terms of knowledge about TIP and safe migration, levels were higher in Kazakhstan. Almost all of the respondents had heard the term safe migration or could define it. Two-thirds of respondents referred to the legal aspects of safe migration. In the Kyrgyz Republic, all the specialists and businesspeople had a sense of what safe migration means, identifying key elements related to migrants being protected from risks to their life, health, and wellbeing during all stages of the migration process. However, half of the direct beneficiaries were unaware of the term or unable to explain its potential meaning. We saw similar findings regarding knowledge of TIP. Of the direct beneficiaries, 23 people (21%) had not heard of or could not define TIP. All but one of the 23 people who could not define TIP were female, with just under half having been in migration.

Informal networks remain the key to accessing information and facilitating migration among direct beneficiaries in both countries. In both countries, most of the direct beneficiaries were influenced or recruited into migration by people they knew in their country, such as a neighbor, friend, or family member.

In both countries, respondents across all three target groups are supportive and indicate that survivors should be supported in reintegrating into their communities. However, they warn that women survivors and children born abroad in particular may face stigmatization. Yet, many misconceptions remain about TIP. Commonly held misconceptions reported by respondents in both countries included the idea that trafficking, and slavery only existed historically or only took place abroad. Other myths include the idea that only marginal segments of the population fall victim to TIP. Another commonly held idea is that the survivors themselves are to blame. Businesspeople in both countries relayed these myths most frequently. Many respondents, particularly those in government, repeated gender stereotypes in both countries. Respondents in both countries thought that women were more vulnerable to trafficking than men due to their position as the “weaker sex.”

Coupled with this stigmatization, survivors and at-risk groups in both countries have additional barriers to accessing support. There is a knowledge gap about existing services among direct



beneficiaries in both countries. In the Kyrgyz Republic, over half of the direct beneficiaries were not aware of the existence of crisis centers, hotlines, or services for those in migration. In Kazakhstan, 70% of the direct beneficiaries do not possess full information about safe migration, the risks of trafficking, or which organizations they could turn to for help. Three-quarters of respondents in the Kyrgyz Republic and a similar share in Kazakhstan rated information currently available to facilitate safe migration as untrustworthy, and they cited a general lack of access to information about specific work opportunities that are safe and dependable. In both countries, few vulnerable migrants or survivors understood that they were trafficked, inhibiting their ability to seek help. Even in Kazakhstan, where levels of knowledge about TIP being relatively high, among direct beneficiaries, one-third did not view themselves as survivors of TIP even though their experiences met the State Department definition of human trafficking.

For direct beneficiaries in both countries, law enforcement was viewed negatively - part of the problem rather than a body to rely on for help. Both the respondents from civil society and the direct beneficiaries argued that many survivors do not trust the police or government more generally because they do not believe that as survivors of trafficking they are treated as human beings. There is broad agreement among specialists outside of the government and direct beneficiaries that the lack of prosecutions and distrust of police are a vicious circle that keep victims from even being willing to come forward to give evidence in the first place. Women are particularly afraid of the male-dominated police.

While law enforcement was singled out in both countries as the most problematic actor in CTIP efforts, specialists in both countries pointed to a lack of coordination among government agencies in efforts to facilitate safe migration. Government agencies do not cooperate closely enough among themselves and with civil society. There is a lack of cooperation and information sharing among agencies. In the Kyrgyz Republic, personnel turnover and government restructuring since October 2020 has created additional issues in developing and implementing a coherent policy on CTIP.

Survivors in both countries are supportive of the establishment of a network to help them support one another and gain access to services. Three-quarters of the direct beneficiaries in the Kyrgyz Republic, including 80% of the survivors of trafficking, expressed interest in participating in a survivor network (provided they had the option to remain anonymous). Over half of the survivors of trafficking and migrants in Kazakhstan were supportive of the idea of creating a national survivor network to support survivors of TIP.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### KAZAKHSTAN

Over the past 15 years, Kazakhstan has transitioned from being a net exporter of migrants to a net importer.<sup>31</sup> It has become a sender, site, and transit country for trafficking in persons. Levels of knowledge of TIP and safe migration vary, with direct beneficiaries having lower levels of understanding. Almost all of the respondents had heard the term safe migration or could define it. Two-thirds of respondents referred to the legal aspects of safe migration. Most of the respondents had heard of TIP. The predominant understanding of TIP was a crime involving the exploitation of individuals for their labor. Over three-quarters of respondents, with higher numbers from the government sector, understood this as a problem driven by lack of documentation. Among direct beneficiaries, one-third did not view themselves as survivors of TIP, even though their experiences met the State Department definition of human trafficking.

This knowledge gap also extends to awareness of existing services and programs. Observations from interviews show that 70% of the direct beneficiaries do not possess full information about safe migration, the risks of trafficking in Kazakhstan, or which organizations they could turn to for help. Respondents in the business sector, as well as direct beneficiaries and migrants, did not seem to know about the new changes to Kazakhstan's migration policy made in January 2020. With this policy, Kazakhstan cancelled the practice of cards that require registration with the migration services in Kazakhstan within five days of entry. The new policy allows migrants to enter the country and stay up to 30 days without requiring registration cards, and if needed, they can extend their stay up to 90 days within a six-month period. However, under this new law, the responsibility for any violations lies with those hosting or sponsoring the migrants. The fact that respondents in the business sector did not know these details and during the interviews continued to assume that migrants were solely responsible for violations shows that people in the business sector are not familiar with the policy changes. Over half of the direct beneficiaries were not aware of the existence of crisis centers, hotlines or services for those in migration.

A particularly problematic finding was that half of the respondents from the business community think that the employer should keep their workers' passports due to stated fears that they will "escape" or that they may steal from them. They were not aware that this was illegal. Most migrants who were interviewed did not know about labor rules laws governing migration in

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<sup>31</sup> Edward Lemon, "In a Region that Usually Exports Migrants, Kazakhstan Becomes a Major Destination," 2 December 2021, *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/region-usually-exports-migrants-kazakhstan-becomes-major-destination-196960>

Kazakhstan. They reported giving their passports away to their employers expecting and believing that s/he will use it for registration purposes.

The State Department Report on Trafficking 2021 reported that the Government of Kazakhstan demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore, Kazakhstan was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more trafficking cases and identifying more survivors of sex trafficking and forced labor than the previous year; increasing the number of trafficking convictions for the first time in five years; and achieving the first convictions for forced labor crimes in three years. But among the respondents a few could point out that the government officials became more committed and improved procedures in administrative court.

Our findings reinforce these findings. Both the respondents from civil society and the direct beneficiaries argued that many survivors do not trust the police, or government more generally, because they do not believe that as survivors of trafficking they are treated as human beings. They are afraid of being blamed or humiliated by police, who view trafficking as a law enforcement rather than a trauma-related issue. Women are particularly afraid of the male-dominated police. Several specialists from civil society from some regions/oblasts noted that the government agencies do not cooperate close enough among themselves and with civil society. There is a lack of cooperation and information sharing among agencies.

## **THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

Migration remains the bedrock of the Kyrgyz economy, making up one-third of the country's GDP. In many rural areas, especially in the south, migration affects virtually every family. Knowledge of and resources for safe migration are a serious need for communities across the country. Half of direct beneficiary respondents were unaware of the term "safe migration" or unable to explain its potential meaning. While respondents across all groups and regions frequently cited the involvement of the state as a key potential factor in making migration safe, trust in law enforcement was very low across beneficiary communities and prosecution of TIP cases is rare. Trust in law enforcement was especially low among marginalized groups in the south -- with many respondents stating they perceive any interaction with police is more likely to bring them harm than help both at home and while in Russia in particular. While increased investigations of TIP in 2020 over 2019 are reflected in a modest improvement in the State Department's TIP rating to Tier 2 in 2021, for the past three years no one has been prosecuted on TIP-related charges in Kyrgyzstan, which both reflects and helps explain the low levels of trust in law enforcement found among respondents in this study.

In general, understandings of TIP were often very limited except among those who had experienced it themselves or were close to someone who had. While most direct beneficiaries had a sense that TIP referred to a crime that involves people being sold for profit or forced into slavery, few could elaborate in more detail. Therefore, they are unlikely to take any measures to protect themselves or their family members from it. Among both men and women, pressure to avoid shame, stigma or social exclusion leads many to publicly talk about their own past migration experience as much more positive than it was.

Three-quarters of respondents in all regions and categories rated information currently available to facilitate safe migration as untrustworthy and cited a general lack of (awareness of) information about specific work opportunities that are safe and dependable. Direct beneficiaries primarily draw information from word-of-mouth within their peer networks (or virtual word of mouth over WhatsApp or Instagram), and report frequently arriving in a destination city with no prior information about work opportunities and using personal networks in those locations to arrange work.

A prominent myth cited by respondents was that survivors have “only themselves to blame” if they fall into a negative situation and cannot extricate themselves. A commonly held assumption is that trafficking only happens to gullible, uneducated people. Over 90% of respondents from all three groups indicate that survivors should be supported in reintegrating into their communities. But direct beneficiaries warn that female survivors and children born abroad in particular may face stigmatization and potentially rejection from their home communities or families due to assumptions that the women are “ruined”, and their children may be illegitimate.

Specialists and business respondents cited the decision to abolish the migration departments in local government offices and merge those staff into other departments such as Labor/Employment as having negatively affected the migration situation in the country.

Specialists working within the government and civil society noted that the various policy and personnel changes since October 2020 had disrupted various projects on TIP. Mechanisms, including the National Referral Mechanism, are not operating properly. This assessment was corroborated by the direct beneficiaries, over three quarters of whom negatively evaluated the work of the government in CTIP.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

### FOR SMICA:

- **Develop a Survivor Network.** Many respondents expressed a desire to use their own experiences, be they positive or negative, to help others avoid falling victim to trafficking. This could be modelled on best practices from other countries, such as the ANIRBAN survivors' network in Bangladesh, Hamro Samman in Nepal, or the Survivor Network in the USA. The network could be organized by an NGO and involve monthly wellness calls, online psychosocial support sessions, and peer to peer mentorship.
- **Improve information campaigns.** As highlighted above, there is a knowledge gap surrounding the existence of services for the support of safe migration and counter trafficking in persons. Information campaigns could be made more effective by connecting at-risk groups with available services and enhancing knowledge of safe migration. First, numerous respondents recommended the development of information campaigns on the risks of TIP that could be distributed in schools, particularly in districts with high migration rates. Second, respondents in the south argued that campaigns may be more effective if they could find a common language with the population through the prism of Islam. Lastly, respondents recommended utilizing social networks that are most popular among younger people, including Instagram and TikTok. Many respondents, particularly from the direct beneficiaries, consider survivor narratives a much more reliable form of information than other resources currently available to them. Utilizing survivor narratives, messaging on (C)TIP should clearly articulate that survivors are not to blame for being trafficked and contain narratives that challenge gender stereotypes. Using survivor accounts could help build empathy.
- **Train law enforcement to adopt more survivor-centric approaches to TIP.** Training for law enforcement in detection of TIP and developing trauma-aware approaches that focus on survivor needs could help build trust with survivors and prevent underreporting. The training could be delivered via a series of videos.
- **Focus more on internal migration.** Our research shows that many direct beneficiaries did not think they could be trafficked within the Kyrgyz Republic. SMICA should highlight that internal migration also needs to be safe in training sessions and informational campaigns.
- **Provide additional training sessions to support safe migration.** Specialists and direct beneficiaries both identified a lack of Russian language skills as a key factor that led migrants to find themselves in unsafe situations. Training sessions could be supplemented with training sessions on regulations affecting migrants in Russia and job skills training. These training sessions should be held in rural areas with high levels of migration, such as Batken, Isfana, Aravan, and Talas. Every effort should be made to invite and include women in these sessions as participants and trainers.

## **FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC:**

- **Reopen migration departments.** Respondents, particularly in the south, noted the need to reopen migration departments in the field that had been opened in 2005 and closed in 2015. Staff were laid off or transferred to other departments (such as Labor) where they no longer had remit to work on migration. In other cases, responsibilities were transferred (particularly to Labor/Employment departments) without increasing their budget or staff.
- **Increase investigations and prosecutions.** While the country has a robust legal system to deal with TIP, it is not being effectively utilized. As one civil society activist noted, “Yes, there are laws. There is an article through which people can be sentenced for up to 13 years, but this requires proof that these cases were indeed TIP. It is very difficult for us, because if applicants are offered money to close the case, they quickly agree and give a counter statement”. Other specialist interviews, particularly in the north of the country, stated that they believe corruption undermines willingness to open investigations at all. They repeatedly stated beliefs that police, or former police officials have a financial interest in protecting sex-trafficking networks from investigation or prosecution. Low trust in law enforcement -- stemming from these perceptions as well as extremely low levels of prosecution of TIP cases, and fears that anonymity will not be protected -- helps create a vicious circle in which victims decline to report or participate in investigations and police and prosecution services cannot initiate criminal prosecutions.
- **Create an independent body to oversee CTIP.** Specialists noted that the National Referral Mechanism is not functioning effectively because there is no centralized management. This is despite the fact that the Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for coordinating its activities. Specialists proposed establishing a specialized independent body to oversee its work. This body would not be responsible for the NRM’s day-to-day activities but would instead monitor and evaluate its activities and make recommendations on how to make the NRM more effective. This could be similar to the Kyrgyz National Center for the Prevention of Torture, which was established in 2012 to oversee law enforcement. This could help with coordination among already overburdened agencies and civil society. This independent body could serve as a national rapporteur on TIP.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: KAZAKHSTAN

### FOR SMICA:

- **Organize trauma and gender sensitivity training for stakeholders, especially law enforcement.** More training on gender and trauma sensitivity for law enforcement could help address the previously identified distrust of police. Very frequent rotation of staff in government agencies leads to new and inexperienced staff, specifically on gender and trauma sensitivity. While law enforcement was singled out as a particularly problematic actor regarding CTIP, responses also indicate that SMICA should enhance the gender and trauma sensitivity aspects of its training for other stakeholders like healthcare workers and labor inspectors.
- **Organize workshops for employers and employment agencies.** SMICA should organize training workshops to cover laws and regulations related to migration, including the illegality of seizing workers' passports. SMICA could also organize an information campaign on social media.
- **Organize training sessions and informational campaigns for migrants.** Given that many migrants did not know about the changes to Kazakhstan's migration policy from January 2020, SMICA should organize training sessions on migration laws and regulations for migrant workers. The briefings could be supplemented by a public information campaign on social media to raise awareness of the new laws.
- **Improve information campaigns.** Research demonstrates that there is still a lack of awareness about TIP in the greater public, with many survivors themselves not knowing that their experiences meet the definition of trafficking or where to find support in crisis situations. Direct beneficiaries suggested three ways in which information campaigns could be enhanced. First, respondents noted that younger people in particular are increasingly using TikTok and Instagram as sources of information. More content should be developed for these platforms to increase the reach of information. Second, they suggested that the government and civil society conduct outreach in schools to make young people aware of the risks of TIP and practices of safe migration from a young age. Finally, they recommended that more information be posted at points of departure or transit for migrants, such as airports, borders, bus stations, and markets.
- **Create a Survivor Network.** The network could be built in partnership with the proposed network in the Kyrgyz Republic, and it could adopt a similar structure with a local NGO coordinating activity. Survivors said that, if there was a guarantee of anonymity or no pressure to participate, they would welcome the opportunity to share experiences and coping mechanisms. Those who had migrated safely expressed a desire to give support and advice to others.
- **Provide training to labor inspectors to help them identify victims of forced labor and report potential trafficking cases to the police.** Such training sessions could increase levels of identification and connect survivors to necessary services.

## FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF KAZAKHSTAN:

- **Establish a National Referral Mechanism.** Numerous respondents discussed the ways in which government agencies lack coordination among themselves and with civil society. Creating a National Referral Mechanism, modelled on international best practices, would be one way to enhance coordination among stakeholders. It could also allow for greater transparency and reveal underlying explanations for why law enforcement does not initiate investigation into trafficking cases more frequently.
- **Create a centralized anti-trafficking data collection system.** The respondents lamented the fact that each government agency has its own collection system for data on TIP and migration. Standardization and centralization would allow for enhanced coordination and could be built into the National Referral Mechanism.
- **Adopt a law on trafficking in persons.** Respondents noted that there is no specific law that protects citizens from trafficking in persons in Kazakhstan. The current legal basis for the definition and punishment for TIP stems from the Constitution and the Criminal Code. A specific law could enhance protections for survivors, increase prosecutions, and align the definition of trafficking with international standards.
- **Adopt stricter punishments for traffickers.** Over half of the direct beneficiaries thought that the current system did not provide adequate justice for survivors, despite harsher punishments having been previously introduced in 2019. They called for law enforcement to increase numbers of arrests, the court system to increase convictions, and for changes in the law to increase punishments for traffickers.
- **Expand the network of shelters.** Those who had spent time in shelters were positive about the assistance they received there, and they advocated for more centers to be established across the country.



## Annex I: List of Interviewees

<b>Interview/FG</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>File Name</b>
Interview	Aravan	Businessperson	M	Interview 1
Interview	Aravan	Businessperson	F	Interview 2
Interview	Aravan	Specialist	M	Interview 3
Interview	Aravan	Beneficiary	M	Interview 4
Interview	Aravan	Specialist	M	Interview 5
Interview	Aravan	Specialist	F	Interview 6
Interview	Aravan	Businessperson	F	Interview 7
Interview	Aravan	Beneficiary	F	Interview 8
Interview	Aravan	Specialist	M	Interview 9
Interview	Aravan	Beneficiary	M	Interview 10
Interview	Aravan	Beneficiary	F	Interview 11
Interview	Aravan	Businessperson	F	Interview 12
Interview	Aravan	Beneficiary	F	Interview 13
Interview	Aravan	Beneficiary	F	Interview 14
Focus Group	Aravan	Beneficiary	2M, 5 F	Focus Group 1
Focus Group	Aravan	Beneficiary	5 F	Focus Group 2
Focus Group	Aravan	Beneficiary	5 M	Focus Group 3

Focus Group	Batken	Beneficiary	6 M	Focus Group Men
Focus Group	Batken	Beneficiary	6 F	Focus Group Women

Interview	Jalal Abad	Specialist	M/F	Interview 1
Interview	Jalal Abad	Specialist	F	Interview 2
Interview	Jalal Abad	Beneficiary	F	Interview 4

Interview	Jalal Abad	Beneficiary	F	Interview 5
Interview	Jalal Abad	Beneficiary	M	Interview 6
Interview	Jalal Abad	Beneficiary	F	Interview 7
Interview	Jalal Abad	Beneficiary	F	Interview 8
Focus Group	Jalal Abad	Businessperson	M	Focus Group 1
Focus Group	Jalal Abad	Businessperson	F	Focus Group 2

Interview	Osh	Beneficiary	F	Interview 1
Interview	Osh	Beneficiary	F	Interview 2
Interview	Osh	Beneficiary	F	Interview 3
Interview	Osh	Beneficiary	F	Interview 4
Interview	Osh	Beneficiary	F	Interview 5
Interview	Osh	Specialist	M	Interview 6
Interview	Osh	Specialist	M	Interview 7
Interview	Osh	Businessperson	M	Interview 8
Interview	Osh	Businessperson	M	Interview 9
Interview	Osh	Specialist	M	Interview 10
Interview	Osh	Specialist	M	Interview 11
Interview	Osh	Beneficiary	F	Interview 12
Focus Group	Osh	Beneficiary	6 M	Focus Group 1
Focus Group	Osh	Beneficiary	5 F	Focus Group 2
Focus Group	Osh	Beneficiary	5 M	Focus Group 3

Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 1
Interview	Bishkek	Beneficiary	F	Interview 2
Interview	Bishkek	Beneficiary	F	Interview 3

Focus Group	Bishkek	Beneficiary	5 F	Focus Group 1
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 4
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 5
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	M	Interview 6
Focus Group	Bishkek	Businessperson	6 F, 2 M	Focus Group 2
Focus Group	Bishkek	Businessperson	4 F, 2M	Focus Group 3
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 7
Focus Group	Bishkek	Beneficiary	5 M	Focus Group 4
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 8
Interview	Bishkek	Beneficiary	5 F, 5M	Focus Group 5
Interview	Bishkek	Businessperson	F	Interview 9
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 10
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 11
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 12
Focus Group	Bishkek	Beneficiary	9 F, 1 M	Focus Group 6
Focus Group	Bishkek	Beneficiary	5 F, 1 M	Focus Group 7
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	M	Interview 13
Focus Group	Bishkek	Beneficiary	9 F	Focus Group 8
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	M	Interview 14
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 15
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 16
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 17
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	M	Interview 18
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	M	Interview 19
Interview	Bishkek	Specialist	F	Interview 20

## Kazakhstan

<b>Interview/FG</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>File Name</b>
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 1
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	M	NGO Interview 2
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 3
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 4
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	M	NGO Interview 5
Interview	Mangystau	Specialist	M	NGO Interview 6
Interview	Kostanai	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 7
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 8
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 9
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 10
Interview	Turkestan	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 11
Interview	Turkestan	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 12
Interview	Petropavlovsk	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 13
Interview	Aktobe	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 14
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 15
Interview	Almaty	Specialist	M	NGO Interview 16
Interview	Kyzylorda	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 17
Interview	Almaty	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 18
Interview	Kyzylorda	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 19
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 20
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 21
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	F	NGO Interview 22
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	M	NGO Interview 23
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 1
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 2
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 3
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 4

Interview	Nur-Sultan	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 5
Interview	Turkestan	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 6
Interview	Turkestan	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 7
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 8
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 9
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 10
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 11
Interview	Turkestan	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 12
Interview	Almaty	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 13
Interview	Turkestan	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 14
Interview	Turkestan	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 15
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 16
Interview	Almaty	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 17
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 18
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 19
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 20
Interview	Shymkent	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 21
Interview	Almaty	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 22
Interview	Turkestan	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 23
Interview	Almaty	Beneficiary	M	Beneficiary 24
Interview	Almaty	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 25
Interview	Almaty	Beneficiary	F	Beneficiary 26
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	F	Government 1
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	M	Government 2
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	M	Government 3
Interview	Almaty	Specialist	M	Government 4
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	M	Government 5
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Specialist	M	Government 6
Interview	Almaty	Specialist	M	Government 7

Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	Government 8
Interview	Turkestan	Specialist	M	Government 9
Interview	Turkestan	Specialist	F	Government 10
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	M	Government 11
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	Government 12
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	Government 13
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	Government 14
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	M	Government 15
Interview	Almaty	Specialist	F	Government 16
Interview	Shymkent	Specialist	F	Government 17
Interview	Turkestan	Specialist	M	Government 18
Interview	Turkestan	Specialist	F	Government 19
Interview	Shymkent	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 1
Interview	Shymkent	Businessperson	M	Businessperson 2
Interview	Almaty	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 3
Interview	Almaty	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 4
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Businessperson	M	Businessperson 5
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 6
Interview	Nur-Sultan	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 7
Interview	Shymkent	Businessperson	M	Businessperson 8
Interview	Almaty	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 9
Interview	Turkestan	Businessperson	F	Businessperson 10
Focus Group	Shymkent	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 1
Focus Group	Kazakhstan	Specialist	1 F, 2 M	Focus Group 2
Focus Group	Kazakhstan	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 3
Focus Group	Almaty	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 4
Focus Group	Kazakhstan	Specialist	2 F, 1 M	Focus Group 5
Focus Group	Shymkent	Businessperson	3 F	Focus Group 6

Focus Group	Almaty	Beneficiary	2 F, 1 M	Focus Group 7
Focus Group	Almaty	Beneficiary	3 F	Focus Group 8
Focus Group	Almaty	Beneficiary	1 F, 2M	Focus Group 9
Focus Group	Shymkent	Beneficiary	1 F, 2M	Focus Group 10
Focus Group	Shymkent	Businessperson	3 F	Focus Group 11
Focus Group	Almaty	Specialist	2 F, 1 M	Focus Group 12
Focus Group	Shymkent	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 13
Focus Group	Turkestan	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 14
Focus Group	Shymkent	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 15
Focus Group	Shymkent	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 16
Focus Group	Almaty	Beneficiary	1 F, 2 M	Focus Group 17
Focus Group	Almaty	Specialist	3 F	Focus Group 18

## Annex II: Question Guides

### Module for Specialists (Government, Civil Society, Experts)

Age:

Gender:

Occupation/Current Employment:

Location:

### Knowledge

#### *Safe Migration (SM)*

1. In a few sentences please describe the migration situation in your country
2. What are the benefits and costs of migration for your country?
3. Can you explain the term “safe” migration?
  - a. In your opinion what makes migration “safe”?
  - b. What factors help keep migrants safe?

#### *Trafficking in Persons (TIP)*

4. In your own words, tell me what you think human trafficking is?
  - a. Can you give me three examples of situations which would be classified as human trafficking?
5. How would you describe the human trafficking situation in your country?
  - i. In your view what factors cause people to be trafficked?
  - ii. What are the demographics of those who are trafficked?
6. What laws, policies or other regulations exist to counter TIP in your country?
7. I'd like to ask about the differences in vulnerability to exploitation in migration between men and women.
  - i. What do you think are risks or dangers that are common to both men and women in migration?



- ii. What do you think are the risks or dangers that are specific to men in migration?
  - iii. What do you think are the risks or dangers that are specific to women?
- 8. Do you or members of your local community have experiences of bride kidnapping? i.e., has this issue impacted your community directly? [Kyrgyzstan specific question]
  - a. In your opinion, how are bride kidnapping and trafficking similar or different?

### *Access to info*

9. How would you assess the accuracy, trustworthiness, or appropriateness of stories or pieces of information about trafficking and safe migration? Can you say more about how they presented the information, and what you think was presented accurately or inaccurately, appropriately or inappropriately?
  - a. What can be done to improve it?

### **Attitudes**

10. I'd like to ask your opinion about how TIP is addressed by various government agencies and other stakeholders.
  - i. Who do you identify as the relevant authorities within national and local government to be addressing issues related to TIP?
  - ii. If you were in a position to make recommendations to those bodies, what recommendations, if any, would you offer?
11. What effects does TIP have on the victims, on the victim's community and on the victim's family?
12. How are migrants that arrive in Kazakhstan from neighboring countries treated?  
[Kazakhstan specific question]
13. How should those who have been trafficked be treated?
  - a. Should they return to their family and communities?
  - b. If so, how can they be safely supported in returning to their communities?
14. What do you think are the most important misconceptions about exploitation and abuse in migration and TIP?

### **Practices**

15. What are the most effective means of helping survivors of TIP?
  - a. Which of these means of preventing TIP and helping victims do you think are most effective? Choose three and explain why.
    - i. CTIP NGO networks
    - ii. National Referral Mechanism

- iii. Government regulations
  - iv. Diaspora groups
  - v. Private Employment Agencies
  - vi. Labor inspectorate (Kazakhstan)
16. What kinds of considerations are required when planning for services or programs in your professional area regarding survivors of TIP?
- a. What about considerations for survivors of other forms of exploitation or abuse in migration?
  - b. What about considerations regarding populations vulnerable to TIP?
  - c. What about considerations regarding populations vulnerable to other forms of exploitation or abuse in migration? [prompt: return to previous discussions about who might be vulnerable to exploitation or abuse in migration and thoughts about best practices for safe migration]
17. How can information sharing and data collection on safe migration be improved?
18. How might victims of TIP be better supported upon their return [Kyrgyzstan specific question]?

### **Module for Non-specialists (Business People)**

Age:

Gender:

Occupation/Current Employment:

Location:

### **Knowledge**

#### *Safe Migration (SM)*

1. In a few sentences please describe the migration situation in your country
2. What are the benefits and costs of migration for your country?
3. Can you explain the term “safe” migration?
  - a. In your opinion what makes migration “safe”?
  - b. What factors help keep migrants safe?

4. Do you know the procedures for legally employing migrants in Kazakhstan?  
[Kazakhstan specific question]

### *Trafficking in Persons (TIP)*

5. Tell me what you think human trafficking is?
6. Where did you hear about TIP?
7. From your perspective, please describe who traffickers are and what their purpose is?
8. From your perspective, what methods do traffickers use to get their victims?
9. Do you personally know someone who has been a victim of trafficking, exploitation or abuse in migration?
  - a. If “YES,” have you ever heard them share anything about their experience?
  - b. What would you do to offer support to someone who has experienced trafficking, exploitation or abuse in migration?
  - c. If you wanted to help a victim of trafficking but didn’t know how, where would you turn to find more information?

### *Access to Information*

10. Can you think of the most recent times that you heard or saw stories or information about risks or harm related to migration, safe migration, or TIP? Where did you hear or see these pieces of information or stories?
  - a. What sources do you use to learn about TIP or safe migration related stories and cases in your country?
    - i. [prompt] Social media (name)
    - ii. [prompt] TV (name channels)
    - iii. [prompt] Professional events (name)
    - iv. [prompt] WhereWhat else?
11. How would you assess the accuracy, trustworthiness, or appropriateness of these stories or pieces of information sources?

### **Attitudes**

12. I’d like to ask your opinion about how TIP is addressed by various national and local government and other stakeholders.
  - i. Who do you identify as the relevant authorities within local government to be addressing issues related to TIP?

- ii. If you were in a position to make recommendations to those bodies, what recommendations, if any, would you offer?
13. How should those who are trafficked be treated? Who is responsible for what happened to them?
  14. What do you think are the most important misconceptions about exploitation and abuse in migration and TIP?
  15. Do you think that labor migrants should pay agencies or the government for the opportunity to work abroad? Why?

## Practices

16. What is an appropriate way to pay migrant workers? incrementally? Or when the work is completed?
17. Have you ever employed a migrant? If so, have you done so within the quota allowance? (Kazakhstan specific question)
18. Do you think the people for whom migrants work should keep the passports of those who are working for them? Why?
19. Do you think it is a good business practice to conclude labor agreements? Orally or in written form? If yes, should the employer hold their documents? And why?
20. If you come across someone who you think is being trafficked or exploited, what would you do?
  - a. What are some signs that someone is a victim of human trafficking? Do you know what steps to take to get someone help if you were able to identify someone?
21. What are the most effective means of preventing TIP and helping victims?
  - a. How can migrants be better prepared before they migrate to prevent them becoming victims of TIP?
  - b. How can information sharing and data collection on TIP be improved?
  - c. Would you be willing to work with non-governmental organizations to help raise awareness of safe migration and employ victims of trafficking?

## Module for Direct Beneficiaries:

Age:

Gender:

Occupation/Current Employment:

What is the highest level of school that you have completed?

Location:

## Knowledge

For All:

1. Can you explain the term “safe” migration?
2. Please describe TIP from your perspective?
3. Have you ever been a migrant? If no, see next question [#7]; If yes, how long and where?
  - a. Why did you decide to migrate?
  - b. What expectations did you have?
  - c. Who advised you to go? What information did they give you?
  - d. How did you find your work while in migration?
    - i. Did you pay anyone to find you work? Was it an agency in your home country? Was it an individual/organization in the destination country?
  - e. What was the situation with your family while you were a migrant in another country?
  - f. What would you do differently?

For Family/Other vulnerable

4. Do you know anyone close to you who was/is a migrant?
  - a. How long were they in migration? Where? What was their experience?
  - b. What did you do as a family member/neighbor/friend to support her/him?
  - c. What expectations did you have?
  - d. Did you meet your expectations?
  - e. Is there anything you would have done differently to support them?
5. Do you or members of your local community have experiences of bride kidnapping? i.e., has this issue impacted your community directly? (Kyrgyzstan)
  - a. In your opinion, how are bride kidnapping and trafficking similar or different?

*Access to Information*

6. (For Migrants) What sources did you use to communicate with other migrants?
  - a. Were they useful for you? How?
7. What sources do you use to learn about migration?
  - a. Social media (name)
  - b. Phone apps (Viber, WhatsApp, telegram etc)
  - c. TV (name channels)
  - d. Professional events (name)
  - e. Hotlines (name)
  - f. Chatbots (name)
  - g. Private employment agency websites (name)
  - h. Government employment centers (name)

- i. What else?
- 8. How would you assess the accuracy, trustworthiness, or appropriateness of these stories or pieces of information sources? Can you say more about how they presented the information, and what you think was presented accurately or inaccurately, appropriately or inappropriately?

### **Attitudes**

- 9. How are those who are trafficked be treated?
- 10. How should those who are trafficked be treated
- 11. What do you think the government is doing to help? Do you think that is sufficient?

### **Practices**

- 12. What changes could you recommend -- to government, or civil society organizations or the media -- that might prevent others from being trafficked?
  - a. If a Central Asian survivor of trafficking started a network of survivors, would you join that network? Why or why not?
  - b. If not, what would be the terms of that network that would make it easier for you to be involved?
  - c. If a civil society organization reached out to you to become involved in an advocacy campaign or awareness campaign to provide a survivor's voice, are there any circumstances under which you would be willing to do so? If so, what conditions would you desire in order to be comfortable to be part of such an initiative?