



Rapid Situational Assessment on the Child Trafficking Context and Response in Southern Kazakhstan: Situational Analysis Report

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Academy of Law Enforcement Agencies – Academy of Law Enforcement Agencies under the General Prosecutor’s Office

akimats – in this study refer to *akimats* of regions and cities of Astana, Almaty, Shymkent

CAM – Centers for Adaptation of Minors

CSC – Children’s Support Centers

EU – European Union

ICT – Information and Communications Technology/Technologies

ILO – International Labor Organization

IO – international organizations

IOM – International Organization for Migration

Karaganda Academy – Karaganda Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs named after B.Beisenov

KATCH – Kazakhstan Actions Against Trafficking in Children

KazAID – Kazakhstan Agency of International Development

KZT – Kazakhstani Tenge

LGBTQIA – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Ministry of Digital Development - Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan

MLSP – Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan

MOE – Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

MOH – Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan

MOJ – Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan

NAP – the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons for 2024–2026 of the Republic of Kazakhstan

NGO – non-governmental organizations

NSC – National Security Committee

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PHC – primary healthcare

SMICA – Safe Migration in Central Asia

TIP – Trafficking in Persons

U.S. – United States

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USD – United States dollar

Executive Summary

Background and Overview of Current Trends in Child Trafficking in Kazakhstan

Child trafficking is a pressing issue in Kazakhstan. The country is deemed a supplier, recipient, and transit country for trafficking in persons (TIP). Studies on human trafficking suggest the presence of both internal and external trafficking, with survivors of TIP being both citizens of Kazakhstan and other neighboring countries. The reported forms of child exploitation include various types of labor and sexual exploitation; the means traffickers use to enable this exploitation are also highly diverse, including utilizing intermediaries, psychological pressure, grooming via social media, and even gaining power of attorney under false pretenses. According to legal statistics of the Committee for Legal Statistics and Special Accounts of the State Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Kazakhstan, violent acts of a sexual nature against minors, kidnapping of minors, and illegal confinement of minors all increased. Still, the number of TIP survivors, particularly among children, is thought to be much higher than the reported figures.

Kazakhstan undertook multiple initiatives to improve identification of TIP survivors and their referral to law enforcement, as well as to ensure the access of TIP survivors to special social services stipulated by the policies. Vivid examples thereof are the development of the draft law “On Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan” and improvement of the existing legislation, such as the Standard for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of Human Trafficking (2023). The number of specialized anti-trafficking police officers has increased, contributing to the increased number of identified TIP survivors. In 2023, the country was ranked as Tier 2 country by the U.S. Department of State based on the increased but insufficient actions to target TIP given its true magnitude.

Objectives and Methodology

This study was conducted within the framework of the “Kazakhstan Actions Against Trafficking in Children” (KATCH) project, funded by the United States (U.S.) Department of State, which aims to improve the identification of and service provision to survivors of child trafficking and accompanying children of migrant laborers in southern regions of Kazakhstan. This research investigates factors contributing to the vulnerability and resilience of children to child trafficking and identifies major gaps in the referral of TIP survivors to police and their access to special social services offered by the relevant state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The study comprised of a desk review and twenty semi-structured interviews with representatives of state and civil society organizations and experts working on combatting TIP. In so doing, the research is intended to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the factors contributing to children's vulnerability and resilience to child trafficking?
2. What is the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the child trafficking process?
3. What services are currently offered to survivors of child trafficking?
4. What are the gaps/unmet needs in the identification and referral of survivors of child trafficking and their access to services, also in terms of trauma-informed and survivor-centered care/approach?

Desk Review

Child trafficking is under-researched in the Kazakh context; thus, this study can only draw upon a few previous studies conducted on this topic. These are:

- The 2009 and 2012 studies commissioned by UNICEF, discussing the common forms of child exploitation in the country and factors associated with children's vulnerability to child trafficking, namely poverty, family violence and conflicts, parents' drug and alcohol problems, death of parents/caregivers, etc. These studies also pointed out the issues associated with researching this topic, including non-generalizability and stakeholders' frequent unwillingness to engage in research on child trafficking.
- A study by the International Federation for Human Rights et al. (2018) discussed the vulnerability of labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan working in Kazakhstan and suggested an underrated phenomenon of child exploitation, underreporting, and limited access of children to health services and their repatriation problems.
- A final study by the International Organization for Migration examined the intersection of human trafficking and ICT in Central Asia. In addition to emphasizing the particular vulnerability of children and youth due to the increased use and unsupervised exposure to ICT, this study has also highlighted the significance of ICT in the identification of survivors of human trafficking.

This section concludes with a brief overview of the current state of academic research on ICT and child trafficking, suggesting a broad role of ICT in the child and human trafficking process and related research being at an initial stage.

Major Upcoming Initiatives

Major initiatives in human and child trafficking are outlined in Kazakhstan's National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons for 2024-2026 (NAP). The NAP emphasizes the role of interdepartmental and intersectoral activities in countering TIP and

preventing forced labor, including collaboration with the private sector. It also stipulates that state initiatives should use ICT to prevent human trafficking and exploitation and improve the referral process of TIP survivors, also via mobile applications. The NAP also outlines a broad range of awareness-raising activities among the general public, including new programs specifically targeting orphans and children deprived of parental care, neglected, homeless minors, and state officials involved in the identification and referral of potential TIP survivors, as well as the organizations providing special social services to TIP survivors. It also stipulates training activities for consular officers, lawyers, law enforcement bodies, prosecutors, border service, labor inspectors, health, education, social protection departments, judges, mass media, and NGOs. This section also indicates the roles of international organizations, namely the IOM and Winrock International, whose roles are critical to the awareness-raising and joint training activities.

Identifying the Profile of Survivors of Child Trafficking: Vulnerability and Resilience Factors

Based on semi-structured interviews conducted in the southern regions of Kazakhstan targeted by KATCH, this section outlines the factors associated with the vulnerability of children to child trafficking. The children most vulnerable to trafficking are those without parental care and those with limited parental supervision or who live in dysfunctional families. Poverty and insecurity such as family violence and conflicts, parents' drugs and alcohol problems, are equally highlighted, both being risk factors for among male and female children and adding further to their vulnerabilities. Interviewees also emphasized the specific vulnerability of children with disabilities, age-specific differences in vulnerability of children to child trafficking, and the particular vulnerability of ethnic Lyuli children to labor exploitation.

These vulnerability factors are complemented by the factors associated with resilience to child trafficking and successful recovery processes. These are: child literacy and awareness, the presence of trust-filled relationships with parents and caregivers, personality traits, motivation, and the quality of social services offered to TIP survivors. This section concludes with a discussion of these interview findings in the context of the broader discussions of vulnerability, resilience, and recovery-associated factors in the academic literature on child trafficking.

The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Child Trafficking

Unsupervised access to the internet contributes to the vulnerability of all children to child trafficking. At the same time, ICT also contributes valuable tools to identification and referral services, vividly demonstrated by intersectoral anti-trafficking groups established within social media channels and designated hotlines for children to share their issues or report potential TIP cases. Among other issues, the increasing number of calls related to family conflicts, personal

problems, and self-harm among children is alarming. This section also outlines confidentiality, data collection and analysis issues, and the need for further research into the connections between ICT and child trafficking.

What Services are Currently Offered to Survivors of Child Trafficking? Findings and Discussion

The Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023) and the Standard for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of Trafficking in Persons (2023) stipulate access to a broad range of services for TIP survivors. These services target physical and psychological well-being, access to education and skills development, recreational activities, and legal services to defend beneficiaries' rights and ensure their access to the relevant entitlement benefits. Yet recognition of TIP status is essential to accessing the full range of state-guaranteed benefits. This section provides an overview of the major providers of special social services for survivors of child trafficking, including Children's Houses, Centers for Adaptation of Minors, Centers for the Support of Children, and NGOs. It also gets at some of the major problems associated with funding and service provision in this area by pointing out the multiple regions in which the funding assigned for special social services for TIP survivors was not utilized.

Gaps and Unmet Needs in the Identification and Referral of Survivors of Child Trafficking and Their Access to Special Social Services

Multiple actors are involved in the identification of potential survivors of child trafficking, and the "proactive approach" implemented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs emphasizes this multiplicity through joint identification approaches involving the police, NGOs, and city or regional authorities responsible for employment and social protection. Still, there are issues with stakeholders' limited awareness of their functions in both identification and referral services, requiring further awareness-raising and training in these areas. Training activities need to target school systems and medical professionals to increase their awareness of child trafficking and their roles and responsibilities in recognizing and referring potential survivors.

This section also expands on the potential reasons for the low identification rates of survivors of child trafficking suggested by interviewees: among other reasons, they point to the potential requalification of TIP-related crimes and that TIP-related criminal charges may not be brought to court. It also reveals the lack of algorithms of action in intersectoral collaboration and in cases of child involvement in begging. Lastly, this section outlines the legislative changes, training, and awareness-raising activities necessary to improve the identification and referral processes of survivors of child trafficking and their access to special social services.

Conclusion

In regards to the research questions, this study found:

- (i) The age-specific vulnerability of children to TIP suggested in this study is critical to informing the awareness-raising activities and developing measures to prevent TIP among different age ranges of children (i.e. children aged 7-14 may need different interventions than those aged 14-18);
- (ii) The particular vulnerability of ethnic Lyuli children to labor exploitation requires further investigation and development of awareness-raising activities for representatives of this group;
- (iii) The increased risk of labor exploitation among children also requires the development of an effective response mechanism for both the state and civil society organizations working to combat child trafficking for cases in which they encounter child involvement in begging;
- (iv) A particular vulnerability of migrant children more broadly equally calls for attention and synergy with other programs targeting human trafficking;
- (v) Resilience and recovery factors identified in this research emphasize the personal and environmental traits supporting the necessity of targeting child trafficking not just at an individual, but also at the family and community levels. This broad perspective re-emphasizes the necessity of continuing the intersectoral awareness-raising and training taken by Winrock International and IOM in NAP.

Recommendations

This study calls for:

- i. Further research on the role of ICT in child recruitment due to the limited awareness of this phenomenon among stakeholders involved in identifying potential TIP survivors;
- ii. Further integrate the use of ICT into CTIP activities, particularly in relation to intersectoral groups;
- iii. Promote data collection, confidentiality, and analysis by state and civil society actors, with a future harmonization of recording and reporting parameters allowing for the unification and comprehensive analysis of data on child trafficking in Kazakhstan.
- iv. Investigation of barriers to utilization of government funding for TIP survivors, increase the awareness of state agencies of their functions in the identification of survivors of child trafficking, and
- v. Continue awareness and training activities with the specific emphasis on systemic and continuous training of social pedagogues and psychologists at schools, as well as health professionals, psychologists, social workers at primary healthcare (PHC) facilities.

Equally, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights and its regional counterparts should be targeted, as they are not explicitly addressed in the NAP;

- vi. Support of intersectoral activities, such as barriers to collaboration among intersectoral mobile groups, to overcome the collaboration issues and mistrust among stakeholders reported by some interviewees;
- vii. Expand services beyond individuals in shelters to include families and repatriation of survivors of child trafficking.
- viii. Furthermore, the irregularities in the definitions of human and child trafficking and the utilization of the same assessment criteria for adult and child survivors of TIP were reported to hinder the identification of potential and recognition of child TIP survivors. These issues require further discussion with the state and civil society organizations to develop the necessary recommendations;
- ix. A referral mechanism should be developed in relation to various professionals' reports of potential child TIP cases.

1. Background

1.1. The Child Trafficking Situation in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a supplier, recipient, and transit country for TIP. Relatively high economic development and visa waivers attract citizens of neighboring countries. Khamzin et al. (2023) suggest a high prevalence of Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Chinese, and Tajik origins among survivors of human trafficking in Kazakhstan. However, internal trafficking is estimated to be equally substantial (Haarr, 2012; UNICEF, 2009). A snapshot of human trafficking investigations suggests that the number of criminal cases in the first half of 2023 almost doubled, and the incidents of trafficking minors tripled compared to the same period in 2022 (Khamzin et al., 2023, p. 3). The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Office in Kazakhstan (n.d.-c) notes increasing sexual violence against children, though exploitation equally involves forced labor or mixed forms (Rusakova et al., 2019).

Forms of exploitation and the means used by traffickers are diverse. Trafficked persons end up in domestic servitude, construction, agriculture, and *bazaars* (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). Cases of illegal adoption, forced begging, organ trafficking (Mahmudova, 2022), and sexual exploitation were also reported (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, n.d.-c, p. 3). Traffickers use different strategies for recruitment, including utilizing intermediaries, psychological pressure, or even power of attorney in the case of minors (Khamzin et al., 2023). There are also cases of recruiting via social media (Arna Press, 2022). Though traffickers’ online strategies are similar to their offline means, the internet allows for direct contact with a potential victim, data gathering, and gaining trust by feigning interest in one’s life and concerns (Rusakova et al., 2019, pp. 35–49). It also reduces the risks of being caught “on the spot,” allows for online transactions and exchange of information, and increases the room for maneuvering, as creating a website or a profile is not time-consuming (ibid., pp. 40–47).

In its efforts to combat TIP, Kazakhstan is ranked as a Tier 2 country by the U.S. Department of State (2023a) for demonstrating “significant” efforts towards this objective but not meeting the “minimum standards” set in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000). These “significant” efforts are demonstrated by the recent increase in the number of specialized anti-trafficking police officers and uplifting the legal status of the unit combatting TIP, which is estimated to have increased the number of identified TIP survivors (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). Indeed, the much higher number of registered criminal offenses related to child and human trafficking for 2023 mentioned earlier may mainly be reflecting higher detection rates due to this expansion of police capacity:

Table 1: Number of Criminal Offenses Registered in Relation to Human and Child Trafficking, Exploitation and Abuse (2019-2023)¹

	2023			2022			2021			2020			2019		
	Total	Against Minors	In %	Total	Against Minors	In %	Total	Against Minors	In %	Total	Against Minors	In %	Total	Against Minors	In %
Incitement to Suicide (Article 105)	713	81	11.4	54	4	7.4	102	3	2.9	56	0	0.0	96	1	1.0
Torture (Article 110)	19	6	31.6	1	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Rape (Article 120)	396	194	49.0	45	11	24.4	48	12	25.0	45	7	15.6	111	12	10.8
Violent Act of a Sexual Nature (Article 121)	283	202	71.4	24	12	50.0	17	11	64.7	17	7	41.2	49	12	24.5
Sexual Intercourse/ Other Act of a Sexual Nature with a Person Under 16 (Article 122)	260	259	99.6	19	19	100.0	16	16	100.0	23	23	100.0	16	16	100.0
Corruption of Minors (Article 124)	121	121	100.0	4	4	100.0	7	7	100.0	2	2	100.0	10	10	100.0
Kidnapping (Article 125)	36	5	13.9	3	0	0.0	6	0	0.0	10	1	10.0	10	0	0.0
Illegal Deprivation of Freedom (Article 126)	44	7	15.9	2	0	0.0	8	0	0.0	7	0	0.0	9	0	0.0

¹ See the Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Accounts of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan (n.d.).

TIP (Article 128)	8	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	3	1	33.3
Involvement of a Minor in Prostitution (Article 134)	5	5	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	1	1	100.0	0	0	0.0
Trafficking in Minors (Article 135)	23	6	26.1	7	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	1	1	100.0	1	0	0.0
Illegal Adoption Activities (Article 137)	2	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Violation of Labor Legislation (Article 152)	4	0	0.0	0	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	3	0	0.0
Violation of the Labor Legislation in Respect to Minors (Article 153)	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Violation of Labor Protection Regulations (Article 156)	390	4	1.0	25	0	0.0	53	0	0.0	38	0	0.0	40	0	0.0
Total	127,149	2,330	1.8	34,016	141	0.4	27,722	90	0.3	28,672	93	0.3	54,335	183	0.3

To provide a comprehensive overview, the table above lists not only the number of criminal offenses related to TIP, but also those related to child exploitation and abuse. Alarming, children represented the majority of victims of violent acts of a sexual nature: 71% in 2023, 50% in 2022, and 64% in 2021. Children also represented over a third of all victims of criminal offenses registered in relation to torture, and about a quarter of those related to illegal deprivation of freedom in 2023 (Table 1).

However, the actual prevalence of human and, in particular, child trafficking is estimated to be much higher. TIP is a “latent” phenomenon (Haidar, 2023), given that the victims as a rule remain “hidden” (UNICEF, 2009, p. 10) and refrain from filing cases against their traffickers (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], n.d.-b) or sharing their experiences (Kusanova, 2023). Equally, data fragmentation and analysis issues within governmental, civil society, and international organizations hinder the assessment of the genuine magnitude of this problem. Thus, in Kazakhstan, as in other Tier 2 countries, the prevalence of severe forms of TIP is estimated to be increasing, with the country not taking sufficient action against it or not providing evidence thereof (U.S. Department of State, 2023b).

1.2.Objectives of this Study

This research aims to explore the factors contributing to the vulnerability and resilience of children to child trafficking. It also aims to identify major gaps in the services currently offered by state institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) related to this area. To complement the past studies on child trafficking in Kazakhstan, this research will additionally explore the intersection of child trafficking and ICT. To this end, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors contributing to children’s vulnerability and resilience to child trafficking in Kazakhstan?
2. What is the role of ICT in the child trafficking process there?
3. What services are currently offered to survivors of child trafficking in Kazakhstan?
4. What are the gaps/unmet needs in the identification and referral of survivors of child trafficking and their access to services, also in terms of trauma-informed and survivor-centered care/approaches?

The results of this rapid assessment, particularly in regard to gaps in special social services provided to survivors of child trafficking, will be essential to informing project activities within the framework of the KATCH project. The three-year project, funded by the U.S. Department of State, aims to improve the identification of survivors of child trafficking and accompanying

children of migrant laborers. Geographically, KATCH focuses on Turkistan, Kyzylorda, Almaty, Jambyl, and Jetisu regions, along with the southern cities of Almaty and Shymkent (Winrock International, n.d.-b).

This report proceeds as follows: the methodology section expands on the conceptualization of child trafficking, data collection, and analysis processes. It also presents the trauma-informed and survivor-centered care approaches highlighted in the KATCH. The desk review outlines the main studies conducted on child trafficking in Kazakhstan thus far. The following section summarizes major stakeholders and current initiatives in this area. The analysis is presented in the order of the four research questions guiding this study. Finally, the conclusion and recommendations section present major recommendations and potential areas to target within the scope of project activities.

2. Methodology

2.1. Conceptualization of Child Trafficking

Drawing from the Palermo Protocol, “Child Trafficking” is comprised of two separate stages: the “Act and the Purpose”. Per the Palermo Protocol, “the Act is the ‘recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons’, irrespective of whether the threat or use of force, coercion, fraud, deception, or any other means are utilized or not; the “Purpose” is exploitation; a “child” is defined as any person under eighteen years of age (Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol in the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Office Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.). The Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2014) defines Trafficking in Minors as “the purchase, sale or other transactions relating to a minor, as well as his/her exploitation or recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, receipt, or any other act undertaken for the purpose of exploitation” (Article 135 of the *Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2021). However, the definition of TIP in the national legislation is estimated as not fully compliant with international standards (*Regulatory Policy Advisory Document to the Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan,”* n.d.). Therefore, this research uses the Palermo Protocol definition of “child trafficking” stated above.

The meaning of “exploitation” in this study aligns with hazardous labor activities defined by Article 3(d) of the ILO Convention No. 182 “Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor” (1999) as “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.” These specifications are further complemented with an operationalization of TIP in the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a person “in respect of whom there are reasons to believe that he/she has directly suffered from an offense related to trafficking in human beings,” regardless of

whether or not any criminal proceedings are initiated in relation to the actions committed against this person (Article 1 of the *Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2023). The term “child with special needs” is also operationalized according to the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a child “who has a health impairment with an enduring disorder of the functions of the organism caused by diseases, injuries, disorders, or their consequences which leads to restriction of life activity and the need for the child’s social protection” (ibid.).

2.2. Trauma-Informed and Survivor-Centered Care

The desk review and the analysis of national legislation, namely the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023), the National Action Plan on Preventing and Combatting Crimes related to Trafficking in Persons (2024-2026) and the Standard for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of Trafficking in Persons (2023c), outline the current state of identification, referral, and access to services in Kazakhstan. The study aims to explore the status, strengths, and weaknesses in trauma-informed and survivor-centered care, coordination, and referrals.

There is a growing emphasis on trauma-informed care in human trafficking and child welfare services over the past years. This emphasis is guided by the understanding that survivors have different interpretations of their human trafficking experience (Heffernan & Blythe, 2014) and subsequently require “unique” interventions (Milam et al., 2017, p. 39). Another consideration is that trauma has a widespread impact beyond the traumatic experience itself, and the integration of related knowledge into policies and practices is essential in order to avoid the re-traumatization of survivors (Leitch, 2017). Elements associated with trauma-informed care vary across sectors, and there is no consensus on a single standard definition (Heffernan & Blythe, 2014). Common elements include resilience, well-being (Middleton et al., 2019), emotional safety, physical safety, rebuilding control, a strengths-based approach (Heffernan & Blythe, 2014), and trust in client-provider relationships (Leitch, 2017). Trauma-informed care is provided at the community (macro), organizational (mezzo), individual, and family (micro) levels (Middleton et al., 2019, p. 241). This division into levels brings in the systemic perspective on trauma-informed care by emphasizing the agency of the multiple relevant stakeholders.

This study also emphasizes resilience and strengths-based approaches to trauma-informed care. Following Leitch (2017), studies on trauma-informed care focus extensively on negative experiences instead of “protective” factors. However, the strengths-based approach is critical to both resilience and recovery processes. Thus, the questions should not only be “What happened to you?” but also “What is right with you?” (Middleton et al., 2019, p. 240). These questions cause a person “to be known for more than negative events” by restating their agency and outlining strengths for social workers/services to focus on (Leitch, 2017, p. 4).

This study aims to incorporate the strengths-based approach in data collection and analysis processes to explore factors contributing to child trafficking survivors' vulnerability and resilience. While the study differentiates between resilience and recovery, it acknowledges that both are relevant to survivors of child trafficking. Drawing on Ungar's study on resilience in children (2006), "resilience" for the purposes of this publication refers to a process in which the child navigates toward and has the capacity to negotiate for resources when exposed to significant adversity. "Recovery," in turn, implies "a person regaining after loss a normative or desirable standard of wellness or gaining these standards in the context of a previous absence of such wellness" (Knight et al., 2022, p. 1049). While the data collection process explores all factors contributing to survivor recovery, it is also intended to ascertain vulnerability and resilience-related characteristics.

2.3. Vulnerability and Resilience

The main objective of this research is to explore special social services provided to survivors of child trafficking in Kazakhstan and how these services could be improved. It should be remembered that vulnerability is not universal or static, but rather evolves in certain cases under specific circumstances (van der Glind, 2010, p. 106), bringing to light the relevance of resilience. UNICEF (2009, p. 24) rightfully notes the significance of both risk and resiliency factors in protecting children from trafficking and exploitation, as well as the necessity of assessing the contribution of social constructs in this regard.

Globally, child participation in the development, implementation, and evaluation of anti-trafficking programs is limited (Gearon, 2019). Part of the reason for this lies in the lack of agency given to children and the perception of them as "victims" and not "survivors" (UNICEF, 2009, p. 18). The (largely subconscious) choice of wording may nevertheless have considerable implications on how children's actions, decision-making capacities, and resilience are understood (ibid.). Another concern here is of a legal character: passivity is consistent with victimization, whereas any agency contributed to survivors may be interpreted as a willful violation of migration or other relevant laws (Gearon 2019). This research will aim at finding a middle ground by acknowledging that the choice is contingent upon the specific situation, and that a child's (or, at times, an adult's) awareness of migration arrangements varies. Still, the service recipient's agency is at the heart of this research, which aims at understanding not just the risks contributing to vulnerability, but also the factors that could help us understand the resilience of child trafficking survivors and the strategies they used to overcome the adversities they encountered.

2.4. Data Collection, Analysis, and Storage

This research began with the desk review aimed at assessing the situation regarding child trafficking in Kazakhstan and identifying the recent academic literature on this topic, relevant national legislation, and key actors involved in combatting child trafficking in the country and providing services to survivors. Due to the limited availability of studies on child trafficking in the Kazakhstan context, the desk research did not apply the typical systematic literature review but rather analyzed the available sources, most of which were reports from international organizations (IOs) and media. This overview of the context-specific situation based on freely available NGO and media reports was further complemented by the academic literature on child trafficking beyond Kazakhstan. Largely composed of academic journal articles and books, this literature provided a broader perspective on the phenomenon of child trafficking, along with an overview of recent theoretical and methodological developments in this area.

The primary method of data collection for this study was semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in combatting child trafficking and providing services to survivors of child trafficking. The interviewees were recruited following the snowball method, with each interviewee being asked to suggest further interviewees. These suggestions were complementary to the list of key stakeholders identified by the researcher during the desk review and suggested by Winrock International Office in Kazakhstan. The interviews with these stakeholders were structured around the activities of their organizations in child trafficking. Annex Four provides an overview of interview questions, which were further tailored for each interviewee depending on the organizational focus and the interviewee's position in this organization. The interviews were carried out through both online and offline means in October 2023. In total, twenty interviews were conducted with representatives of state and civil society organizations and experts working on combatting TIP (Annex One).

The researcher conducted these interviews in Russian and English in regions targeted by KATCH (Turkistan, Kyzylorda, Almaty, Jambyl, and Jetisu regions, as well as the cities of Almaty and Shymkent) and in Astana to cover the perspectives of the national stakeholders based there; it should, however, be noted that many interviewees are involved in combatting child trafficking throughout the country. Fluency in Kyrgyz assisted the researcher in understanding respondents whenever they used Kazakh along with Russian. According to the interviewee's preference, the interviews were either recorded or detailed notes were taken by the researcher. In cases of recorded interviews, the researcher used the Sonix automated transcription service, following the European Union (EU) General Data Protection Regulation protocols.² Only the researcher had access to the transcription files, with all documents deleted upon transcription and stored on the researcher's

² No party other than the researcher had access to the transcription files, with all transcript documents being directly deleted after being stored via secure external means.

personal cloud. No identifiable data was recorded. Similar precautions applied to the researcher's own voice notes, which were later transcribed by the researcher as well. All interview transcripts and notes were anonymized to ensure the confidentiality of all research participants.

Initially, this study also aimed to conduct interviews with adult survivors of child trafficking. The researcher drafted open- and closed-ended questions on the areas specified in the consulting agreement and previous studies on child trafficking in Kazakhstan (e.g., Haarr, 2012). Some questions aimed at outlining the background of survivors of child trafficking, trafficking routes, and the means used by perpetrators to recruit and control their victims. To reach out to potential interviewees, the researcher contacted the organizations working in the areas of human and child trafficking and enquired about the possibility during the interviews outlined in Annex One. However, no interviews with adult survivors of child trafficking were conducted, for three reasons:

- (i) Providers of special social services were unaware of former service recipients' location upon their departure from the organizations;
- (ii) State organizations largely reported not to have come across child trafficking in their work, which precluded any ability to refer to an adult survivor of child trafficking;
- (iii) Few of the adult survivors of child trafficking with whom the selected stakeholders maintained contact showed interest in participating in this study.

2.5. Ethics

This study touches upon a sensitive topic, requiring additional care in the collection and handling of empirical data. The researcher was guided by the common principle of "do no harm" stated in the consulting agreement and the non-judgmental orientation discussed in the context of ethnographic research (see Fetterman, 2010). In the data collection and analysis processes, the researcher abided by the Code of Conduct of Winrock International (n.d.-a). The researcher aimed to duly follow good practice and under no circumstance engage in prohibited practices, in order to ensure the interviewee's well-being and safety.

Equally, the researcher strived toward the correct interpretation of responses obtained from all interviewees. The researcher aimed to express respect toward all research participants and ensure that her behavior was non-maleficent and guided by the belief that research participants' protection is of highest priority in the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

Also equally, the researcher emphasized the voluntary nature of participation in this research. All interviewees received consent forms outlining the purpose of this research and the contact details of the researcher in case of any future questions or concerns (see Annex Two). This information was also stated verbally at the beginning of each interview. In order to protect interviewees' personal details, and due to the general unease associated with signing documents in Eastern

Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, oral consent was considered sufficient. The researcher explained that the interviewee could withdraw from this study at any time by contacting the interviewer, all interviewees retaining a copy of the consent form for this purpose.

2.6. Limitations

In collaboration with the Winrock International Office in Kazakhstan, the author of this study contacted and followed up on the majority of the international, civil society, and state organizations involved in identifying and referring survivors of child trafficking and providing social services to them. Like previous studies conducted on this topic in Kazakhstan (see Haarr, 2012), this research also encountered stakeholder dropout and individuals unwilling to participate. There were also issues with respondents being unaware about the role that their organization played in preventing and combatting child trafficking and providing social services to TIP survivors. It was relatively common for this author to also be redirected to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Indeed, this Ministry is essential to combatting child trafficking, as noted in this report, but it is not the only entity that works with TIP survivors. This author found that stakeholders' understanding of their organization's functions and the definitions of child trafficking and child exploitation varied greatly and did not appear to be correlated with an organization's sector. For reasons of anonymity, no specifics are provided for the organizations included in this study.

As with any qualitative investigation, this research has significant limitations in terms of the generalizability of its results. The analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of this study are based on information provided by interviewees and are complemented by the perspectives of individuals quoted in academic and non-academic publications and the mass media. Descriptive statistics provided by the organizations are noted in this research; such data build on the insights garnered from the interviews. Overall, this study outlines essential gaps and unmet needs in the identification and referral of survivors of child trafficking and their access to special social services while also providing practical insights into the role of ICT.

3. Desk Review

3.1. Studies on Child Trafficking In Kazakhstan

Child trafficking is largely under-researched in the context of Kazakhstan, except for a handful of studies conducted by international organizations.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has led the majority of studies focused on child trafficking in Kazakhstan. A 2009 UNICEF research of child trafficking and exploitation in Central Asia outlined common forms of child exploitation and their seasonal and permanent nature and

highlighted the ubiquity of forms of exploitation that do not necessarily qualify as child trafficking (e.g., child marriages and illegal adoptions) (UNICEF, 2009, pp. 36–44). That investigation also noted methodological issues—including non-generalizability, stakeholders’ unwillingness to engage in the topic of child trafficking, and the fact that interviews with NGO partners may merely represent a “recollection of single cases” and not a systematic assessment of the phenomena—that may affect a large fraction of related studies (*ibid.*, pp. 10–13). Furthermore, this UNICEF study acknowledged that the research focused on children identified by authorities and did not address scenarios in which children did not “succeed” in their attempts to free themselves (*ibid.*, pp. 10–20).

The second UNICEF study conducted in 2012 aims to compensate for these shortcomings by focusing on child trafficking in Kazakhstan. It makes use of structured, in-depth interviews with 468 children and youth who are considered to be vulnerable; these individuals are sex workers aged 11–23 and survivors of TIP (Haarr, 2012, p. 10). Some child trafficking victims were found in the Centers for Adaptation of Minors; mislabeled as vulnerable children by police and the child protection system. This study included background information about the survivors of child trafficking: their ethnicities, educational attainment, demographics in terms of age and sex, socioeconomic backgrounds, and urban/rural origin (*ibid.*). It also emphasized the role of third-party encouragement in their engagement in risky behaviors (e.g., forced them to use drugs and/or alcohol). This study furthermore suggests that trafficking and exploitation are the underlying causes of self-harming and suicidal behavior (*ibid.*, pp. 14–15). This investigate provides essential findings about social services by contrasting survivors’ satisfaction with and access to healthcare services with their relatively low satisfaction with police work, legal representation, and court proceedings (*ibid.*). We also found that TIPs’ access to housing and relocation support and education and job skill training was limited (*ibid.*, pp. 15–16). This study highlights the worryingly low fraction of survivors (less than 10%) reporting that a third party helped them escape and/or the low fraction traffickers being caught (less than 15%) after the TIPs’ rescue (*ibid.*, p. 72). Finally, this study outlines major push and pull factors, pathways that lead to sex trafficking and forced labor, and the means that traffickers use to control victims (For more information, see UNICEF 2012).³

The third study relevant to child trafficking was conducted by the International Federation for Human Rights (2018). It focused on the vulnerability of labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan who frequently worked in the food, agricultural, construction, and childcare sectors in Kazakhstan. This

³ UNICEF has also published a document citing the 2016 Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Survey on Justice for Children in Kazakhstan. It compares the perceptions of the general public, child protection officials, and media of potential perpetrators by considering vulnerability indicators (e.g., age, sex, and ability) (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, n.d.-c). In addition to comprehending the differences and similarities across the surveyed stakeholders, this document also reports statistics about crimes committed against children.

study also demonstrated minors' susceptibility to exploitation when they were sent away alone to earn money (International Federation for Human Rights et al., 2018, p. 35). Despite state agencies and potential employers' denials of extreme forms of child labor, this study provided examples that strongly allude to underreported child exploitation (ibid., pp. 41–42). The reluctance of officials to investigate and parents to acknowledge child labor and the issue of underreporting can also be explained by children's limited access to assistance and problems that might arise if they returned to their home countries (i.e. they have no documents or education) (ibid., pp. 45–47). Children's unwillingness to turn to institutions for help might also play a large role: If unaccompanied or separated children under the age of 16 were found, they were often sent to adaptation centers for up to three months and/or were subject to administrative arrest for violating migration laws (ibid., p. 35). Although this study did not focus on child trafficking, it nevertheless emphasized the vulnerability of minors from foreign countries in Kazakhstan and the structural barriers they encountered during their time in Kazakhstan.

The fourth study was conducted in 2019 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) about the role of ICT human trafficking in the context of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. According to this investigation, none of the stakeholders were able to gather information about the proportion of e-trafficking occurring within the reported human trafficking cases (Rusakova et al., 2019, pp. 33–36). However, the fraction of e-trafficking cases is likely to increase, given upticks in the rate of internet use. Children and youth are particularly vulnerable to e-trafficking, irrespective of their urban/rural origin and social background (ibid., pp. 42–44). The perception that an online exchange is consistent with meeting in person, combined with limited parental awareness of ICT use, risk aversion, and unawareness of the associated risks among children themselves, all act in concert to increase children's vulnerability (ibid.). These factors are additionally aggravated by the accessibility and widespread use of ICT for job searches, dating, ride-sharing, communication, and information exchange (ibid.). ICT could also facilitate searches for victims of human trafficking, however, by increasing awareness of their plights and contributing to state-run measures against human trafficking (ibid., pp. 39–47). But given that current programs about raising awareness of internet safety do not specifically address the issues of e-trafficking and children (ibid.), there is certainly room for improvement.

3.2. ICT and Child Trafficking

Overall, the relationship between ICT and human trafficking is a double-edged sword. The intersection between ICT and trafficking was reported at least as early as 1999 (Prylinski, 2020). Today, multiple countries in the EU report that traffickers openly use social media platforms, websites, and the darknet to advertise their services (Antonopoulos et al., 2020). Traffickers take advantage of online advertisements, payments (O'Brien & Li, 2020, p. 190), and potential victims'

accessibility in “less than the click of a mouse” (Prylinski, 2020, p. 346). Given the growing use of social networks and smartphones (Leary, 2014), children and youth are particularly vulnerable to online predation. At the highest risk are children with extensive connections of online “friends;” children often feel a sense of closeness with people they have never met in real life (O’Brien & Li, 2020, p. 189). Though frequently thought of in the realms of recruitment and advertising, ICT is used throughout the four stages of the human-trafficking process (Raets & Janssens, 2021). A vivid example is the use of GPS by traffickers to control their victims (Antonopoulos et al., 2020), sexual exploitation of children online, and pornography. At the same time, ICT may also contribute to rescues and awareness-raising. It may furthermore be used to prevent trafficking and aid investigations by allowing state agencies to inform wider audiences (Jeanis, 2020; O’Brien & Li, 2020). Technology-based solutions can also be used for data extraction and data-mining purposes (Raets & Janssens, 2021).

However, research about e-trafficking is still in its nascency, and there are several misconceptions about ICT. In addition to technical limitations due to data readability, the use of ICT tools requires a high level of sophistication from law enforcement agents (Raets & Janssens, 2021). There is also the mindset that neither legislation nor tools can be “fast enough” to adapt to the changing context and advanced skills of perpetrators (Prylinski, 2020, pp. 343–371; Raets & Janssens, 2021, pp. 227–228). Surveillance or other technological advancements might assist in furthering state control over human mobility and people’s access to labour markets is genuine. The ‘humanitarian’ element of such interventions is often used to justify border-hardening practices, or the removal of non-citizens and workers in low-paid, low-skilled industries (agriculture, mining, fishing, and the like). (Milivojevic et al., 2020). There are rightful assumptions that despite its reachability, ICT is not an agent but a tool (ibid.); an online presence does not replace but rather complements offline activities (Antonopoulos et al., 2020). Overall, there is a gap in efforts to assess technology and child trafficking (e.g., Leary, 2014), particularly given that previous research has focused on ICT as a tool for facilitating communication between migrants and its role in expanding networks and overcoming time and distance (Antonopoulos et al., 2020).

There is a limited discussion of the role of ICT in human trafficking in Kazakhstan. Other than the IOM study cited above (Rusakova et al., 2019), a few instances are mainly the mass media sources reporting about the recruitment of potential victims of TIP via the Internet (Batyr, 2023) and the increased exposure to the Internet as the contributing factor to the vulnerability of all persons to TIP (Mamyrykhanova, 2022). Some sources report on the ongoing work of the MIA in detecting and blocking websites with TIP and pornography (Central Communications Service. under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). Others report on the seminars organized for practitioners from Central Asian and South Caucasus countries working on combatting TIP on how to detect suspicious platforms, identify TIP survivors advertised on websites, and implement

proactive investigation of such cases based on the experiences of the USA, Canada, Ireland, Romania, and Israel (Law Enforcement Academy under the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). Overall, the discussion of the role of ICT in human trafficking in Kazakhstan is at an early stage.

4. Major Upcoming Initiatives

4.1. National Action Plan

Major initiatives and stakeholders working in human and child trafficking are outlined in the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons for 2024–2026 of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter NAP). As most activities are intersectoral, the activities are grouped by areas, not stakeholders, to facilitate readers’ comprehension.

First, NAP activities involving intersectoral collaboration include development of standard operating procedures for the identification and referral of TiP victims in order to provide them with comprehensive assistance, staff training in all sectors, interdepartmental/intersectoral preventive activities, and intersectoral mobile groups. Annual or semiannual meetings of the Interdepartmental Committee on Combating Illicit Export, Import and Trafficking in Persons under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population (MLSP) (2024–2025) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) (2026) are complemented with regional committee meetings under the responsibilities of the regional and *akimats* of the Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent cities (simply *akimats* hereafter in this section) (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). These meetings are complemented by five types of preventive interdepartmental or intersectoral activities. These are (i) countering TIP-related criminal activities (MIA); (ii) interdicting illegal migration and human trafficking (MIA and the National Security Committee [NSC]); (iii) preventing forced labor on construction sites, farms, and exploitation of child labor in cotton fields, tobacco plantations, and elsewhere (MIA, MLSP, MoE, the *akimats*, the General Prosecutor’s Office, and NGOs); (iv) preventing sexual exploitation (MIA, MoH); and (v) preventing crimes related to trafficking newborns/underage children (MIA, General Prosecutor’s Office, and MoH). Lastly, mobile groups aim to prevent and identify the victims of labor exploitation throughout the regions. These are composed of representatives of the MIA, the MLSP, the *akimats*, the General Prosecutor’s Office, NGOs, and the IOM (ibid.)

Second, the NAP emphasizes the prevention of labor exploitation and a combination of labor and sexual exploitation. To this end, unannounced inspections are organized by state labor inspectors, law enforcement agencies, and NGOs (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). In addition, working meetings with the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs “Atameken” and the Association of Farmers of Kazakhstan to prevent forced labor at construction sites, peasant farms,

agricultural lands, and supply chains. Furthermore, a list of private employment agencies is published annually or semiannually by the MLSP, the MIA, and the unified digital employment platform “Electronic Labor Exchange” (ibid.).

Furthermore, amendments to the user agreement of the “Electronic Labor Exchange” platform are planned by July 2024 to prevent the exploitation and the recruitment of people for sexual and/or other exploitation (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). Similarly, methodological recommendations will be developed for the private travel and employment agencies to prevent TIP among citizens of Kazakhstan who are leaving the country for tourism or work purposes, as well as to prevent TIP in transport infrastructure facilities (e.g., railway stations, airports, etc.). While they vary depending on the activity, stakeholders for preventing labor exploitation include the MLSP, the MIA, NGOs, and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (ibid.).

Third, the NAP also outlines the relevance of forming state social order to conclude long-term [up to 3 years] contracts for rendering special social services to TIP survivors. It also emphasizes assistance in employment for TIP survivors to avoid their repeated victimization (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). Moreover, the NAP emphasizes access to state-guaranteed legal assistance to TIP survivors and stipulates special social services via NGOs from the state budget and related quality control. These activities generally involve the MLSP, the MIA, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the *akimats*, and NGOs (ibid.).

Fourth, the NAP stipulates two activities related to the use of ICT technologies in the prevention, identification, and referral of child and human trafficking victims. The NAP stipulates the monitoring, verification, and subsequent blocking of advertisements about sale of newborn children and human organs and equally blocking demand for these services via media and the Internet through the “Cybernadzor” information system or through the judicial procedure (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). This activity involves the MIA, the Ministry of Culture and Information, and GPO. The NAP also stipulates the development of standard operating procedures for the identification and referral of TIP survivors via mobile applications to assist the stakeholders involved in this process (ibid.).

Funded by the IOM and scheduled for implementation by September 2024, the “algorithm of actions” is expected to assist multiple state agencies and private sector in identification and rendering of comprehensive assistance for TIP victims (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). These organizations include the police, state labor inspection, healthcare, education, social protection, diplomatic missions, border guards, travel and employment agencies, and transport infrastructure facilities. Among the responsible is listed a broad range of state agencies: the MIA, the MLSP, the MoH, the MoE, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Border Service of the NSC, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Ministry of Transport. Equally,

the *akimats*, the Karaganda Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs named after B.Beisenov (Karaganda Academy), the Academy of Law Enforcement Agencies under the Prosecutor General's Office (Academy of Law Enforcement Agencies), NGOs and the IOM are expected to participate (ibid.).

Fifth, the awareness-raising activities target the general public and include posting of TiP awareness materials (brochures, billboards, social ads with telephone hotline numbers) at entry/exit checkpoints to Kazakhstan (including airports, train stations, car and taxi parks, catering facilities, public toilets, etc). It also envisages the broadcast of videos, documentaries, interviews and programs on television and radio stations (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). For potential TIP victims, the NAP focuses on continuous preventive activities among those vulnerable due to financial, psychological, and other dependencies; children and elderly people; pregnant women, people with disabilities; and people who are unemployed, people experiencing homelessness, those abusing substances and irregular migrants (ibid.).

Additionally, (iii) continuous media coverage of the “116-16” anti-trafficking hotline is foreseen to increase public awareness of the TIP problem. (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). (iv) Continuous awareness-raising among students and their parents at educational facilities includes informing them on TiP risks during class hours and parent meetings. (v) Awareness-raising among migrants entails the development of information materials for all those entering/leaving Kazakhstan and providing relevant information on the MIA and MLSP websites. Information on preventing the use of tourism for illegal migration and transit to third countries due to the risks of exploitation of Kazakhstani citizens abroad is equally targeted. Stakeholders vary depending on the activity, but overall include the General Prosecutor's Office, NGOs, the MoE, the *akimats*, the MIA, the MLSP, the MTC and others (all ibid.).

Sixth, the NAP stipulates activities for analyzing and researching TIP-related processes and annual monitoring of the fulfillment of international commitments made by Kazakhstan. These include analyzing the pre-trial investigation and judicial practices of TIP-related crimes and administrative offenses contributing to such crimes, with specific recommendations to be developed in 2024 (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). Scientific research on forms of TIP, along with subsequent recommendations and training involving law enforcement bodies, academia, independent experts, and civil society, is planned for 2025. Notably, the Interdepartmental Committee at the national level annually reviews the country's fulfillment of international obligations in combating TIP. Stakeholders' involvement depends on the activity but generally includes the General Prosecutor's Office, the MIA, the MFA, the MLSP, and others.

Seventh, the NAP emphasizes intercountry learning. The MFA annual report on best practices of foreign countries in awareness-raising and combating TIP at the Interdepartmental Committee is

highlighted as essential to implementing such practices in Kazakhstan (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). Additionally, the NAP stipulates the exchange of experience with law enforcement agencies of other countries and joint training on identifying and combating TIP with Central Asian countries and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. These activities are complemented by international conferences, forums, workshops and round tables on TIP problems (ibid.).

In addition to intercountry learning, the NAP lists a number of training activities for law enforcement bodies, prosecutors, labor inspectors, judges, consular officers, lawyers, mass media, NGOs, and joint training across sectors. The IOM-funded annual training on combating TIP focuses on the law enforcement bodies and prosecutors (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). Training activities for state organizations include annual training for judges on handling TIP-related criminal cases, which is funded by the state budget (all ibid.).

4.2. Support from International Organizations

To complement the findings from NAP, the researcher also sought to understand the activities of IOs in areas related to combatting human and child trafficking implemented in Kazakhstan. These organizations include the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), OSCE, and UNICEF.

First, the IOM aims to address the structural reasons behind TIPs and protect migrants to reduce the risks of their being exploited and trafficked in its Central Asia Regional Strategy (2021–2025). To do so, the IOM makes use of awareness-raising and pre-departure communications with prospective migrants (IOM, n.d.). The IOM is also implementing three initiatives that fall under the umbrella of Kazakhstan’s NAP. The first two are being implemented from 2023–2025: “Identification, Investigation and Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons in Kazakhstan” and “Strengthening Legislation on Combating Trafficking in Persons in Kazakhstan.” Both are funded by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. The third one is the “Labour Migration Programme – Central Asia” (2022–2026) project, which is financed by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency. It targets Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan and aims to improve labor migration regulations to account for responsiveness to market and employer demands and protect labor migrants’ rights and interests. This intercountry initiative is intended to strengthen the economies of labor migrants’ countries of origin and work and, in so doing, decrease the dependence on the Russian labor market on migrant labor (IOM, 2022). On 14 December 2023, the IOM announced that roughly 21 million Canadian Dollars (about \$15 million United States Dollars [USD]) had been earmarked by the Government

of Canada for a three-year regional project aimed at protecting and integrating Afghan nationals looking for refuge in Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (IOM, 2023).

Second, several organizations such as the UNODC specifically focus on countering TIPs and the smuggling of migrants. The UNODC's program for Central Asia (2022–2025) includes information campaigns against human trafficking and works focused on enhancing the capacity of civil society organizations supporting groups vulnerable to TIPs (UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, n.d., pp. 2022–2025). The fight against TIPs is also one of the areas targeted by the OSCE Programme Office in Astana. In addition to providing seminars about border management (OSCE, n.d.-a), the organization conducts training for law enforcement officers and judges about international anti-trafficking standards and tools (OSCE, n.d.-b). In the summer of 2023, OSCE organized the first Central Asia regional simulation-based training session for practitioners working towards combatting TIPs (OSCE, 2023). Similarly, among the key initiatives relevant to

Third, several EU-funded initiatives could also be potentially relevant to KATCH. The “Dialogue and Action for Resourceful Youth in Central Asia” project (2002–2027) implemented by the European Training Foundation (n.d.-b) covers Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It emphasizes equal opportunities and flexible and inclusive teaching to support youth in obtaining skills relevant to the labor market (European Training Foundation, n.d.-a). Another EU-funded project—the “Border Management Programme in Central Asia” (Phase 10 2021–2025) regional project covering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—has a more TIP-related focus (International centre for Migration Policy Development., n.d., p. 10).

Finally, UNICEF continues to be a key organization working towards child well-being and protection; KATCH could benefit from its ongoing broader activities in enhancing education and ending violence against children. The previous EU-funded UNICEF project “Protecting Children Affected by Migration in Kazakhstan” (2017–2022) was aimed to ensure that children affected by migration are protected and their rights promoted through improved child protection services and an enabling environment. (UNICEF, n.d.-b). It resulted in the development of Operational manuals for NGOs, the Centres for the Support of Children in Difficult Life Situations, and the Centres for the Adaptation of Migrants working with migrant children; such work could be emulated by KATCH (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, n.d.-d). Additional areas of work that are potentially relevant to KATCH include the Samgau (Upshift) initiative of UNICEF and the MLSP, which aims to provide adolescents and young people with transferable skills and competencies to create innovative social and business projects with special attention to the most vulnerable adolescents (see *Samgau Digital*, n.d.). UNICEF's training course on life skills and competencies development for social problems identification and solution (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, n.d.-e), could be

further explored by organizations providing services to adolescent TIP survivors. UNICEF also simultaneously works to eliminate violence against children (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, n.d.-b). UNICEF and the Ministry of Education's (MOE) "Algorithm of Actions of Educators for the Prevention and Response to Violence Against Children" program, along with a pilot tool supporting digital case management in schools, could be additionally explored further to prevent violence against and exploitation of children (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, n.d.-a). In October 2023, UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kazakhstan Agency of International Development (KazAID) to support digital learning, child poverty reduction, and access to quality inclusive education (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, 2023a). KATCH could also explore UNICEF and TikTok initiatives on digital well-being, particularly in the context of using ICT to prevent child trafficking and increase awareness of this issue (UNICEF Office in Kazakhstan, 2023b).

5. The Profile of Survivors of Child Trafficking: Vulnerability and Resilience Factors

Due to data fragmentation issues (see Subsection 6.1. Data Anonymity, Data Collection, and Analysis), the profile of survivors of child trafficking in this situational analysis primarily focuses on the factors contributing to children's vulnerability to and resilience against human trafficking. The answers were predicated on the factors highlighted by interviewees based on their experience with child trafficking and/or their encounters with child exploitation, rather than those pre-defined by the researcher (as would have been the case in a survey, for example). Therefore, quantifying the number of responses behind individual factors and comparing the answers by the state and non-state stakeholders is not feasible at all times. Nevertheless, the researcher later grouped these factors to emphasize the demographic characteristics, family circumstances, types of exploitation, methods of recruitment and control, and places of origin and destination. Similarly, efforts were made to delineate gender, sex, ethnicity, and disability-related characteristics associated with the vulnerability and resilience of children to child trafficking.

5.1. Factors Contributing to a Child's Vulnerability to TIP

First, children left without parental care, including those who have aged out of the residential institutions, are reportedly most vulnerable to child trafficking and child exploitation (Int. 3, 10 & 16). However, children living with their parents were reported to be vulnerable as well. Interviewees recalled limited parental supervision and overall responsibility for the child (Int. 4), also in the context of large families (Int. 20). Similarly, living in dysfunctional families, in which a child endures or witnesses domestic violence (Int. 3 & 6) and parents' quarrels/fights (Int. 16) or

abuse of alcohol or drugs (Int. 10), were associated with the child's vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.

Second, in terms of economic circumstances, four out of twenty interviewees stressed poverty and financial insecurity as conducive to child trafficking and exploitation. Correspondingly, children from low-income families were estimated to represent the majority of cases (Int. 4 & 18), among other factors due to the desire of the parents/children to escape poverty (Int. 20) and support their families (Int. 10). Based on past experience, however, one interviewee equally stressed the vulnerability of children from well-off families whenever a child had no parental supervision (Int. 4).

Third, exposure to labor and sexual exploitation was indicated to be equal among male and female children, while children from rural areas and those with special needs were viewed by interviewees as more at-risk. Notably, four out of twenty interviewees did not associate specific types of exploitation with the sex of a child, suggesting equal vulnerability to sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, or a combination of both (Int. 3, 4, 16 & 18). Based on their past experiences, two interviewees suggested that children with mental conditions may be at heightened risk of sexual exploitation (Int. 10), as well as the girls with hearing problems/hearing loss due to the inability of others to understand their pleas for help (Int. 16). None of the interviewees mentioned the origin of a child among the vulnerability factors except for one, who highlighted the rural/urban inequity in child welfare and the vulnerabilities of households relocating to cities in pursuit of happiness and financial gain without considering the economic and social risks (Int. 6).

Fourth, three out of twenty interviewees discussed age-specific vulnerability of children to trafficking and exploitation. One highlighted explicitly that this vulnerability is an outcome of age (Int. 20). The same interviewee emphasized the susceptibility of children under age seven or eight, who are commonly involved in begging to evoke "pity and compassion" (ibid.). Provided with basic accommodation and nutrition, a child may not realize the violation of their rights, perceiving the situation as "normal," and may even have close ties to their exploiter (ibid.).

Two other stakeholders associated child trafficking with the adoption of newborns (Int. 5 & 13). Children's awareness of their interests and rights reportedly evolved over the years, but they nonetheless remained exposed to labor and sexual exploitation. One interviewee suggested that between the ages of seven and fourteen, children were more aware of violations of their interests, also in terms of bodily integrity or mistreatment, and could assess the situation and bargain with exploiters to search for ways out (Int. 20). However, at this age, they may equally be more likely to end up in labor exploitation due to their ability to perform the tasks they could not do earlier (Int. 13). Between ages 14 and 18, children were reported to be primarily interested in earning and gaining independence; therefore, the activities could focus on explaining different earning

possibilities and the risks of human trafficking (Int. 20). Overall, this age-specific overview of vulnerabilities is essential to the awareness-raising activities, enabling greater responsiveness to the issues encountered by children and the objectives they pursue at different ages. However, the categories mentioned above are not intended to claim greater vulnerability of any one category over another; they merely call for a differentiated response to TIP prevention.

Fifth, children from all ethnicities were reported to be vulnerable to child trafficking. Based on past experience, two out of twenty interviewees emphasized the vulnerability of all, including ethnic Kazakh children (Int. 10), due to a high level of internal migration (Int. 20). Two other respondents, however, suggested that foreign nationals represented the majority of survivors of human and child trafficking in their experience, and those of Uzbek and Kyrgyz origin were particularly vulnerable to sexual and labor exploitation (Int. 3 & 10). This discrepancy in interviewees' experiences corresponds with findings from other sources, pointing at the prevalence of foreign (Khamzin et al., 2023) and Kazakh nationals (Haarr, 2012) among survivors of human trafficking.

One particularly interesting insight which may help square this circle comes from the observation of another interviewee about the vulnerability of children from both Kazakh-speaking and migrant families resulting from limited parent-child communication (Int. 16). Based on past work, the interviewee pointed out that parents may warn younger children about strangers, but they talk less to children as they grow up, with many older children and teenagers unaware of how to behave with a stranger, if one hears footsteps behind while returning home late at night, or even on a date (ibid.). However, the interviewee suggested that children from Russian-speaking families were generally more aware in these regards, as they seemed to discuss these issues at home (ibid.). Clearly, interviewees' experiences and subsequent views on the vulnerability of children based on their ethnic origin varied, but their insights offered important explanations regarding how this vulnerability manifested itself across different groups.

Nonetheless, labor exploitation of children from one specific ethnic group was observed by interviewees in all regions targeted by the KATCH project in the south of Kazakhstan. Based on their daily observations and experience, four out of twenty interviewees mentioned the greater vulnerability of ethnic Lyuli children to labor exploitation. They pointed to the large number of children from this ethnic minority being in street begging (Int. 16) and noted that, based on their investigations, the same woman may interchangeably use multiple children from her diaspora (Int. 20). Interviewees also recalled parents rejecting NGO assistance in obtaining skills for further employment (Int. 8) and observed that children of school age sometimes did not attend schools (Int. 16), but rather followed in their parents' footsteps by earning through begging (Int. 4). According to respondents, this was due to the nomadic lifestyle of this ethnic group (Int. 8), often living in large groups with women and children allegedly expected to ensure income through begging while men (also allegedly) lay about (Int. 4). These negative views about this ethnic group

may indeed be misconceptions, a possibility strengthened by interviewees' reference to Tajikistan or Uzbekistan as the Lyuli's country of origin, even though the group's traditional homeland is in actuality spread over several modern Central Asian countries. The awareness-raising programs should consider cultural values and identification of specific groups, but also look into child well-being and access to education and healthcare services.

Sixth, migrant children were reported to be vulnerable to child exploitation and child trafficking. One interviewee recalled a 17-year-old Kyrgyz migrant who was subject to sexual exploitation and had no access to healthcare during her exploitation. With NGO support, she was admitted to a tuberculosis hospital, but passed away from the advanced stage of this disease (Int. 16). The respondent noted that migrants had limited access to healthcare and could be expelled from work if found to be sick (*ibid.*). Furthermore, working on a visitor visa without employment permits, they risked ending up in labor or sexual exploitation (*ibid.*). Similarly, migrant children were reported to have limited access to services and benefits they are entitled to due to their undocumented status and/or their identity documents being absent, expired or lost (Int. 6). Despite compulsory education for all children (Int. 9), some institutions were reportedly reluctant to accept migrant children (Int. 6). Based on past experience, the same interviewee suggested that parents were sometimes unaware of their children's right to education per Kazakhstan's law (*ibid.*).

Seventh, the vulnerability of parents inevitably leads to the vulnerability of their children. Based on past experience, five out of twenty interviewees recalled the adverse effects of adult trafficking and exploitation on accompanying children. Civil society representatives and experts engaged in combatting human trafficking and exploitation emphasized that children whose parents were subject to human trafficking are [much] less likely to be able to read and write (Int. 18), and do not have access to education as their responsibilities were limited to performing specific household-related tasks (Int. 20). Indeed, though children whose parents are being exploited may not necessarily be directly exploited as well (Int. 11 & 20), they are equally affected by poor living conditions (Int. 10) and are "equally victims ... as their right to childhood is being violated" (Int. 10). One interviewee described a case of a man escaping labor exploitation on a farm who came to an NGO with his underaged daughter, born during the time he had been working. The girl had not herself been exploited, but was in need of medical care and vaccinations as her physical and mental well-being were fragile (Int. 11). The interviewee recalled that the medical worker examining the child was "shocked" at her condition (*ibid.*). Medical, social, and psychological support and providing comfortable living conditions for both father and daughter were essential for the child to recover (*ibid.*).

However, in other cases, a child may be exploited along with a parent, or even taken hostage to force the adult to comply with the traffickers' expectations. One interviewee recalled a woman forced to beg with her two-year-old child while her six-year-old child was kept against her will by

her trafficker in order to ensure the mother's return (Int. 3). The younger sibling was also physically abused by the exploiters: when found by an NGO, the child had swollen veins due to constant injections of drug, used to keep the child asleep (and quiet) for begging (ibid.). While, the extent of exploitation of children whose parents are being exploited is case-specific. However, in all cases, children endure great hardship as a result of the trafficking of their parents.

5.2. Resilience Against and Recovery from Child Trafficking

Furthermore, along with the factors contributing to the vulnerability of children, this research aimed to identify the factors associated with children's resilience to human trafficking and exploitation. This approach corresponds with UNICEF's (2009) study that emphasized the significance of both risk and resiliency factors in protecting children from trafficking and exploitation and the necessity of assessing the contribution of social constructs to this protection.

Based on their experience with children who were subject to exploitation, either directly or through accompanying an exploited adult, interviewees outlined multiple factors contributing to the resilience of a child to TIP. These are literacy and awareness of TIP (Int. 20) and trust-filled relationships with parents and caregivers (Int. 16). Interviewees also recalled the significance of individual personality traits, the psychological state of a person, and stress resistance and tolerance as essential to resilience in both children and adults (Int. 3 & 6). Among the interviewees, several stated that resilience is dependent upon an individual's perception of human trafficking, and not necessarily on the types of exploitation the person endured (ibid.). One interviewee noted that individual perception of human trafficking also affected the recovery process: in some cases, girls who were subject to sexual exploitation recovered sooner than those who were recruited and transported but then rescued by the police (Int. 6). Tying recovery to personal traits and resistance, this interviewee suggested that sometimes girls who were not subject to exploitation suffered longer and more intensively from the shock and the idea of potentially being exploited, while some other girls who were actually exploited managed to recover sooner due to higher intrinsic resilience (ibid.). This example reemphasizes the significance of trauma-informed care in human trafficking and child welfare services by showing that survivors may interpret the human trafficking experience differently (Heffernan & Blythe, 2014) and subsequently require "unique" interventions (Milam et al., 2017, p. 39).

Multiple factors were listed by interviewees as essential to the recovery from human and child trafficking. Commencing the rehabilitation of a child as soon as possible to assist further social socialization and psychological recovery (Int. 20), psychological support (Int. 6 & 11), professionalism of service providers (Int. 20), and quality of services were indicated as critical to the rehabilitation and re-integration of survivors (Int. 17). Interviewees also emphasized the role of

personal motivation of a survivor to return to a “normal life,” to see family members and friends, go to school and socialize (Int. 20), as well as the importance of providing the necessary conditions for a child to feel comfortable and safe during the recovery process (Int. 11). Removing a child from an unfavorable environment is only the first step; further work is required to strengthen the child’s support networks, including restoring family relations (Int. 20). This broader perspective on the recovery process is also related to the fact that recovery lasts longer than the stay in a shelter (Int. 6), and it goes well beyond the survivor of child trafficking him/herself by involving the child’s family/guardians, society more broadly, service providers, and relevant policies.

5.3. Discussion of Findings

This study identified multiple factors related to the vulnerability of children to child trafficking and child exploitation. They are, as one interviewee noted, “generally well-known” (Int. 16) and essentially recall the factors listed in previous studies on child trafficking in Kazakhstan (e.g., Haarr, 2012). They also correspond with findings from beyond this country. Studies suggest prior contact with multiple public service systems (Farrell et al., 2020), homelessness, being a sexual minority (O’Brien & Li, 2020), migration background, and the ubiquity of cultural practices such as bride kidnapping and a particular type of dowry practice as contributing to the vulnerability of children (UNICEF, 2009). The high risk of exploitation and trafficking faced by children accompanying adults who themselves became subject to these is also known (UNICEF, n.d.-a). The researcher did not find explicit references to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA) orientations, which may also be the result of sexual orientation not being openly discussed in Eastern European, South Caucasian, and Central Asian contexts. However, drawing on interviewees’ observations and experience, this research suggests further examination of the association of children from specific ethnic groups with exploitation, particularly involvement in begging, is certainly necessary.

Indeed, child trafficking is not an isolated phenomenon. UNICEF (2009, p. 57) emphasizes the intersection of this phenomenon with societal issues such as child migration, child labor, school dropout rates, and placement into the state-run children’s residential institutions. The US Department of State (2023a) similarly emphasizes the vulnerability of undocumented migrants, people experiencing homelessness, the unemployed, and persons with disabilities around the world. These vulnerabilities of adults inevitably affect any children under their care. Children whose parents encounter financial hardships (Sain et al., 2022) or come as labor migrants to Kazakhstan (Khamzin et al., 2023) are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking (International Federation for Human Rights et al., 2018). The interview findings are consonant with these broader

considerations, pointing to significant effects of human trafficking and exploitation of adults on children accompanying them in the Kazakh context.

Nonetheless, the interplay between the accepted vulnerability indicators is not straightforward. Poverty is a known risk factor associated with child labor (van der Glind, 2010). Yet, most children living in poverty are not subject to child trafficking, emphasizing the need to examine the interplay of various indicators (*ibid.*). Similarly, family disruptions may be an additional factor contributing to the vulnerability to child trafficking (*ibid.*), while enrollment into education, though it may be somewhat “protective,” may not be the defining factor it is often thought to be (UNICEF, 2009, pp. 24–25). The case-specific interplay of factors can help explain the differences in interviewees’ experiences and subsequent views on poverty or ethnic background as contributing to the risks of child exploitation and trafficking. Still, the age-specific overview of vulnerabilities might be essential to the awareness-raising activities, enabling greater responsiveness to the issues encountered by children and the objectives they pursue at different ages.

In terms of resilience and recovery factors, interviewees broadly emphasized the roles of personal traits along with the child’s household and general environment. This emphasis on the relevance of multiple stakeholders to resilience and recovery corresponds with the community (macro), organizational (*mezzo*), family (micro), and individual levels emphasized in trauma-informed care (Middleton et al., 2019, p. 241). Similarly, framing recovery processes beyond an individual child and equally including families and the child’s social environment corresponds with the understanding that trauma has a widespread impact beyond the triggering event, and that the integration of related knowledge into policies and practices is essential in order to avoid the re-traumatization of persons (Leitch, 2017).

6. The Role of Information and Communications Technology in the Child Trafficking Process

The role of ICT in child trafficking needs further research. Three out of twenty interviewees reported having work-related experience with child exploitation by online means, with the majority reporting no such experience. Still, the impact of ICT on TIP may be significant. According to interviewees, high levels of access to the internet among children and an increasing demand for child exploitation by online means increase the vulnerability of all children to trafficking and exploitation (Int. 3). ICT is also reported to facilitate the child recruitment process, as recruiters know well whom to target and how to do so (Int. 20).

Feelings of loneliness are also presumed to make a child more receptive to online and offline recruiters (Int. 16). Such feelings of loneliness are clearly case-specific and depend on many factors, including parent-child communication, as discussed in the previous section. Yet, bullying

by other children (Int. 16) and teachers (Int. 4), reported by two interviewees as a major concern at the moment, may also contribute to the isolation of a child. In light of the number of bullying-related cases reported to the “150” hotline for children and youth (discussed later in this section) doubling between 2021 and 2022 (see Table 5 in this section), one can conclude that the number of children feeling isolated and therefore potentially susceptible to recruitment is growing.

ICT also has a positive role in the identification and referral of potential survivors of child and human trafficking in general. Overall, social media are believed to have contributed to increased civic engagement and public awareness by providing accessible information in the Kazakh language (Int. 10). Interviewees suggested the use of intersectoral WhatsApp groups to ensure a timely response to potential cases of child trafficking and exploitation (Int. 6 & 9). Allowing case workers to circumvent the typical bureaucracy (Int. 10), these groups are evaluated as practically applicable and “useful” (Int. 6). Timely response in these groups is ensured by identifying the location of a case and the responsible state organizations, including the police and special social service providers, who are members of these groups and who then report on the results and the assistance provided (Int. 6). In addition to reacting to child exploitation and potential cases of child trafficking, there are also intersectoral groups discussing the “most difficult” child-related issues, be it access to education or health care (Int. 7 & 9). These intersectoral groups involve representatives of the juvenile police, migration services, NGOs, deputy *akim*, representatives of local state authorities, and others (ibid.). Overall, the number and the focus of such intersectoral groups and whether this is present in all cities and regions need to be clarified further, as multiple respondents reported not being acquainted with such groups.

Furthermore, the confidentiality of personal data in intersectoral groups on social media, for instance WhatsApp, requires further consideration. Essential confidentiality is reportedly ensured through limiting numbers of members, though data-sharing practices seems to vary from sharing personal data openly to password-protecting it (Int. 6 & 9). Accordingly, further specifications on confidentiality and provided services/end results in each case could be beneficial, as the continuous flow of unstructured information frequently makes these difficult to ascertain (Int. 6). Equally, the level of detail in reporting the issues and the actions taken seems to vary (ibid.), and further actions could be taken to explore the uniformity of reported data and activities; however, this must be done with great care to not bureaucratize the tool, which was developed to ensure a rapid response to reported cases.

Hotlines represent another form of ICT use in the identification and referral of potential survivors of human trafficking. The two well-known hotlines are “116-16” against human trafficking and “150” supporting children and youth. In addition to these landline numbers, the hotlines offer mobile phone numbers to allow communication via WhatsApp and the sharing of geolocation or photos if the location is unknown, with this information transferred by hotline staff members to the

police for immediate response (Int. 6 & 20). Mobile phone numbers are also reportedly useful for cases in which survivors may not be able to speak out loud (Int. 3).

In addition to reaching out to potential human trafficking survivors and referring them to the relevant state services, the “116-16” hotline on human trafficking provides general preventive information, for instance on safety measures to take when offered/engaging in work abroad (Int. 3 & 20). The coverage of this hotline needs to be clarified further, but based on the information from the Union of Crisis Centers in Kazakhstan, 1,205 calls were received from March to September 2023, mainly from male adults, with most callers becoming aware of the hotline via the internet (see Table 2). Uzbek citizens placed the second-highest number of calls, followed by citizens of Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, and others (ibid.).

Table 2: Calls Received on the Hotline Against Human Trafficking. March–September 2023
(Source, Sex, Age, and Citizenship)⁴

How did you hear about the hotline?	Internet	997
	Other	164
	Friends, Relatives	44
	Total	1,205
Sex	Male	714
	Female	491
	Total	1,205
Age	18-25	257
	26-40	498
	41-55	317
	56-65	133
	Total	1,205
Citizenship	Russian Federation	377
	Uzbekistan	238
	Kazakhstan	191
	Ukraine	162
	Tajikistan	161
	Other	56
	Belarus	20
	Total	1205

The regional distribution of calls was as follows:

⁴ This data was provided by the courtesy of the Union of Crisis Centers in Kazakhstan.

Table 3: Calls Received on the Hotline Against Human Trafficking. March–September 2023
(Current place of residence)⁵

Current Place of Residence	Number of Calls
South Kazakhstan Region	154
Shymkent	109
Almaty Region	108
Almaty	93
Kyzylorda Region	90
Zhambyl Region	77
East Kazakhstan Region	72
Karaganda Region	65
Atyrau Region	64
Akmola Region	57
North Kazakhstan Region	55
Astana	54
West Kazakhstan Region	46
Mangystau Region	44
Kostanay Region	41
Pavlodar Region	36
Aktobe Region	31
Overseas	9
Total	1,205

It should be noted that most calls were related to traveling abroad for study (18%), employment (12%), health, social, or family-related issues (12%), entry to/exit from Kazakhstan (10%), and other issues (see below). Questions related to human trafficking (1.7%) and specific cases of TIP (0.6%) represented only a small share of calls:

⁵ This data was provided by the courtesy of the Union of Crisis Centers in Kazakhstan.

Table 4: Main Issues Raised in Calls (March–September 2023)⁶

Category	# calls
Traveling abroad to study	324
Traveling abroad for employment	215
Other	210
Health, social, or family-related issues	209
Entry to/exit from Kazakhstan	177
Background information and contacts of government agencies	149
Calls from journalists, partners	119
Going abroad for permanent residence	98
Business trips abroad	83
Rules for staying abroad	63
Traveling abroad for marriage	56
Employment in caller's new country of residence	44
What is human trafficking?	31
Tourism	16
Advice on obtaining and restoring identity documents	13
Specific cases of human trafficking	10
Immigration, repatriation	5
Ban on entry to the Russian Federation (blacklist)	1

The “150” hotline for children does not specifically focus on human trafficking, but rather on broader issues and psychological support for children and youth, with the service recipient remaining anonymous if needed (Int. 2). It also offers legal information and advice, information referral services, and other support.⁷ Psychological support is further subdivided into 14 categories: “acute stressful events,” “self-harm,” “gambling addiction,” “alcohol and substance abuse,” “religious issues: imposing one’s views, coercion, and other issues,” “family conflicts,” and “personal problems,” “domestic violence,” “violence outside the family,” “unwanted pregnancy,” “early pregnancy,” “bullying,” “health- and special needs-related issues,” and “conflicts with society.” In 2022, 86,024 calls were received, compared to 36,578 in 2021 (ibid.), with the increase potentially attributable to increased awareness of the hotline and the repercussions of the general political and economic instability in the country on household and individual lives. More than 5,000 callers complained about each of the following issues in 2022: personal issues, family conflicts,

⁶ This data was provided by the courtesy of the Union of Crisis Centers in Kazakhstan. Please note that the total for all categories (1,823) is higher than the number of calls received for the same period (1,205), as the same call could be assigned to multiple categories.

⁷ An analytical document was issued on 06 January 2023 on calls received by the “National Helpline for Children and Youth” (Hotline “150”). The data was provided by the courtesy of the Union of Crisis Centers in Kazakhstan.

acute stressful events, domestic violence, and self-harm, conflicts with society, health- and special needs-related issues, bullying, gambling addiction, and alcohol and substance abuse (ibid.). Legal information and legal advice, information referral services, and other support were equally provided as integral parts of hotline services (ibid.). Particularly significant increases were observed in the number of calls related to unwanted pregnancy, personal problems, family conflicts, self-harm, bullying, acute stressful events, and religious issues:

Table 5: Main Issues Reported to the Hotline for Support for Children and Youth⁸

#	Categories of calls	2022	2021	% Change
1	Personal problems	12568	2976	322.31%
2	Family conflicts	10957	2857	283.51%
3	Information referral services	9691	3262	197.09%
4	Other	8299	6694	23.98%
5	Acute stressful event	8041	2654	202.98%
6	Domestic violence	6650	3662	81.59%
7	Self-harm	5892	1669	253.03%
8	Legal information and legal advice	5611	3034	84.94%
9	Conflict with society	4437	2531	75.31%
10	Health and special needs-related issues	3756	2209	70.03%
11	Bullying	3612	1125	221.07%
12	Gambling addiction	2804	1553	80.55%
13	Alcohol and substance abuse	2125	1917	10.85%
14	Unwanted pregnancy	630	120	425.00%
15	Violence outside the family	625	0	
16	Religious issues: imposing one's views, coercion, and other issues	187	76	146.05%
17	Early pregnancy	139	239	-41.84%

Overall, the number of calls received in 2022 has clearly increased compared to the previous year, though in relation to the population of almost 20 million, including 6.5 million children (Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023b, 2023a), overall call volume remains fairly low. One interviewee mentioned this directly, hinting at possible low awareness of the population of these hotlines as the reason for continued low call numbers (Int. 20).

⁸ The data was provided with the courtesy of the Union of Crisis Centers in Kazakhstan.

However, it is important to remember that not all hotlines, particularly those run by NGOs, continue working due to financial volatility and limited state support, resulting in staff rotation and closure of related activities. The TIP-specific hotline by Sana Sezim NGO is among those that continued functioning. According to information from its provider, 3,856 calls were received from 1 April 2019 through 30 September 2023. Most potential and actual TIP survivors who called were male and between the ages of 19 and 49. No calls from children were received.

6.1. Data Anonymity, Data Collection, and Analysis

The legislation, namely the “Law on Personal Data and their Protection” (2023) stipulates the anonymity of personal data, but the particulars of the implementation of this clause depend on the organization. Overall, stakeholders are expected to comply with the confidentiality of personal data as defined in the national legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, with third-party access not allowed unless an official request has been sent and accepted and there is a case-specific necessity for it (Int. 20). There are also further regulations on archiving, particularly for state organizations and those implementing social service contracts (*ibid.*). Similarly, NGOs comply with confidentiality requirements (Int. 6) by following international recommendations (Int. 18) and regulations, for instance, on encoding the personal information of service recipients (Int. 20). The encoding practice used is determined by each organization individually.

Compliance with confidentiality requirements also closely relates to the financier and grant providers. Sharing personal data may be allowed in cases of NGOs conducting joint activities across regions or countries whenever recruitment, transportation, and exploitation take place in different locations and require the involvement of multiple actors (Int. 3). Still, the anonymity of personal data reportedly remains an issue both among state organizations (Int. 6) and NGOs (Int. 20). The situation in terms of sharing information about the TIP status of survivors of human trafficking is unknown and requires further consideration in other studies.

Furthermore, there is a significant problem with data fragmentation across sectors and stakeholders involved in combatting child trafficking. State organizations at the local level report to the relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Healthcare (MOH) and the MLSP, on activities conducted and services provided. Similarly, the law enforcement authorities have their own database with the information reported to the MIA.

It should be noted that organizations providing special social services at the expense of the state budget ought to inform internal affairs authorities about TIP-related cases. They should also account for the confidentiality of personal data (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). Following the adoption of the draft law “On Combatting Human Trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan,” this regulation is expected to expand to NGOs

and state organizations working on combatting human trafficking in Kazakhstan (See Electronic Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.-b). Thus, all known cases are expected to be further reported to the MIA:

Table 6: Data Reporting at the Local and National Levels

Ministry of Healthcare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health providers report about the provided health services • No reference is made as to whether a recipient is a TIP or not 	Ministry of Internal Affairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law enforcement agencies report about raids, identify cases with TIP status • Data on hotline calls is reported to this Ministry • Police also report on prevention activities conducted at schools 	Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities at city and regional levels report on labor inspections conducted • Both state and NGO providers of social services funded from the state budget report about the special social services provided, including those provided to survivors of child trafficking
Ministry of Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to TIP is unknown, as no prior experience was reported 		NGOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs report project-related data to project financiers

Ministries keep data related to their particular work area, with data collection and reporting standards often not allowing for a comprehensive analysis of information across all relevant sectors, for instance healthcare, social protection, and education. There has been a continuous discussion on the possible solution to this problem in the form of the Digital Family Card, which was launched in 2022 by the MLSP in collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP Kazakhstan, 2023). Since January 2023, the Digital Family Card has been expanded to social protection services, and in 2024, it is expected to include state-guaranteed services in health care and education, with the coverage of all state-guaranteed services in these three areas planned for 2025 (Kapital.kz, 2023). The Digital Family Card is intended to provide a platform for the integration of what were 24 separate information

systems (Int. 2, 9 & 19) to provide a broader, more accessible overview of healthcare, education, and social protection services. This is an important step towards uniting numerous disparate information systems (even within individual ministries) and allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the population's access to social services. However, the current state of integration needs further inquiry.

It should be noted that the information NGOs keep is equally fragmented, with data collection and reporting standards varying across organizations depending on the requirements of the organizations financing individual projects. International organizations similarly have their own data collection and reporting systems and, as a rule, do not share information due to confidentiality concerns.

The downside of fragmentation in the data collected by and across organizations is the limitations this imposes on assessing the magnitude of human and child trafficking in Kazakhstan. Interviewees emphasized the lack of integration between information systems (Int. 5) and the lack of unified statistics (Int. 20), with even the available statistics being themselves fragmented (Int. 6). For instance, the information reported by the MIA on human and child trafficking in the country refers to the number of cases (not the number of survivors) related to human trafficking, and despite this reporting, the information is not accessible or necessarily known to other ministries (Int. 19).

6.2. Discussion

Integration of information systems will contribute to transparency and creating a comprehensive overview of Kazakhstan's children throughout their lives, from birth to receiving entitlement social benefits and access to education, allowing for better recognition of warning signs such as not attending school, crossing borders, etc. (Int. 5). In order to change the situation, one needs a comprehensive picture of trends in child trafficking and exploitation processes, which is not possible in the current state of data fragmentation (Int. 6). Subsequently, data analysis within both state and NGOs is limited. State organizations may provide essential statistics, but not the necessary detailed overviews by specific characteristics (Int. 6). The analysis of the data gathered via hotlines is also incomplete. For instance, tracking the outcome of the consultation is not possible, as very few callers call back to report the results (Int. 20). Similarly, NGOs largely focus on the data they gather themselves, which may often (if not always) alone be insufficient to support a systematic analysis.

7. What Services are Currently Offered to Survivors of Child Trafficking? Findings and Discussion

7.1. Legislation

The special social services offered to survivors of child trafficking are regulated by the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023), the Standard for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of TIP (2023c) (hereinafter “the Standard”), and normative documents regulating the activities of Infants Homes (Minister of Healthcare, 2017a), Centers for the Adaptation of Minors (CAM) and Children’s Support Centers (CSC) (Minister of Education, 2022). The Social Code outlines the general principles of special social services and entitlement to them. Defining the priority of international treaties ratified by the Republic of Kazakhstan, it pursues equality, non-discrimination, and preventive and targeted approaches to social protection and care (Articles 2 & 3). It also stipulates the individual approach to service provision based on an individual plan of care, which is developed jointly by the service provider and the recipient (Article 1). The Social Code defines “special social services” as a set of services that are intended to support a person or a family in overcoming "life-disrupting circumstances" to ensure their equal participation in social life (Article 1). A person or family is recognized as being in need of special social services based on 12 criteria, with one — cruel treatment leading to social maladaptation and social deprivation of a person — explicitly related to TIP (Article 133). Furthermore, the lack of parental care, homelessness, and disability are among the criteria entitling a person to special social services (ibid.). Children with special needs have further entitlements to designated special services (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023a).

There are 36 Children’s Support Centers and nine Centers for the Adaptation of Minors in Kazakhstan which:

- *Provided services to 5,000+ children (including foreign citizens) in difficult life situations in 2023*
- *Have the capacity for 3,628 children*
- *Provide 24-hour reception*
- *Maintain continuous monitoring and video surveillance.*
- *For the scope of services, see Section Seven of this document. Information on children is confidential and not disseminated to third parties.*

However, recognition of a person’s TIP status is critical to accessing state-funded special social services designated for TIP survivors. Recognition of TIP status is a recognition of a person as a victim of ill-treatment resulting in social maladaptation and social deprivation due to TIP, exploitation, or kidnapping (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c), irrespective of whether criminal proceedings were initiated in relation to the committed acts (Article 133 of the *Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2023). However, if a pre-trial investigation has been initiated, with a child or an adult being recognized as a victim of TIP, exploitation or kidnapping, no assessment of TIP status is required (Deputy Prime Minister of

Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c, p. 5). Otherwise, the assessment of a person's TIP status is conducted following 32 criteria laid down in the assessment form in Annex Two to the Standard. These criteria are composed of questions related to (i) the purpose of the trafficking, exploitation, and/or kidnapping; (ii) acts committed against the person; (iii) means used against a person; (iv) harm caused to a person (see Annex Three in this document). If a person is not identified as a TIP victim, she/he is denied access to the special social services (ibid.).

The assessment of a person's TIP status may be conducted in two ways:

- (i) by a representative of an organization providing special social services and a representative of a district/city authority responsible for employment and social programs (based on the service recipient's application to a service provider), within one working day upon the receipt of such application;
- (ii) if a person was identified by internal affairs bodies during a TIP-related investigation, the assessment is conducted by the investigating internal affairs bodies together with the service provider and the district/city authority responsible for employment and social programs (ibid.).

In cases involving children, the assessment process should be conducted in the presence of their parents/other legal guardians /custodial services. For both children and adults, the assessment is conducted in the form of a personal conversation with the survivor, taking into account at all times essential safety considerations, confidentiality of disclosed information, and non-distraction to other bureaucratic processes (ibid.).

The scope of special social services is elaborated in the Standard, defining the (binding) minimum requirements for the quality, scope, and terms of services for all organizations offering them. It also stipulates quality assurance and safety measures for each type of service. One example thereof is a book of complaints and suggestions kept in the service-providing organization, which is reviewed monthly by the head of the organization and which should be presented to beneficiaries and visitors immediately upon request (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023a, p. 5). Provision of services is based on (i) a personal application on the part of the service recipient using the sample form provided in the Standard; (ii) a written referral by district and/or city authorities responsible for employment and social programs; (iii) a referral by an internal affairs body within one working day from the moment of recognition of TIP status (ibid.).

Upon the recognition of an applicant's TIP status, the organization providing special social services sends the filled assessment form and the individual's application to the authorized body within one working day to obtain permission to provide special social services (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c, p. 5). Upon receiving this permission, a

contract is concluded between a service-providing organization and the service recipient. If, upon referral to the organization, an adult applicant is accompanied by children, they are admitted together to the service provider, given that the adult is a parent or a legal guardian of these children, but children are still considered as separate service recipients (ibid.). In the case of children are unaccompanied and separated, the service provider notifies the guardianship and tutelage authorities and transfers the child to the CAM/CSC (ibid.).

7.2. Scope of Services

The duration and scope of service provision vary depending on the type of contract between the service provider and service recipient. Services range from day stays (from one hour to four hours per day) and temporary round-the-clock stays (for up to six months) to long-term residence (in case of contract extension beyond those six months) (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c, p. 5). Prior to the conclusion of a contract, a person is entitled to temporary accommodation, food, primary medical examination and pre-hospital medical care, and satisfaction of essential sanitary and hygienic needs (e.g., shower, bathroom, washing, cleaning) (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023b). Upon the conclusion of a contract, the scope of services increases to include the eight types of services provided, depending on individual needs and an individual plan developed by the service provider and recipient. For easier comprehension, the author of this study presents these services in three groups.

The first group of services focuses on the essential physical and psychological well-being of the beneficiary:

- (i) Social and domestic services entail the provision of accommodation, food, and essential conditions for living and self-care (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). Transportation for treatment, rehabilitation, education, and leisure activities is also stipulated, if necessary in the company of a social worker (ibid.).
- (ii) Socio-medical services presume access to primary medical examination and sanitary treatment, pre-hospital medical care, assistance in hospitalization (ibid.). They also foresee support in preparing referral documents and accompanying beneficiaries to medical organizations, if necessary, as well as support in obtaining guaranteed free medical care and access to prescribed medicines and medical devices (ibid.).
- (iii) Socio-psychological services focus on mental health, security, and stress resistance of beneficiaries through examination, systematic observation, and emergency assistance (ibid.). Psychological counseling, training, and correctional activities are combined with joint sessions in mutual support groups and clubs in which beneficiaries can socialize (ibid.).

The second group of services focuses on education, skills development, and recreational activities to support the development and socialization of an individual:

- (iv) Socio-pedagogical services range from sessions on values, attitudes, and behavioral skills to educational support for children, including both school- and home-based forms (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). Children with developmental delays and disorders are also entitled to corrective and developmental assistance. Notably, school supplies and textbooks for all children are to be provided by educational organizations (e.g., schools) (ibid.).
- (v) Social and labor services aim to support the person in raising her/his “social status” through counseling, therapeutic labor and social work, and training in practical and professional skills (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). Skills development begins with the identification of the beneficiary’s skills, linked to the individual’s characteristics and abilities, and aims to provide assistance in terms of career orientation, which also entails support in choosing a specialization if the beneficiary has no profession yet (ibid.).
- (vi) Socio-cultural services are intended to embrace creativity through engagement in leisure and cultural activities, as well as ensure the service recipient's open communication with family and friends via phone and online means (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). The presence of a specialist from a service-providing organization during this communication is intended to facilitate the prevention and resolution of conflicts (ibid.).

The third group of services is aimed at protecting the service beneficiary’s rights and supporting access to the benefits:

- (vii) Socio-economic services include support in obtaining the benefits beneficiaries are entitled to, including allowances, compensations, alimony, and payments to improve the recipient's living conditions (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c).
- (viii) Social and legal services include restoration of documents and assistance in collaboration with law enforcement, judicial authorities, and (when relevant) diplomatic and consular representatives of the service recipient’s country of citizenship (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). They also entail broader support in defending the beneficiary’s civil, family, and property rights, filing appeals against, translating and interpreting to his/her native tongue, and representation of the beneficiary's interests in front of judicial and investigatory bodies (ibid.).

The contract between a service provider and a recipient is concluded for a period of up to six months, with a possible extension of no longer than three months if a recipient is in inpatient treatment or if a criminal case involving the recipient is ongoing. The contract can also be terminated based on the recipient's written application, incompliance with terms and conditions, and an early fulfillment of the objectives/completion of the activities stated in an individual plan (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). There are also regulations on children's stay in CAM and Centers for the Support of Children, including bans on possessing alcohol and drugs as well as unauthorized departure/absence from premises (Minister of Education, 2022).

7.3. Service Providers

Upon encountering an unaccompanied child, service providers and law enforcement authorities notify the guardianship and custody authorities, who then assist the further placement of the child (Minister of Education, 2022). Depending on the child's age, he or she is placed in an Infants' Home or CAM.

Children under three are allocated to Infants' Homes, organizations which offer childcare for abandoned children, orphans, deprived of parental care or for children with special needs (here, a child may be up to four years old) (Minister of Healthcare, 2017b). These organizations are overseen by the MOH, and they largely focus on medical care to ensure the physical and mental well-being of a child. Beneficiaries accommodated by these organizations are further grouped based on their age, health status, life situation (*ibid.*). Service recipients are discharged from these organizations if returned to their biological families, in cases of adoption, or (upon age-out) transferred to residential institutions in education and social protection systems discussed below (*ibid.*).

Children aged four (or five for children with special needs) to seventeen without parental care or legal guardians are transferred to CAM/CSC (Minister of Education, 2022). These are overseen by the MOE, and provide accommodation, social and psychological assistance, determine social status, prepare for reunification with their biological families, if possible, or for transfer to alternative forms of care (foster families, guardianship, tutelage, adoption, etc...) (*ibid.*). These provisions do not contradict the eight types of services, and they are neither as comprehensive nor as specific as the special social services for survivors of TIP are. (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c). The child is entitled to special social services for up to three months, during which the guardianship and custody authorities and the administration of the abovementioned Centers gather documents necessary to confirm the child's status and ensure further living arrangements (*ibid.*).

Upon identification of parents or other legal guardians, children are sent to their place of residence after being handed over to them; if no such person is identified, children stay in residential institutions (Minister of Education, 2022). As a rule, these are the CSCs overseen by the MOE. In these Centers, the status of an orphaned child/a child left without parental care is to be determined/established within six months from the moment of admission (Acting Minister of Education, 2021). If reunification with biological family is impossible, a child is temporarily enrolled in the CSC, which supports her/his future placement under family-based care/ alternative to institutional forms of care. (ibid.). Additional support is stipulated for children with special needs in specialized CAMs to teach them necessary social and everyday skills, job skills, school curriculum applying individual approach (ibid.).

It should, however, be noted that following the country's deinstitutionalization of childcare policy, the number of children in residential care has decreased substantially. In 2021, there were 2,109 children in CAMs, compared to 4,795 in 2011 (Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics, 2023). As of 2023, there were nine Centers for Adaptation of Minors and 36 Centers for the Support of Children in Difficult Life Situations (*Information Provided by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 01/12/2024 No. ZhT-2023-0273363*, personal communication, 2024)

Overall, as described above, survivors of child trafficking are entitled to a broad range of services, though the scope of services is the same for adults and children. Their actual provision, however, is case-specific and depends on the service recipient's needs (Int. 9 & 20). The overall scope of the special social services listed above was confirmed by several interviewees, who noted that the social services account for sex, family ties (Int. 20), and translation assistance, if necessary (Int. 16), including sign language interpretation (Int. 9 & 19).

The individual approach to service provision, stipulated in the Social Code, is reportedly a common practice within both non-governmental and state organizations. Staff members define an individual plan together with a recipient depending on the recipient's specific situation, as well as his/her needs (Int. 20) and wishes (Int. 3). In relation to children with special needs, another interviewee agreed that there should be possibilities to ensure their access to services (Int. 6) and that the lobbying conducted by civil society organizations defending the rights of persons with special needs brought positive results (ibid.). The introduction of per capita payments foreseen in the Social Code to improve the accessibility of social services for persons with special needs is a vivid example thereof (Official Information Source of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). However, de facto implementation depends on the leadership of the organizations providing social services (ibid.). Due to reportedly limited encounters with survivors of child trafficking, evaluation of this, as well as other questions of factual access to social services, was not feasible.

The foremost organizations involved in supporting unaccompanied children are the CAMs. Initially under the MIA, these were transferred to the Ministry of Education (Int. 16), which has reportedly improved services by focusing on children's social well-being (Int. 10). In contrast to NGOs, whose experience is limited to children staying with their parents/guardians, CAMs have first-hand experience working with unaccompanied children. Service provision there is reportedly as follows: initial medical examination and fulfillment of essential food and clothing-related needs are followed by development of a long-term plan and assistance in medical-psychological-pedagogical rehabilitation and social adaptation of children; work to determine the social status of minors; identify their close relatives and return them to their families (if appropriate) or prepare them for life in alternative family-based care (Int. 2). The centers emphasize children's well-being and aim to understand the situations and issues they face (ibid.). They also offer cultural and leisure activities, such as visiting theaters, libraries, museums, etc. to educate and entertain (ibid.).

In addition to assisting the child with any documentation issues (Int. 3), the related authorities also provide support with qualifying for disability services, if relevant (Int. 19), which is a relatively straightforward process but requires the awareness and experience of staff in terms of eligibility requirements, as well as their support in the application process (Int. 13).

Yet CAMs have limited experience in working with survivors of child trafficking. According to one interviewee, 1,915 children received assistance in the past 11 years, but no case of a survivor of human trafficking was reported (Int. 2). The lack of cases of child trafficking observed could be explained by limited identification of survivors in state residential institutions. Furthermore, CAMs are seen as a transition point unless the status of the child has been identified (Int. 16). Children staying there include orphans, children deprived of parental care, homeless and neglected children, children removed from their parents at imminent risk to their life or health as a result of abuse, and children with deviant behavior (Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics, 2023). Interviewees note that a more individual, targeted approach would probably be beneficial for a more "child-friendly" environment (Int. 20). On average, CAMs are for 30 children. However, irrespective of the setting, they emphasized that children were better off in families (Int. 2, 5, 7 & 19), as in these state residential institutions, they end up bullying each other (Int. 13).

In addition to the organizations under the MOE described above, service providers also include the organizations accountable to the MLSP. These are a) the state centers for the provision of special social services to TiP victims and b) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing social services through social service contracting. The state centers are established by local executive bodies (usually the Departments for the Coordination of Employment and Social Programs in *akimats*) and offer special social services 24 hours a day, or in the form of a day stay or as a long-

stay accommodation (in case of contract extension). The number and the scope of organizations in the regions vary.

NGOs provide somewhat similar services and pursue a similar case-specific approach, although, as noted earlier, their experience of service provision is limited to children accompanied by their parents and guardians. Services NGOs provide to accompanying children commence with fulfilling basic food, hygiene, and clothing needs, followed by medical services (Int. 3), psychological support (Int. 16). The organizations also provide legal assistance with restoring identity documents (Int. 3) and enrollment in school (Int. 6). Individual case management involves relevant state authorities (Int. 20). One interviewee noted that needs are case-dependent: for instance, some recipients may require more medical assistance, and others more legal assistance (Int. 3). The cultural, leisure, and recovery approaches/activities in NGO facilities include psychotherapeutic corners to enhance survivors' feeling of safety, creating home-like conditions, cooking, art therapy, and more, all aimed at supporting survivors in accepting what happened to them and working through trauma, as well as any lingering feelings of guilt or aggression (Int. 6).

In relation to children, multiple interviewees emphasized access to education and health as the most essential areas of support. Neglected, a survivor of child trafficking has often had no opportunity to receive education in the past (Int. 20). Similarly, children whose parents are survivors of human trafficking may have attended school at some point, but have often stopped attending due to their family circumstances (Int. 3). Children exploited in begging also generally do not attend schools, despite the mandatory schooling policy (Int. 16).

NGOs have attempted to right this wrong by supporting children in enrolling in schools. Secondary education is compulsory in Kazakhstan (*EDU.KZ*, n.d.). Children with hearing loss, vision impairment, and mental health conditions are entitled to special boarding schools, with all other children attending general schools (Int. 9). Still, interviewees note problems with some parents' unwillingness to enroll children in schools, for instance due to fear of losing income brought by children through begging (Int. 16). Similarly, not all migrants seem to be aware of their children's right to study (Int. 6). Some NGO shelters have adjacent schools, allowing for direct enrollment there (*ibid.*) or children receive "home-schooling," with teachers coming to conduct lessons in shelters, if necessary (Int. 11). Equally, access to health is an issue as health organizations may be unwilling or unable to provide services to a person without compulsory social and/or medical insurance (Int. 16), and families not registered in their place of residence (*propiska*) may often not receive social payments and support they are entitled to (Int. 16).

In terms of skills development in children who were subject to exploitation and trafficking, interviewees emphasized the relevance of short-term courses and supporting the child in identifying future career paths. According to one civil society representative, labor therapy, in the form of

engaging a child in specific activities and working with a psychologist utilizing relevant exercises and masterclasses, reportedly assists the child in identifying existing skills and potential future professional paths (Int. 20). Similar activities are conducted at CAM and CSC, but it is a time-consuming process (ibid.). Often falling out of the education system, children are also unable to assess their skills and navigate the job market alone (ibid.).

In terms of children's work-related preferences, the interviewees recalled the following: according to one civil society representative, based on past experience, 16–17-year-old girls who had been sexually exploited were interested in short-term computer literacy or language-related courses, as well as manicure and sewing training that would provide them with financial means (Int. 3). However, children's preferences do not seem to depend on financial independence only. Another interviewee recalled a boy found with his mother (who was a survivor of human trafficking) and his wish to become a policeman, as the police were those who had found and identified them (Int. 20).

7.4. Sources of Funding and Service Provision

The special social services provided by NGOs are paid for by both the state budget and IO funding (Int. 6, 11 & 20). These two sources of finances have further implications for the service provision. Multiple actors receive state financing for survivors of human trafficking. The MLSP allocates finances to the state centers for the provision of special social services to TIP victims (Int. 3), though they primarily focus on adults with children (Int. 12), as unaccompanied children are referred to the Adaptation Centers for Children. Another form of special social service provision is social service contracting through NGOs that, in contrast to the state organizations described above, are required to rent their own building and ensure security, with financing provided according to the number of days a person spends in the shelter (Int. 3). Social service contracting is also provided through departments of employment and social protection at the local *akimat* level (Int. 4). A social service contract can be concluded for up to three years (*Law "On the state social order, the state order for realization of strategic partnership, grants and prizes for non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023*). The draft law "On Combatting Human Trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan" foresees non-expulsion and provision of special social services to foreigners and stateless persons detected and legally identified as TIP victims (Electronic Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.-b).

NGOs receiving state financing provide services only to survivors of human trafficking identified as such with the involvement of relevant state authorities. In other words, following the three-day period allocated for the official recognition of a survivor of human trafficking (beginning the moment a person's application is submitted to the service provider/the moment the person's case

is submitted to the provider by the relevant internal affairs bodies), NGOs receiving state funding cannot provide the necessary services if the person has not been officially identified as such (Int. 8). However, within this three-day period, the person is entitled to special social services (Int. 11) (see Section 7.2. Scope of Services). The requirement for official recognition of TIP status also results in some social service contracts not being realized due to no survivors of human trafficking being identified and referred to an NGO (Int. 14), with the NGO returning the finances to the state budget in these cases (Int. 11).

Despite these difficulties, however, many organizations did indeed provide services to survivors of human trafficking. While the organizations funded by state budget may struggle with providing special social services due to the lack of “recognized survivors,” one organization claimed to provide services for an average of 23 TIP survivors per year (Int. 8 & 18). Two interviewees referenced the possibility of providing one-time support in the form of psychological assistance and payments to those not officially recognized as survivors of human trafficking (Int. 8) and the possibility of providing support up to four hours a day (Int. 18), respectively. These statements correspond with the differences in the duration and scope of special social services funded by the state depending on the presence of a contract between a recipient and a provider of services.

The above-mentioned difference in NGO practices results in the limited ability of some NGOs to ensure the eligibility of service recipients for state-funded special social services. One interviewee pointed out the necessity of confirming recipient eligibility for each individual applicant, both orally and in written forms, to avoid further complications later (Int. 8). Furthermore, the implications of a TIP status recognition on service provision may even vary across NGOs depending on the recognition criteria and procedure they use. On a related note, another interviewee posited that there might be differences in recognition procedures across regions (Int. 17), which may explain the regional differences in the utilization of finances allocated for the special social services for TIP survivors (see Table 7 below):

Table 7: Funds Utilized from the National Budget for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of Trafficking of Human Beings
(in thousands of Kazakhstan Tenge [KZT])⁹

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023 (stipulated)	
	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT
Akmola Region	0		0		0		0		0		0	0	5	2,866	12	13,617
Aktobe Region	0		11	3,460	23	11,411	10	12,553	6	8,264	6	8,600	7	8,836	13	15,235
Almaty Region	0		0		0		0		0		0	0			12	13,617
Atyrau region	0		0		0		0		0							0
East Kazakhstan Region	0		23	5,195	10	9,100	10	12,500	9	8,264	19	14,462	7	11,098	17	21,708
Zhambyl Region	0		0		0		0		0				5	6,461	12	13,617
West Kazakhstan Region	0		0		0		0		0						12	13,617
Karaganda Region	0		20	8,099	29	9,001	16	11,207	6	7,835	15	6,937	5	6,038	12	13,617

Table 7 (continued)¹⁰

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023 (stipulated)	

⁹ Data was provided by the courtesy of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Age specifications are not available, and the information on citizenship is only recorded as “foreign” with no further specifications. Data for 2023 is through November. The # symbol denotes the number of persons and KZT—Kazakhstani tenge.

¹⁰ Data was provided by the courtesy of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Age specifications are not available, and the information on citizenship is only recorded as “foreign” with no further specifications. Data for 2023 is through November. The # symbol denotes the number of persons and KZT—Kazakhstani tenge.

	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT	#	KZT
Kostanay Region	12	2,237	17	10,190	16	9,116	10	4,502	8	2,411	16	8,239	6	8,551	17	21,708
Kyzylorda Region	0		10	6,475	11	7,231	10	7,759	6	8,264	22	14,462	10	14,472	17	21,708
Mangystau Region	0		0		0		0		0		0	0			12	13,617
Pavlodar Region	0		26	9,500	46	11,411	30	9,000	5	3,750	5	6,145			12	13,617
North Kazakhstan Region	0		10	3,280	0		0		0						10	10,381
Turkistan Region	11	5,000	12	11,500	21	10,000	18	12,552	12	9,199	20	28,920	20	31,678	32	41,838
Shymkent	0		0		0		0		0				0	0	0	0
Almaty	14	5,693	26	11,500	28	11,411	24	12,553	6	8,264	4	3,958			18	19,182
Astana	50	10,868	43	11,630	31	11,411	17	10,952	39	13,744	36	14,461	34	11,309	20	24,076
Total	87	23,798	198	80,829	215	90,091	145	93,577	97	69,995	143	106,184	99	101,309	228	271,155

In the table, the regions and years marked with "0" indicate the return of finances allocated for TIP. Non-utilization of allocated finances may, at best, be an indicator of no TIP present in a given region, but it may (much more likely) also point to none of the actually existing TIP being identified and recognized as such, thus leading to no eligibility for related services. Three interviewees suggested issues with the participation in social service contracting for special social services. It can occur that a tender is announced by a local authority, but no NGO is willing to participate in it (Int. 14) due to the fear of ending up on a blacklist for not utilizing the allocated finances (Int. 8) or overall difficulties in implementing the state-funded project (Int. 11). This information was confirmed by another state official, who similarly recalled no organization participating in a tender for special social services and no TIP survivors identified by internal affairs bodies in that specific region (Int. 15). As seen above, the return of finances allocated for TIP is not limited to one region and includes cities as large as Shymkent and Almaty.

In addition to the issues of utilization of finances, further issues were reported in relation to their allocation. The state financing is provided on a per-recipient per-day basis for service recipients residing in shelters (Int. 11 & 14). In situations of limited identification of survivors of human trafficking, this form of financing, in combination with the requirement for the NGO to ensure essential costs for the building and staff salaries are covered, affects the viability of NGO service providers. In other cases, an organization may win a bid, but make the presence of a shelter contingent on the presence of a (recognized) survivor of human trafficking (Int. 11).

In addition to considering the essential costs, one solution could be the inclusion of awareness-raising activities in the state budget allocated for survivors of human trafficking, as the social service contract currently focuses on services only. One interviewee noted that the awareness-raising activities are critical to identifying TIP, and there were cases of neighbors and others who participated in these activities referring TIP to a relevant organization (Int. 11). Otherwise, as another interviewee noted, neither a survivor of human trafficking nor others surrounding her/him may be aware of the state services allocated for this purpose, or the existence of shelters for people in their circumstance at all (Int. 11). However, this perspective is not shared by all, as another interviewee noted that such chances are “very slim” (Int. 14).

Similar to the social service contract, IO funding is provided for a specific period, but — critically — the amount of funding is not tied to the number of victims registered or receiving services (Int. 11). TIP can also be identified unofficially by NGOs based on their own assessment criteria and questions, even in cases of a potential survivor of human trafficking not being identified as such officially (*ibid.*). Sometimes, a survivor may be unwilling to refer her/his case to law enforcement bodies, or the related criminal charges may not be pursued further (*ibid.*). A potential incentive for a person to be recognized as a victim of TIP is the access to special social services granted,

irrespective of the court case filed against the perpetrators; however, this is often outweighed by the fear of encounters with law enforcement bodies, especially in cases in which the person is not a legal resident. In this regard, IO-funded NGOs are reportedly “more flexible” (Int. 8) and “survivor-centered,” as they may not inform the police about a TIP survivor if the survivor does not wish it (Int. 3). The state-funded NGOs are, by contrast, obliged to inform the police within three working days (Deputy Prime Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, 2023c).

8. Gaps and Unmet Needs in the Identification and Referral of Survivors of Child Trafficking and Their Access to Special Social Services

Law enforcement authorities are responsible for identifying potential survivors of TIP, but other stakeholders are equally important to both the identification and referral processes. Interviewees held different opinions in this regard. Two suggested that identification was the prerogative of the police (Int. 4), as they had both the authority and capacity to react to potential human trafficking cases (Int. 8). Six interviewees emphasized the roles of other stakeholders in the identification of potential TIP survivors. Accordingly, in addition to raids (Int. 10) and migration services (Int. 18), potentially exploited children could be identified through the education system, with a teacher noticing a missing child or a school psychologist noticing changes in the child’s behavior (Int. 16). The roles of these stakeholders are critical in the referral process. As one interviewee aptly noted, children do not come “on their own” (Int. 18) but are referred by their parents (Int. 20), neighbors (Int. 10), the ombudsman for child rights (Int. 6), and others.

The education, healthcare, and civil society sectors are critical to both the identification and referral processes. The education system stands at the forefront, particularly in cases of children living in dysfunctional families where parents may not necessarily promptly report the missing child (Int. 20). The role of the education system is equally essential to migrant children, as all children are entitled to guaranteed access to education. Actual access may vary due to the reasons outlined elsewhere in this report, but this does not diminish the relevance of the education system to identifying the potential cases of child exploitation and trafficking. Similarly, a visiting health professional stands at the forefront of identifying potential risks for the child, due to their continuous visits to families—access that law enforcement bodies do not have (Int. 13). Equally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are important to identification and referral, as they closely work with local law enforcement bodies in order to provide social support to potential survivors of human trafficking. One interviewee noted that, though not required, NGOs should have the right to identify the potential survivors of human trafficking (Int. 17).

However, there are gaps in the training of staff in the education, healthcare, and even civil society sectors, which, along with the overall structural factors (e.g., increased work burden and limited staff availability and incentives), hinder their ability to identify potential TIP or child exploitation cases and refer them to internal affairs bodies and providers of special social services. These issues are elaborated in the following subsections, which aim to answer the fourth research question guiding this study, namely, what are the gaps/unmet needs in the identification and referral of survivors of child trafficking and their access to services, particularly in terms of trauma-informed and survivor-centered care? These subsections outline the potential areas that KATCH could target.

8.1. The Proactive Identification Approach

The proactive identification approach, implemented through intersectoral mobile groups, is intended to enhance collaboration between stakeholders. Initially piloted with assistance from the IOM, this initiative was rolled out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MIA) throughout the country in 2023. This initiative is known as “Stop traffic,” and it is conducted quarterly in the form of raids by the police in collaboration with civil society organizations and representatives of local departments responsible for social protection and employment. At its core, the proactive approach has three objectives.

First, raids primarily target remote areas where farms, the agricultural sector, and cattle breeding are located (Int. 18), as labor exploitation is most likely to take place in these areas, with exploited persons unable to escape or ask for help (Int. 3). One interviewee emphasized the effectiveness of such activities by sharing the example of a woman, a citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic, with children who were identified during such raids (Int. 11).

Second, the proactive approach intends to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders involved in the identification, referral, and provision of services to survivors of human trafficking. Intersectoral mobile groups are established at a regional level and involve representatives from local police, labor inspectors, prosecutors’ offices, and NGOs (Int. 3). Raids take place quarterly, though the specific timing and focus vary across regions (Int. 19), with the schedule developed and approved by the regional police department, deputy *akim*, and deputy prosecutor of the region (Int. 16). Visits take place at the district level (*ibid*). Mobile groups are a good opportunity to build collaboration between stakeholders (Int. 17) and expand the existing collaboration between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MLSP) on joint raids targeting the exploitation of child labor (Int. 19) to a broader set of actors.

Third, the proactive approach contributes to the awareness among the population and potential survivors of human trafficking of what human trafficking is, what it looks like in practice, and how

to free oneself from it (Int. 19), as well as opportunities to defend one's rights (Int. 17). In addition to preventing potential cases, outreach activities assist in identifying the survivors of human trafficking (Int. 16), as individuals often may not realize they have been trafficked and exploited (Int. 3). Besides, employer identity document retention is generally seen as a normal practice and a justified measure in working with foreign nationals (Int. 3).

The proactive approach is intended to support the identification of potential survivors of human trafficking, which remains low in Kazakhstan (see Table 1 in Section 1. Background). To this point, three interviewees noted that the number of identified TIP cases has been similar throughout the years (Int. 10), and in fact, only a few cases of TIP are identified each year, even in large cities (Int. 8), leaving a high estimated number of unidentified cases (Int. 20).

8.2. Potential Reasons for Low Identification of TIP Survivors

There are multiple reasons for low identification: insufficient evidence (Int. 11), issues with the professionalism of law enforcement bodies (Int. 20), neglect, corruption (Int. 10), fear, and the reluctance of survivors of human trafficking to refer to the police (Int. 18) due to mistrust and fear of exploitation by the police (Int. 10). A desire among all parties not to become known was also indicated in cases of newborn child sale (Int. 5). Furthermore, individuals may not necessarily identify themselves as survivors of human trafficking (Int. 5) and may therefore not be aware of their rights. Another issue is the requalification of cases initially identified as human trafficking as crimes other than human trafficking. One interviewee shared the case of a woman with five children who was initially classified as a case of TIP but was later requalified as a case of retention of identity documents due to the lack of attributes necessary for recognizing TIP status of a survivor (Int. 11). As noted in previous sections, the recognition of TIP status according to the 32 criteria is essential to receiving the state-funded special social services (see Section 7.2. Scope of Services). However, the above example with the five children does not seem to be a singular case. Another example was an adult citizen of Uzbekistan who was exploited on farmland, whose case was not qualified as TIP due to the lack of evidence and the alleged possibility of leaving the farm at any time, irrespective of the long distance between the farmland and the next populated area (Int. 11). Another interviewee recalled a case of a child who was abducted, sexually abused, and deprived of freedom of movement—but the case was qualified as a crime other than human trafficking (Int. 20). There was also a high-profile case of a woman who was recruited at the age of 16 from the orphanage and spent 22 years in labor exploitation, with continuous sexual, physical, and mental abuse. Following her unsuccessful escape and punishment, the woman bore three children and remained there because of the fear of losing them. As in previous cases, she faced difficulties in proving forcible confinement on a farm (Amurzakova, 2021).

Another reason for the low number of cases identified and reported is that not all criminal charges related to human trafficking make it to court. Interviewees described this as a “big problem” (Int. 10) and a “usual practice” in the country (Int. 18). Despite the social, psychological, and legal support provided by both state and civil society organizations offering special social services, survivors of human trafficking are reportedly reluctant to press charges against their offenders (Int. 1 & 10). Among the reasons for this reluctance, interviewees named corruption and the unwillingness of law enforcement bodies to deal with related cases (Int. 10), survivors’ fear of being found both within and outside the country by their exploiters (Int. 18), lack of sufficient evidence to press charges, and the unwillingness of plaintiffs (foreigners) to wait for the 2–6 months necessary to process the charges (Int. 19). Since reconciliation of parties is allowed (Int. 19), victims, particularly foreign nationals, often withdraw their charges (Int. 18) after their employers fulfill their claims and provide compensation, taking these payments and returning to their countries of origin (Int. 1). Similar issues are common among potential survivors of child trafficking. Both victims and their parents may provide a counterclaim, for instance stating that the labor was provided voluntarily and with parents’ consent, as happened in the case of a 14-year-old girl working in a household who was initially reported to be taken and exploited by force (Int. 11). In cases of sexual exploitation, the underaged may also be unwilling to report the situation to hide it from their parents (Int. 3).

Overall, plaintiffs’ success in civil and criminal suits and the receipt of compensation is unclear and could be assessed in further studies. Interviewees were not alone in their concern over the limited number of prosecuted and convicted traffickers, which has also been reported elsewhere (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). The available statistics on terminated criminal cases do not allow estimating the share from the total number of cases, as it is not clear whether the total number refers to all offenses or only those registered in the reporting period. Nevertheless, the table below provides a glimpse into the number of cases terminated for two reasons following MIA statistics:

Table 8: Number of Offenses as a Function of the Crime and the Year¹¹

Offense	2023		2022		2021		2020		2019	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Incitement to Suicide (Article 105)	0	7036	0	452	0	426	0	479	0	548
Torture (Article 110)	2	21	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	1
Rape (Article 120)	11	733	3	139	0	120	11	134	61	188
Violent Act of a Sexual Nature (Article 121)	7	167	0	16	0	29	0	24	9	15
<i>Sexual Intercourse/ Other Act of a Sexual Nature with a Person Under 16 (Article 122)</i>	33	281	1	19	0	23	0	23	0	24
<i>Corruption of Minors (Article 124)</i>	1	161	0	10	0	11	0	20	0	18
Kidnapping (Article 125)	1	47	0	6	0	7	0	4	3	11
Illegal Deprivation of Freedom (Article 126)	11	62	0	2	2	3	1	7	1	5
TIP (Article 128)	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Involvement of a Minor in Prostitution (Article 134)</i>	1	6	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Trafficking in Minors (Article 135)</i>	0	13	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	1
<i>Illegal Adoption Activities (Article 137)</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violation of Labor Legislation (Article 152)	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1
Violation of the Labor Legislation in Respect to Minors (Article 153)	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violation of Labor Protection Regulations (Article 156)	56	650	1	65	2	62	3	71	1	70
Total number of offenses	20650	56209	3783	5364	3392	5465	4463	7488	8167	10358

Child-specific crimes are italicized.

¹¹ 1 - Number of offenses for which criminal cases were terminated under paragraphs 3), 4), 9), 10), 11), and 12) of Part 1 of Articles 35 and 36 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2 - Number of offenses for which criminal cases were terminated under paragraphs 1), 2), 5), 6), 7), and 8) of Part 1 of Article 35 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Committee on Legal Statistics and Special Accounts of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.).

The first group refers to terminations for amnesty; expiration of the statute of limitations; perpetrator's insanity, death, or exemption from criminal liabilities; and presence of privileges or immunity from criminal prosecution (Article 35 of the *Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2021). This group also includes termination of cases with exemption from criminal liability as well as a waiver of criminal prosecution of the accused due to stolen funds recovery, reconciliation of parties, fulfillments of terms,... although these kinds of termination are not allowed if any of the parties object (Article 36 of the *Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2021). The second group of reasons for termination includes the absence of the criminal offense or of corpus delicti, the absence of a complaint from the victim, an unconstitutional application of the law, and others with further exceptions (Article 35 of the *Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2021).

8.3. Expanding the Service Coverage

Multiple interviewees emphasized the necessity of expanding services to ensure survivors of human trafficking a safe return to their countries of origin and re-integration into their families. In addition to addressing the uncertainty after receiving social services (Int. 19), this would reduce the risks of repeated exploitation and being subject to human trafficking (Int. 17). Initially covered by the IOM, the return practice and costs are currently borne by NGOs (Int. 19). However, due to the lack of monitoring and accountability, the actual return of service recipients to their countries of origin, as well as an awareness of their destiny upon discharge from an organization, is lacking, as at times, individuals allegedly returning home do not cross the border (Int. 13). In other words, the current scope of the assistance and the eight types of services provided to survivors of human trafficking generally end at a shelter, unless NGOs have financing to monitor the safe return and integration of a service recipient into a family.

As shown above, both state and civil society organizations offer a broad range of services to assist a survivor of human and child trafficking in the recovery process. However, these services primarily target survivors rather than the environment to which they ought to return. In addition to preparing a survivor to reconnect with family and friends, accept the situation, and learn to manage others' expectations (Int. 6), the services should equally target the environment that, in a way, allowed for child trafficking in the first place (Int. 20). Importantly, one interviewee noted that work with the family, for instance, should not "blame for not paying attention" but rather focus on circumstances that prevented the family from ensuring the child's well-being (Int. 20). There will indeed be multiple reasons, including economic, social, and psychological well-being, as the vulnerability of parents closely affects the vulnerability of a child. Accordingly, an emphasis should be placed on family reunification, working on parents' addictions (ibid.) and stressing the

importance of children's education. Interviewees noted that though parents wish the best for their children, some parents may not allow their children to go to schools so that they can retain the income gained through the children's involvement in begging, for instance (Int. 1). In this regard, one interviewee noted that separate consultation for a child and a parent, with parental permission, would be beneficial, as some children experience high pressure and control from their parents (Int. 8).

8.4. Further Areas to Target

At a systemic level, there is a need to include a broader range of stakeholders and increase their awareness of their roles in identifying and referring potential survivors of child trafficking, particularly in education and healthcare systems.

The school system is at the forefront of the identification process. Interviewees noted that teachers and school psychologists are the first to note the missing child or changing behavior, which may hint at further issues, including exploitation (Int. 16). In 2022, pedagogical support was implemented to support families in difficult living situations, such as migrant families, to monitor and support children in collaboration with related authorities such as the juvenile police (Int. 9). Annually, a social passport is developed at schools, with a social worker compiling and studying the list of vulnerable families and those who have persons with special needs to support children living in these families (ibid.). A social pedagogue develops the work plan before the beginning of the school year and implements this plan throughout the school year, in addition to maintaining the school's social passport and information on pupils in paper or electronic formats (Minister of Education, 2021).

The social pedagogue also keeps a logbook of pupils with challenging behavior on a monthly basis in paper or electronic format (Minister of Education, 2021). The social pedagogue's work also includes activities based around the protection of children's rights, interactions with other organizations, including juvenile departments of the police and guardianship and tutelage authorities (ibid.). In addition to the categories listed by an interviewee above, the school's social passport indicates the number and the share of pupils in single-headed families, and households with many children (ibid.). It also indicates the share of children living in low-income families, orphans and children left without parental care, children with special needs, stateless or with foreign citizenship, and children registered at the juvenile department of police or internal school control bodies (ibid.).

However, the implementation of these activities is contingent on the availability and motivation of social pedagogues at school, which relates to broader issues in the education system. Interviewees

noted that in the current situation of overcrowded schools and overworked teachers, the likelihood of them paying due attention is low (Int. 10), which may also be the reason for a perception that state social support to families is nonexistent or insufficiently fine-grained to account for inequalities, both at urban and rural levels (Int. 20). However, educational organizations in large cities are equally affected: In 2021, 28 classes of first graders were reported to have been recruited to one of the secondary schools in Almaty (Sputnik, 2021). A similar issue was reported in Astana in 2023, with 47 individuals in the study room (Mukhitkyzy, 2023). The large number of pupils and the limited facility undoubtedly affect the abilities of teachers or social pedagogues to perform their work. However, this structural issue requires research on its own, and it cannot be unfolded within the framework of this study.

Equally, medical professionals are essential when it comes to weighing health or social risks to the life, health or development of the child. A vivid example is a visiting health professional (*патронажная медсестра*) responsible for supervising pregnant and children under 5 (Int. 2). Mandatory patronage observation includes two prenatal visits to a pregnant woman and nine home visits as the child grows (Minister of Healthcare, 2022a). These home-based preventive and informational activities of the visiting health professional are based on the universal-progressive model recommended by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which aims to identify and reduce the medical and social risks to the life, health, and development of a child (ibid.).

According to two interviewees, this initiative was introduced in 2016 and primarily targets vulnerable families (Int. 7) to assess the overall environment for children and to consult mothers on breastfeeding and child development processes (Int. 2). During the home visit, patronage nurse assesses the physical development of a child, builds parental skills on child care and development, and also carries out social risks assessment (Int. 7). A good overview of indicators targeted by a visiting health professional is provided in the joint publication by the Ministry of Healthcare, the Republican Center for Health Development, UNICEF, and the Union of Medical Colleges of Kazakhstan "Universal Progressive Model of Home-Visiting Services for Pregnant Women and Young Children at the Primary Health Care Level" (Babayeva et al., 2018).

The health visits take place in the following way. In the case of a pregnant woman, the visiting health professional enquires about her health, mental well-being, and safety and informs the woman about physical and mental changes associated with pregnancy, preparations for childbirth, and warning signs of pregnancy (Minister of Healthcare, 2022c). In the case of a newborn, the visiting health professional evaluates the overall health of the child, the safety of the home environment, parents'/legal guardians' mood, and the mother's well-being, as well as informs the parents about childcare, immunization, and danger signs of illnesses requiring immediate attention (ibid.). At this point, the visiting health professional also assesses social risks to the life, health, safety, and

development of the child, and if any are identified, they relay these risks to the social worker of the primary healthcare (PHC) organization to which the family is assigned (ibid.). Finally, in the case of a young child, the visiting health professional assesses the child's physical and mental well-being and the mother's well-being and trains parents/legal guardians on developmental and hygiene issues, emphasizing the importance of joint participation in the child's upbringing (ibid.). The visiting health professional also informs the guardians about immunization and the signs of childhood illnesses, in addition to assessing the social risks potentially endangering the child's life, health, safety, and development, and, if any such risks are identified, informing the social worker of the family's PHC organization (ibid.).

The identified risks are categorized as either "low", "moderate" or "high." Low risks include issues related to breastfeeding, hygiene, and communication issues, which are then targeted by a nurse individually or in collaboration with a primary care physician (Minister of Healthcare, 2022c). Moderate or high risks refer to cruel treatment, violence, and neglect, or whenever the child has special needs or the family is in need of social support (ibid.). In this situation, the visiting health professional informs a social worker and psychologist of the PHC organization and/or the authorities responsible for public health, education, and social protection at the city, regional, or national levels, territorial police departments, and NGOs (ibid.).

An individual plan of action on how to target the identified issues is developed in cases of moderate or high risks (Minister of Healthcare, 2022c). The plan is developed by a broad range of stakeholders, including the visiting health professional, a social worker and a psychologist from the PHC organization, the parents, and state and civil society organizations (Minister of Healthcare, 2022b). The plan is supposed to list the specific activities, parties responsible for their implementation, deadlines, and notes regarding whether these activities were actually implemented. It is then signed by the child's legal guardians, a visiting health professional, a social worker, and a general practitioner (ibid.). The presence of the individual plan for pregnant women, newborns, and children in need of special support due to medical or social risks to the life, health, or development is consonant with the "progressive approach" indicated above (Minister of Healthcare, 2022c).

However, the quality of patronage services largely depends on systemic issues, including staff shortages and overworked medical professionals. A psychologist responsible for six territorial units (Int. 7) may be overworked, which affects their ability to deliver quality service. Similarly, a health facility at the primary care level has three nurses, and one of them is specifically assigned to conduct up to nine health visits (Int. 19). Conducting this number of visits with many families amidst conditions of staff shortage is burdensome. Interviewees noted general issues with staff shortage related to maternity leave (Int. 7), but also that 30–40% of territorial units have a visiting

health professional, and a unit may have 200–500 children (Int. 19). Issues related to the ineffectiveness of health visits and their use in the primary care system are also reported in the 2024–2030 Concept for Mother and Child Health (Electronic Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.-a).

8.5. Missing Mechanisms of Referral

Multiple interviewees emphasized the necessity to clarify the referral procedures in the following areas. Three interviewees asked for more specificity in visiting health professionals' referral of high-risk cases to other organizations. Six interviewees highlighted collaboration issues in intersectoral mobile groups, and three interviewees pointed out the lack of referral mechanisms in cases of child involvement in begging.

First, the potential cases of child trafficking or child exploitation encountered by medical workers, be they visiting health professionals or other professionals, are referred to law enforcement bodies and not recorded in health information systems. TiP victims are not screened/identified by medical workers until they report on being exploited. The protocol for the identification of potential victims in medical institutions is not available and medical personnel are not trained to handle it. According to two interviewees, medical professionals encountering potential survivors of TIP or exploitation are required to inform law enforcement bodies of such cases and engage a psychologist to work with the potential survivor (Int. 7). Yet no statistics are kept, and information on such cases is not recorded in health-related information systems (*ibid.*), since health information systems only record and report services provided, be it psychological or medical (Int. 2). In other words, the system is categorized according to services rather than the recipients. Similarly, a visiting health professional inserts the information on provided services into information systems (Int. 2), but the issues are reported to a chief physician, local police, and guardianship and custody agency (Int. 7).

As indicated above, the number of stakeholders informed about the social risks endangering the life, well-being, health, and safety of children depends on the level of the risks identified. In cases of high risk, including cruel treatment, violence, and neglect, or whenever the child has special needs or the family needs social support, the visiting health professional ought to inform multiple organizations (Minister of Healthcare, 2022c). These include a social worker and psychologist of a PHC organization and/or the authorities responsible for public health, education, and social protection at the city, regional, or national levels, territorial police departments, and NGOs (*ibid.*). However, one interviewee pointed out the lack of procedure specifying the referral and recording of such cases, as a visiting health professional may orally inform the head physician, who then contacts the police (or maybe not) with no official request sent from an organization to the police

(Int. 17). Indeed, the “Standard on Pediatric Care” (2022) specifies that stakeholders ought to be informed of high risks to the child’s well-being, safety, health, and life, but it does not provide further specifications on how visiting health professionals or PHC staff members involved in such cases ought to inform other stakeholders. Furthermore, the formulation “and/or” leaves further uncertainty as to which stakeholders are required to be informed of such cases.

Second, the mobile groups are indeed critical to developing intersectoral collaboration, which could be extended in terms of coverage and consistency. Interviewees highlighted the necessity of involving a broad range of actors, including healthcare, education systems, in order to unite the available resources and ensure the recovery of survivors of child trafficking (Int. 20). Overall, interviewees were positive about the intersectoral mobile groups and their roles in expanding collaboration (Int. 11 & 18) compared to an intersectoral commission under the MIA, which was described as overly “formal” by some (Int. 20). Intersectoral collaboration has been expanded to the identification and prevention processes so far, though the participation of some sectors, including health, education, and probably guardianship and custody agencies, remains somewhat limited. Similarly, the collaboration between NGOs and state authorities working in education and healthcare was reported to be problematic (Int. 1) in the following ways. Collaboration with the police and prosecutors’ offices seems to be case-dependent, with some organizations struggling (Int. 11) due to the mistrust of organizations funded from abroad (Int. 1). Interviewees also expressed doubt about state organizations’ referral of potential survivors of TIP to them (Int. 1). They reported continuously contacting local law enforcement bodies, for instance, to enquire about potential cases and legal support needed for individuals currently kept (Int. 18). These suggestions demonstrate the necessity of a systemic approach to intersectoral collaboration because, as another interviewee noted, the cooperation of NGOs with other stakeholders is built on “personal contacts,” when they should instead be based on systemic regulations (Int. 10). Moreover, some interviewees noted collaboration issues as a result of staff rotation (Int. 6).

The third issue repeatedly recalled by interviewees during the data collection process was the lack of referral mechanisms for both state and NGOs encountering begging with the involvement of children. Two interviewees noted that state services seemed to have “accepted” the current state of affairs (Int. 1), with begging being perceived as child exploitation but not child trafficking (Int. 20). Yet interviewees were unsure of their roles or the role of KATCH in tackling this problem (Int. 1), noting that the current activities conducted by law enforcement bodies were insufficient (Int. 20). Overall, three interviewees called for the need to develop a set of regulations for both NGOs and state actors on how to respond to such cases and asked about the possibility of targeting this matter in the current project (Int. 1, 6 & 20). Separate attention was paid to children with special

needs and possibly teaching children (and others) how to express/understand “I am in trouble” in sign language (Int. 1).

Notably, begging practices involving children are not limited to specific regions or cities. This issue has also been discussed in some mass media sources. One source specifically problematizes the involvement of children in this activity and points at the lack of a definition of begging in legislation, limiting police activities to issuing a fine and leading to difficulties in locating the person for ignoring the fine (Krutova, 2023). Begging is also common in large cities, especially in public transportation (Aladina, 2022). Begging is qualified as “molestation in public places,” and it is penalized by a warning or a fine up to five monthly calculated indices (17,250 KZT or about 38 USD)¹², and if committed by a foreigner may result in an arrest for up to five days and/or administrative expulsion from the country (Article 449 of the *The Code on Administrative Infractions*, 2023). If repeated, a person is fined for ten monthly calculated indices (34,500 KZT or 75 USD) or an administrative arrest for up to five days (ibid.). The prevalence of the Lyuli ethnic minority in begging has also been noted elsewhere, along with concerns about the security and health of children involved in begging and the associated violation of the children’s right to education guaranteed by the government (Zeng, n.d.).

8.6. Legislative Changes

Interviewees problematized the viability and comprehensiveness of selected laws and normative regulations on child and human trafficking.

First, they questioned the viability of clauses on “sale” and forced retention in human and child trafficking. Indeed, Article 128 on Trafficking in Persons in the Criminal Code defines TIP as “the purchase, sale or other transaction of a person, as well as his/her exploitation or recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, receipt, as well as the commission of other acts for exploitation purposes” (*Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2021). Similarly, Article 135 on Trafficking in Minors in the Criminal Code defines it as “the purchase, sale or other transactions in respect of a minor, as well as his/her exploitation or recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, receipt, as well as other acts for the purpose of exploitation” (ibid.). However, several interviewees noted that a sale and a purchase of a child or an adult is difficult to prove (Int. 1 & 13), with potential human trafficking cases being requalified to deprivation of freedom, organization of a brothel, prostitution, or other offenses (Int. 3). In this regard, one interviewee noted that the legislation is “flexible” (Int. 18). As a result, the flexibility of the legislation and

¹² Exchange rate as of 11 December 2023. Monthly calculated index for 2023 is 3,450 KZT (See *Monthly calculated index: living wage for 1995-2024*, n.d.).

practical challenges in proving individual components of TIP's definition as stated in the law makes it difficult to recognize potential TIP survivors as actual TIP survivors.

Similarly, the clause on forced retention of a person does not seem viable. Two interviewees noted that given the extreme weather conditions, escape is difficult if not impossible for an adult kept on remote farmland in steppes, not to mention children (Int. 10). Moreover, a person living in human trafficking conditions may not contact the police because they are threatened, blackmailed, and intimidated by their "employers" (Int. 1). In other words, in addition to physical barriers, one should consider the psychological abuse and personal reality of living in human trafficking conditions when assessing survivors' ability to free themselves.

Furthermore, in relation to comprehensiveness, respondents emphasized the necessity of including cybersex trafficking, including via webcam, in legislation (Int. 3) because sexual exploitation as defined in legislation is primarily associated with sexual intercourse and does not encompass online means (Int. 19). Indeed, crimes against the sexual inviolability of minors include rape or sexual intercourse with the use of violence (Article 120), violent "acts of a sexual nature" (Article 121), and sexual intercourse/other "acts of a sexual nature" with a person under 16 (Article 122). Coercion to sexual intercourse (Article 123), enticement of minors into prostitution (Article 134), production of erotic products (Article 144), or those containing pornographic images of minors (Article 312) also qualify as crimes against the sexual inviolability of minors (*Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 2021). However, the researcher did not find any specifications of what sexual intercourse means or whether it is limited to physical or online means. The relevance of interviewees' suggestions could certainly be further explored within the framework of KATCH.

Another issue raised during the data collection process was that the official assessment criteria and questions are the same for adults and children (Int. 17, 18 & 19) (see Annex Three). Multiple reasons were identified for the different identification criteria and questionnaires for adult and child survivors of human trafficking. Among others, interviewees pointed out difficulties in understanding the definitions and terms, such as exploitation (Int. 3). Furthermore, the realization of being involved in TIP can take time. Individuals may not realize they were victims of human trafficking, and long psychological work may be required (Int. 3). Through this work, a person may open up and recall the details of their trafficking and exploitation. One interviewee noted that both an adult and a child need to feel safe first before being questioned and may not necessarily open up for days (Int. 18). Providing a feeling of safety is essential to guide the person out of the depression that most survivors of human trafficking experience, and immediate questioning about trafficking and exploitation may result in an adult or a child becoming "withdrawn" (ibid.). Moreover, sexual exploitation, for instance, could be identified indirectly through play therapy and work with a psychologist and not necessarily revealed during the first interview or meeting (Int.

3). Accordingly, identification criteria and questions for underaged survivors of child trafficking ought to be different (Int. 11), which could be implemented through the expansion of the current criteria or the development of separate identification criteria (Int. 3).

Multiple interviewees stated that human and child trafficking should be prosecuted to prevent further crimes. Impunity for child molestation, among others, contributes to teenage pregnancy, where men circumvent the law by claiming that the girl seems to be over 18 (Int. 13). Prevention will not work without punishment of child molestation and exploiters (Int. 3 & 4). Interviewees noted that cases involving children do not always make it to the court (Int. 3), and a right that one cannot defend is “nonexistent” (Int. 10).

8.7. Systematic Training

Systematic training of all stakeholders on child trafficking and exploitation is essential to identifying, referring, and providing special social services to TIP survivors. Three interviewees reported encountering no case of child trafficking in their work (Int. 1, 2 & 9), and three others indicated just a few cases of child trafficking in their work (Int. 9, 12 & 13). The limited encounter in NGOs is understandable, as unaccompanied children are referred to the Adaptation Centers for Minors (Int. 3, 6, 11 & 16), though those working in education, healthcare, and orphanages may equally report not coming across survivors of child trafficking (Int. 3 & 9). This limited encounter is a result of limited staff awareness and/or no identification/screening procedures established in these institutions. During the data collection process, a project team came across numerous references to child trafficking as a prerogative of the MIA and not other organizations, even though the roles of other organizations in the identification and further recovery processes are equally important, as discussed in this report. Rejections to participate in the research were reported elsewhere, too (see Haarr, 2012), though it was not the rejection itself but the reasoning that was instructive for emphasizing the necessity of intersectoral collaboration and training.

Training is essential to increase stakeholders’ awareness of their roles in the identification, referral, and provision of social services to survivors of child trafficking, both in relation to the “Standards on the Special Social Services” (2023) and the NAP. Training activities could be provided by NGOs (Int. 16) due to their experience with training professionals working in education, healthcare, and social protection departments at a local level (Int. 11). However, a more systematic approach is needed, as the work conducted by NGOs could be, as one interviewee aptly put it, “a drop in the ocean” (Int. 10). One interviewee lamented that the low number of identified survivors of human trafficking and the limited number of criminal charges making it to the court are the outcomes of insufficient training within law enforcement bodies (Int. 20). This issue is expected to be addressed

in the following NAP for 2024–2026 through a project jointly implemented by the MIA and the IOM (see Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

Still, training healthcare and education workers remains an issue. In addition to continuous training on identification (Int. 20), the activities could cover anonymity and confidentiality issues at schools and healthcare facilities (Int. 16). Visiting health professionals, pediatricians, general practitioners and social workers at PHC organizations could be targeted in particular, as they, unlike the police, have access to households (Int. 13). Indeed, medical professionals receive substantial training and certification on medical, social, and psychological aspects (Int. 7), but the training activities could additionally address their awareness of TIP and its risks.

Furthermore, intersectoral collaboration could also be strengthened through joint training for NGOs and state organizations, for instance on the application of the new law (Int. 11 & 19). Moreover, due to high staff rotation in state institutions (Int. 6), the activities should also aim at training staff and developing the guidelines (Int. 17).

8.8. Continuous Awareness-Raising

Continuous awareness-raising about child trafficking and its risks is essential to prevent child trafficking and identification of potential cases. Interviewees emphasized the need for continuous awareness-raising activities targeting vulnerable families (Int. 16), children with special needs and their parents, and the places of youth gathering (Int. 6) at a systematic level (Int. 6). They suggested insufficient awareness among children (Int. 20) in terms of online exploitation and Internet safety (Int. 3) and stressed the significance of parental awareness of TIP and related issues (Int. 3 & 7). Respondents identified the positive outcomes of such work as children being aware of their rights (Int. 18), noting that a child who is informed about how to act in certain situations is not an easy prey to recruiters (Int. 6).

Some related activities are already conducted by state and civil society organizations. Internal affairs bodies, for instance, organize seminars and roundtables on subjects such as cyberbullying, the right to bodily integrity, suicide, and other topics (Int. 4). These activities are conducted monthly (ibid.). Other seminars were reported to be conducted by other stakeholders on employment rights and regulations, employment contracts, the worst forms of child labor, and the responsibilities of parents (Int. 9). Similarly, keeping safe on the streets and social networks are also reportedly discussed to prevent violence and abuse (Int. 2). Overall, these awareness-raising activities involve parents, the juvenile police, psychologists, social and medical workers, and medical workers, depending on the subject being discussed (Int. 4). However, no specific seminars on child trafficking by other stakeholders were reported (Int. 2). NGOs also conduct awareness-

raising activities on topics such as safety on the Internet and on the streets (Int. 16) as well as child trafficking and its risks, but the activities seem contingent on the availability of financing or grants (Int. 20).

At the same time, awareness-raising activities among children ought to be delivered in an attractive and accessible form. It may be delivered through colorful booklets (Int. 1), trainings, meetings, and seminars (Int. 3). Indeed, the content should account for the local mentality and religious beliefs of certain groups, particularly in the context of sensitive topics (Int. 16). At the same time, interviewees criticized the common approach of preparing video clips and called for innovative solutions (Int. 20) that would deliver the information in an accessible way for children to absorb and retain it (Int. 6). They pointed out the limited use of social networks such as Telegram and TikTok (Int. 20), where 30-second videos might be broadcast instead of advertisements (Int. 3). Respondents advocated using available screens for the related content (Int. 6), even by enlisting people who are famous among youth to discuss the problem of child trafficking (Int. 11) and cybersecurity (Int. 6). The content could also address the importance of safe behavior and identifying a circle of people they can trust, since these crimes are not necessarily conducted by strangers but by people “little-known” (*малознакомый*) to the child (Int. 20). The awareness-raising activities could also be transmitted in the form of transferable skills to children above 14 years old. Potential topics could expand on how to prepare a CV and explain how to read and understand employment contracts (Int. 16). If well implemented, children demonstrate great interest in such training (Int. 16). The awareness-raising activities could also involve the business sector by emphasizing its sense of social responsibility. Interviewees’ perceptions of this matter varied, with some emphasizing businesses’ disinterest (Int. 3 & 10) and others suggesting the need for involving them (Int. 6) instead of portraying them as “exploiters” (Int. 19). One could, for instance, advocate for cell phone companies sending an SMS about available assistance on the international day of combating human trafficking (Int. 3).

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes with the following recommendations:

First, this study identified multiple factors contributing to the vulnerability of children to TIP. The following five findings are pertinent to preventing child trafficking and child exploitation:

- (i) The age-specific vulnerability of children to TIP suggested in this study is critical to informing the awareness-raising activities and developing age-responsive measures to prevent TIP among children of specific age groups. The categories identified in this research neatly summarize the

age-specific interests and vulnerabilities of children that could be addressed in informational campaigns.

- (ii) A particular vulnerability of ethnic Lyuli children to labor exploitation requires further investigation and development of awareness-raising activities for representatives of this group, as well as state and civil society organizations working in countering child exploitation and trafficking. As noted in this research, the vulnerability of children from this ethnic group, observed by several interviewees, is not limited to specific regions, and therefore requires a broader investigation and subsequent response reckoning with the identity of this group while also preventing/combating child exploitation.
- (iii) Addressing the vulnerability of children to involvement in begging requires the development of clear identification and referral mechanisms for the state and civil society organizations.
- (iv) The particular vulnerability of migrant children equally calls for attention and synergy with other programs targeting human trafficking. Possible synergies here could be explored with the IOM, UNODC, OSCE, and Winrock International (i.e., SMICA) projects listed in Section Four of this report.
- (v) The resilience and recovery factors identified in this research (literacy, awareness of TIP, and trust-filled relationships with parents and caregivers, tolerance to stress) emphasize the personal and environmental traits supporting the necessity of targeting child trafficking not just at an individual (shelter), but also at the family (meso) and community (macro) levels. This broader emphasis implies the awareness of child trafficking and child exploitation at the meso and macro levels. The NAP outlines multiple activities in this area (Section 4. Major Upcoming Initiatives), which could certainly be explored within the activities of KATCH.

Second, in relation to the role of ICT in prevention and identification of child trafficking and referral of survivors of child trafficking, this study calls for the following:

- (i) There is a need for further research on the role of ICT in the child trafficking recruitment processes due to the limited awareness of this phenomenon among stakeholders involved in identifying potential TIP survivors. This finding was not limited to any specific sector, including stakeholders from both state and civil society organizations.
- (ii) This study found extensive use of ICT in the referral of TIP survivors, with further specifications for prevention and referral planned in the NAP. For instance, intersectoral groups could more intentionally leverage social media to raise awareness about TIP among youth. Child TIP stakeholders could consider integrating prevention, identification, and referral activities to enhance responses to child trafficking via ICT.

(iii) Data collection, confidentiality, and analysis require further cooperation among state and civil society actors with the harmonization of recording and reporting parameters to allow for a unification and comprehensive analysis of data on child trafficking in Kazakhstan. Undoubtedly, these activities require the involvement and commitment of stakeholders outlined in this report, despite that these areas did not feature substantially in the NAP.

Third, the Social Code (2023) and the Standard (2023) stipulate a broad range of services for TIP survivors. However, based on interviews, this study found the state-guaranteed services to be contingent upon the recognition of a survivor's TIP status. This status is identified following the state-stipulated assessment criteria, which has reportedly hindered service provision by NGOs providing services under social service contracting, in turn resulting in non-utilization of designated funds. This study calls for:

- (i) Further investigation into this issue, and for increasing the awareness of state agencies and NGOs of their functions in the identification of survivors of child trafficking.
- (ii) Increasing the stakeholders' awareness of the non-utilization of finances in multiple regions of Kazakhstan to emphasize the scale of this issue and attempt to negotiate common grounds to resolve it.

Fourth, and finally, as part of addressing the existing gaps in identifying and referring survivors of child trafficking and ensuring their access to special social services, this study calls for the following:

- (i) Continuing awareness and training activities in this area as per the NAP. Specific emphasis should be placed on systemic and continuous training of social pedagogues and psychologists at schools, as well as health professionals, psychologists, social workers, and head doctors at PHC facilities. Equally, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights and its regional counterparts should be targeted, as they are not explicitly addressed in the NAP;
- (ii) This study also calls for the continued support of intersectoral activities to overcome the collaboration issues and mistrust among stakeholders reported by some interviewees;
- (iii) Expansion of service coverage beyond individuals in shelters to include families and repatriation of survivors of child trafficking should also be considered within the KATCH capacities. This expansion should also entail searching for opportunities for continuous awareness-raising activities among all stakeholders involved in prevention and combatting child trafficking;
- (iv) The irregularities in the definitions of human and child trafficking and the utilization of the same assessment criteria for adult and child survivors of TIP were reported to hinder the identification of potential and recognition of actual TIP survivors. These issues require further

discussion with the state and civil society organizations to develop the necessary legal recommendations;

- (v) Finally, a referral mechanism should be developed in relation to visiting health professionals' reports of risks to child and maternal health and for cases of state and NGO encounters with child involvement in begging.

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11. Annexes

Annex One: List of Conducted Interviews

All interviews were conducted between 10 October and 27 October 2023, with one additional clarification provided on 08 December 2023. For anonymity concerns, no specific date and place are indicated in the table below:

#	Interview
1.	Int. 1
2.	Int. 2
3.	Int. 3
4.	Int. 4
5.	Int. 5
6.	Int. 6
7.	Int. 7
8.	Int. 8
9.	Int. 9
10.	Int. 10
11.	Int. 11
12.	Int. 12
13.	Int. 13
14.	Int. 14
15.	Int. 15
16.	Int. 16
17.	Int. 17
18.	Int. 18
19.	Int. 19
20.	Int. 20

Annex Two: Sample Interview Consent Form for Stakeholders Involved in Combatting Child Trafficking in Kazakhstan

Declaration of consent to provide information to the research aimed at a rapid situational assessment of the child trafficking context and response in southern Kazakhstan

conducted by [researcher's full name], an independent consultant engaged by Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development (Winrock International), and reachable via [researcher's email].

I herewith declare my consent to provide information to the project indicated above. I have been informed about the content and purpose of the above-mentioned project:

This research is conducted within the KATCH project implemented by Winrock International and financed by the U.S. Department of State. This study aims to analyze the child trafficking situation and response in southern Kazakhstan in order to identify the factors contributing to the vulnerability and resilience of children to trafficking. It is also intended to outline major stakeholders in this area and identify the gaps in services currently offered to the survivors of child trafficking.

I am aware that the research project is conducted within the KATCH project, but the person responsible for this research is the independent consultant.

I agree that the information I provide will be processed and stored at Winrock International. I have been ensured that my personal data will not be revealed anywhere. I am aware that the information provided during an interview will be anonymized and used for the above-mentioned research.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and without any personal disadvantage. If I demand this, the information I have provided or any parts thereof as specified by me will be erased entirely, and I will receive a confirmation of this.

Should I have any questions about the storage of the information provided by me or require any clarification concerning the information, its use, or the project context, I will contact the independent consultant using the email indicated above.

Should I have any questions or concerns about how I was treated during the discussion or my rights as a participant, I will contact Winrock International in Kazakhstan at [contact details of staff members of Winrock International in Kazakhstan].

Annex Three: Assessment Criteria for the Presence of TIP and Other Forms of Exploitation and Kidnapping

#	A list of criteria for assessing ill-treatment of TIPs, including minors, and forms of exploitation and kidnapping ¹³	Indicators for assessing ill-treatment of TIPs, including minors, and other forms of exploitation and kidnapping (points)
1.	Purpose of TIPs, including minors, and other forms of exploitation and kidnapping	
2.	Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation	
3.	Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of forced labor	
4.	Trafficking in minor children for the purpose of illegal adoption	
5.	Trafficking in persons for the purpose of forced begging	
6.	Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of illegal removal of human organs and tissues	
	Total for this section	
7.	Acts committed against a person	
8.	The purchase, sale, or other transaction of a person (e.g., gift, exchange, lease, leaving a person as a security for fulfillment of an obligation, the transfer of a person in order to receive any benefits of a non-property nature, etc.)	
9.	Use by the perpetrator for forced labor (i.e., any work or service required via the use of violence or the threat thereof), for the performance of work for which that person has not voluntarily offered his or her services (except in cases provided for by the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan).	
10.	Use by the perpetrator for prostitution or other services in which a person is forced to render sexual services without material gain.	
11.	Compelling a person to engage in begging (i.e., to commit an antisocial act involving asking other persons for money and/or other property).	
12.	Other actions related to the exercise of power by a perpetrator over a person who, for reasons beyond his control, cannot refuse to perform work and/or services for the perpetrator and/or another person.	
13.	Recruitment—obtaining the consent of the victim to perform any work or any activity, including unlawful actions, if it is related to the purpose of his/her exploitation.	
14.	Transportation—deliberately moving a person from one place to another, including within the same locality, for the purpose of exploitation.	

¹³ All categories have been translated and indicated here verbatim (Annex 2 to the Standard for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of Human Trafficking. See Minister of Healthcare, 2022c).

15.	Transfer—the direct transfer of a victim to another person for the purpose of exploitation.	
16.	Concealment—hiding the victim from law enforcement agencies, relatives, and other individuals (e.g., concealment in special premises, preventing a person from leaving a particular area, withholding medication, suppression of physical or mental activity).	
17.	Obtaining—directly obtaining a person for exploitation or further transfer.	
18.	Abduction for the purpose of exploitation.	
19.	Unlawful deprivation of liberty for the purpose of exploitation.	
	Total for this section	
20.	Means used against a person.	
21.	Use or threat of violence dangerous to life and health.	
22.	Use of weapons or objects used as weapons.	
23.	Deception or abuse of trust.	
24.	Use of one's official position.	
25.	Use of material or other dependence.	
26.	Use of mental disorder or helplessness.	
27.	Seizure, concealment, or destruction of identity documents.	
	Total for this section	
28.	Harm caused to a person.	
29.	Beatings or other violent actions that caused physical pain, but did not entail consequences.	
30.	Physical or mental suffering caused as a result of systematic beatings or other violent acts.	
31.	The infliction of non-life-threatening harm that resulted in a long-term health disorder.	
32.	The infliction of life-threatening harm that resulted in loss of sight, speech, hearing or any organ, or the loss of its functions; such harm can be or expressed in permanent disfigurement of the face or the manifestation of a health disorder (e.g., termination of a pregnancy, a mental disorder, drug addiction or substance abuse).	
	Total for this section	
	Total result	

Annex Four: Example Interview Questions

1. Please elaborate on the work of your organization related to identifying and referring survivors of child trafficking. What other stakeholders do you collaborate with?
2. A person who receives special social services is given a registration card containing comprehensive data potentially useful for further analyzing the child trafficking problem. Where is this information kept, and is it analyzed further?
3. How do you communicate the abovementioned data with other stakeholders, and are they incorporated into prevention and response efforts at the country level?
4. Do you have statistics about children admitted to shelters (e.g., age, origin, sex)? Are those statistics accessible?
5. What kinds of cases of child trafficking and child exploitation did you come across in your practice? (Potential prompts could include, for instance: Were there cases of online sexual exploitation, forced labor, or exploitation in criminal activities?)
6. In your experience, what role did information and communication technologies, including telephone, radio, television, and internet, play in recruitment, transportation, exploitation, and profit management related to human trafficking? Have you come across cases of children exploited online (e.g., pornography, a webcam business) or recruited/groomed online?
7. What kind of training opportunities are there for your staff members? How often do these trainings take place?
8. Do those training opportunities address the sexual violence/trauma potentially experienced by children and provide gender-responsive services to survivors of child trafficking? What about the provision of services appropriate to specific cultures/religions and the issue of potential biases among service providers towards certain groups?
9. The Standard on Special Social Services (2023) provided to survivors of child trafficking stipulates an “individualized” approach to service beneficiaries. What does this approach look like in practice? Are there any differences in services depending on the sex and abilities of a child? Are there specific procedures or assistance (for instance, translation support) available?
10. In your experience, what factors are associated with a child’s vulnerability to human trafficking? What roles do sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic and family status, education, and origin play?
11. Based on your experience working with survivors of child trafficking, what helped those children identify their situation and get support? Were these factors similar across groups according to sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic and family status, education, origin, or another characteristic?
12. What factors contribute to a survivor’s ability to recover from child trafficking? Please share specific examples from your experience. Were these factors similar across groups

according to sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic and family status, education, origin, or another characteristic?

13. The “Standard for the Provision of Special Social Services to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in the Field of Social Protection of the Population” stipulates a broad range of services to survivors of human trafficking (for example, professional consultations). Please elaborate on the role of your organization and its collaboration with other organizations in this process.
14. The abovementioned standard also stipulate that the skills of a survivor of human trafficking should be identified. How does this process occur? What mechanisms are in place for children with special needs?
15. What professions do the survivors of human trafficking typically aspire to?
16. In your opinion, how could the identification and referral of survivors of child trafficking could be improved further? Are the special social services provided to survivors of child trafficking adequate? What would you suggest with regard to children with special needs?
17. Who else would you recommend interviewing?