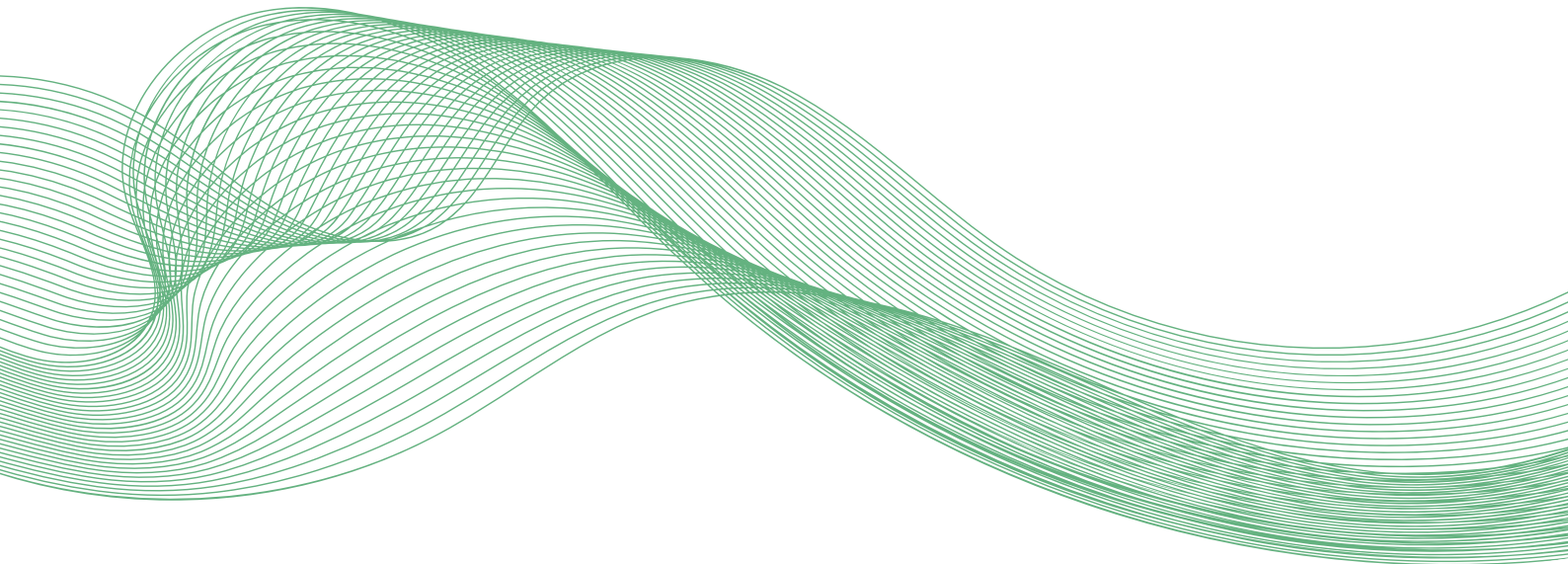




USAID ASIA COUNTER TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Protection in CTIP Briefing: Survivors' Perspectives on Successful Reintegration After Trafficking

Written by Eric Kasper
and Mina Chiang





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This learning brief was developed from “Survivors’ Perspectives on Successful Reintegration After Trafficking”, written by Eric Kasper and Mina Chiang in 2020. It has been prepared with brevity and accessibility of language in mind to reach individuals and organizations working to combat human trafficking at all levels, including grassroots.

You can find the full report [here](#).

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Introduction

Purpose of this briefing:

This briefing aims to understand the experience of reintegration among trafficking survivors, what they think constitutes successful reintegration, and what they feel would best support them in their reintegration journeys.

In the effort to support survivors on their journeys of reintegration, it is important to keep the focus on their experiences and their visions of success. This briefing highlights the main elements of success according to the survivors interviewed in Cambodia and Bangladesh.

In the long term, supporting reintegration means addressing the way trafficking works, and creating new configurations of social, economic, and political systems. This study has been designed in a way to illuminate those systemic structures and dynamics, and to provide insights into entry points for appropriate actions that can lead to systemic change.

Methodology of study:

The research team conducted in-depth interviews of both male and female survivors which focused on the details of survivors' personal experiences and perceptions of reintegration. All the survivors in this study ended up in trafficking after attempting to migrate for work. This study attempts to recentre the discussion of reintegration around survivors' experiences as agents in shaping their own lives rather than from the perspective of providing services.

This study drew on interviews with survivors of trafficking that had attained some degree of success in their reintegration journeys. They do not represent the experiences of all survivors in their own countries.

Reintegration

While it is a common term within the counter-trafficking discourse, its definition tends to be ambiguous, or emphasise on service provision. While access to quality services is definitely an important part of successful reintegration, we have attempted to re-centre the discussion of successful reintegration around the perceptions, knowledge, and aspirations of survivors.

Survivors tended to think about reintegration as being able to survive, escape extreme poverty, and to achieve acceptance and connection within their families and societies. In general, they did not think about reintegration in terms of accessing specific resources, though material resources and support from service providers is indeed an important element in achieving success for most survivors. The key elements of successful reintegration are 1) financial health, 2) mental health, 3) connection with family, and 4) acceptance within society.

Financial health is the ability to earn enough money and to escape or avoid debt. Many survivors are from contexts of extreme poverty, meaning they faced an urgent need to earn enough to survive, which drove them to take risks in migrating illegally, leading to trafficking and even worse financial situations for themselves and families. It is often impossible to achieve successful reintegration by returning to the original context of extreme poverty. Survivors can be supported in attaining financial health by programmes that help them find work.

Mental health involves healing from the traumas of the trafficking experience. Survivors may experience low self-confidence, low levels of self-efficacy, and difficulties feeling comfortable in everyday social settings. Survivors may find psychosocial support helpful, but these must be done in culturally appropriate ways. Survivors may not be comfortable directly exploring mental health issues, and survivors from different countries will have their own ways of understanding and expressing their mental health issues. Our evidence suggests that mental health can be supported by acceptance and support from family and communities.

Connection to family after trafficking can be a major determining factor of success. We observed this to be somewhat more common in Bangladesh than Cambodia, and usually it is women who are rejected. Survivors' economic prospects are also usually bound up with their families'. Families often take on debt to finance a person's efforts to work abroad. When the family member ends up in trafficking, this can exacerbate the hardships of the family. Where possible, interventions should attempt to support whole families.

Acceptance within society is challenging, as survivors typically face some forms of discrimination and stigma from others in their communities. These may not always be directly the result of their trafficking experiences, but rather the ways in which their experiences prevent them from conforming to gendered social norms. Finding ways to support survivors in telling their own stories – for example in small groups – can help build understanding, and impart a sense of agency and visibility to the survivors telling their stories.

Systemic thinking

Reintegration involves reconnecting and reestablishing oneself in society, a complex challenge which requires an understanding of multiple, intersecting systemic issues. We attempted to synthesise the many perspectives from different survivors, their families, community members, and social workers who support them into a coherent picture of how reintegration works as a system.

Pathways to successful reintegration exist within the same complex systems in which trafficking occurs. That means that for all the potential of success, there is also the potential that the survivor remains in the systemic conditions that resulted in the initial trafficking experience. We depict the connections between the factors that constitute and contribute to successful reintegration as a systems map (see figure 1 on the next page).

The key insight of this study is that each element of success is tied up with the others in a complex and systemic relationship. This creates the potential for a feedback loop, which may either keep the survivor trapped in a downward spiral or can help leverage success in one element into success in the others. Working closely with survivors and remaining attuned to those linkages may be the best way to support survivors achieve successful reintegration.

Throughout this report, we will come back to this systemic picture of reintegration so that each insight can be understood in context, including how it intersects with multiple issues.

A guide to reading the systems map:

The circles represent elements of the reintegration system, which are linked together by arrows that represent one element influencing another.
The light blue circle represents successful reintegration after trafficking.
The red circle represents the likelihood of further abuse or exploitation.
The light green circles indicate factors for which we have identified intervention opportunities to support survivor reintegration. Here, the functioning of the system implies that we might gain leverage, and impact may ripple throughout the system.
The dark green and dark blue circles indicate factors related to cultural norms in Bangladesh and Cambodia.
The grey circles represent other issues and factors that we identified as contributing to or impacting the main components of success.
Direct relationships are shown as solid lines with ++ or -- along the arrows. This means that change in one direction for the impacting factor results in a change in the same direction in the impacted factor.
Inverse relationships are shown as dashed arrows. They are also labelled with either + -, indicating that an increase in one leads to a decrease in the other, or vice versa.

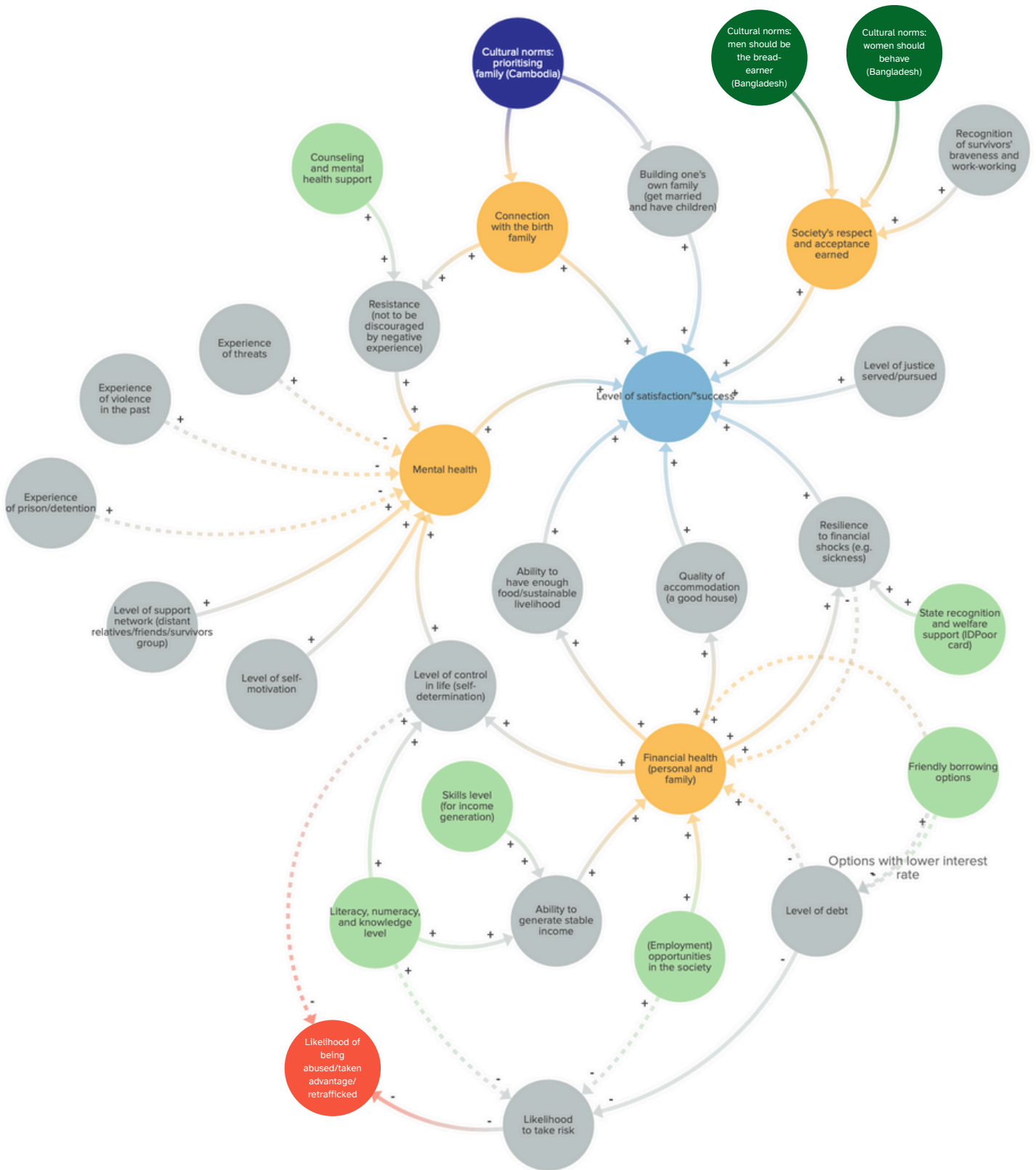


Figure 1. Map of systemic factors impacting successful reintegration after trafficking.

Click [here](#) to explore this map interactively, looking at the factors and their relationships in greater detail.

Key Findings

- Financial health contributes to and defines successful reintegration. Poverty traps are often caused by debt and predatory lending.
- Family contributes to and defines successful reintegration.
- Being accepted by society contributes to and defines successful reintegration.
- Healing from trauma contributes to and defines successful reintegration.
- Ability to generate income and increased control over one's life contribute to successful reintegration.
- In areas with pervasive poverty, livelihood options are extremely limited, which pushes people to take risks on dangerous migration journeys.
- Prison or detention experiences are particularly traumatic; they can decimate survivors' mental health and leave them with a sense of guilt and low self-worth.
- Key stakeholders, including local community leaders, still do not have a clear understanding of human trafficking. This limits their ability to support survivors' reintegration.
- There are many barriers preventing migrants from doing so safely and legally, which leads to increased incidences of trafficking.
- Existing social welfare programmes – including those not directly targeting survivors – can support reintegration and reduce vulnerabilities to trafficking in the first place.

Successful Reintegration Defined by Survivors

This section presents survivors' perspectives on what constitutes successful reintegration, as much as possible in their own voices. For many, success is grounded in basic survival. This is not to say that survivors have no higher aspirations; many survivors spoke about hopes such as the desire to find work that is meaningful, and to create societal changes so that trafficking is reduced and less stigmatised. However, when asked explicitly what they consider to be the definition of success, they emphasised the meeting of basic needs.

Most of the survivors reported having experienced trauma from their trafficking experiences, which resulted in the need to heal and recover their mental health. Based on the prevailing structures of society and the economy, many people in these trafficking-affected communities meet their basic needs through family and other relationships. For all the survivors interviewed, finding one's place in society is a fundamental element of success.

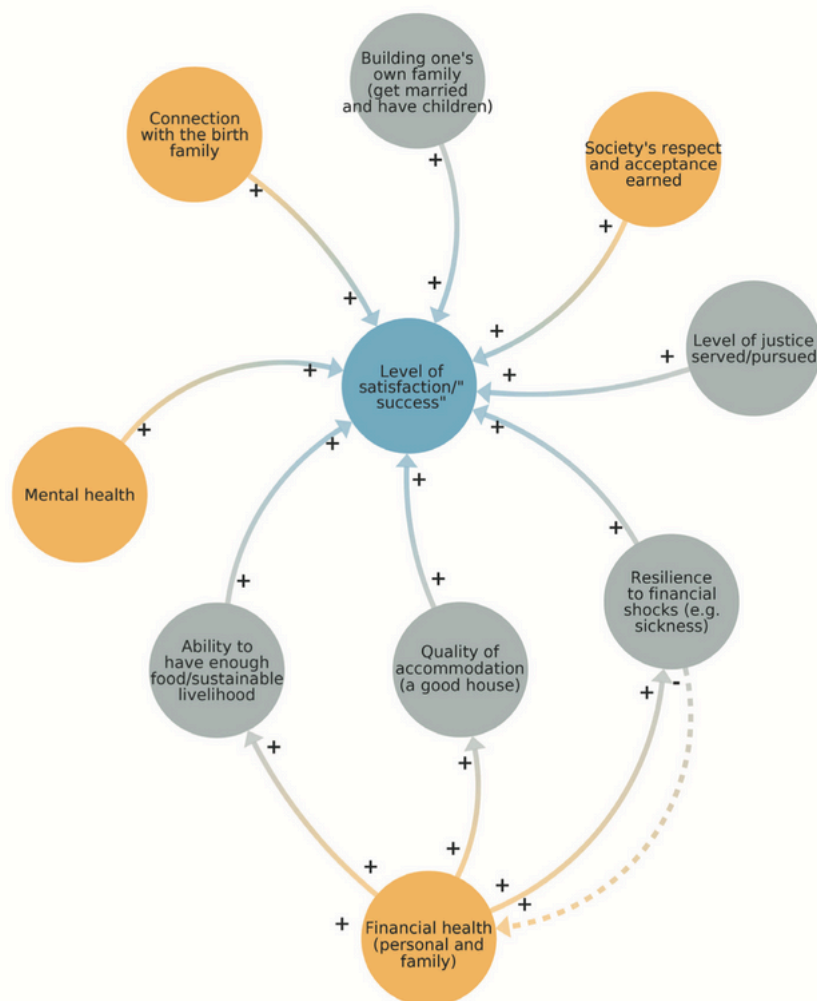


Figure 2. Main components of "success".

Financial health

Financial health is a key element of successful reintegration as defined by survivors. It captures the constellation of closely related issues, including lack of income as well as high levels of debt. In almost every case, survivors experienced debt before and after trafficking; getting out from under the debt was an important element of success.

All survivors we spoke to had been trafficked in the context of migration for work. The need for income had driven them to take risks which resulted in trafficking, and securing a regular, predictable income remained a key objective constituting success during reintegration.

Most of the survivors we spoke to were living in conditions of extreme poverty before trafficking, and these conditions significantly constrained their abilities to achieve successful reintegration. Successful reintegration cannot be synonymous with “returning” if the context to which one returns is the kind of poverty that drives vulnerability to trafficking in the first place. Success in reintegration may require migration if that allows the survivors to escape extreme poverty.

**“Family is no longer in debt and has happiness.”
Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 27)**

**“I am not a successful re-integrated person and without paying the loan I don’t know how much time I would need. I might take three years to be on the right path.”
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No.15)**

People in poverty may subsist with very little money, but even a small financial shock can send them into extreme poverty from which it becomes increasingly difficult to escape. Such shocks often take the form of poor harvests or health problems, meaning medical bills pile up while not being able to work. These shocks lead to debt and desperation, which leads to an increased willingness to take risks.

**“(After returning home) we are our own slaves.”
(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 33)**

Family

Family was mentioned as a key component of success by nearly every survivor we spoke with.

“When I got back to Cambodia, I felt as if I was reborn. Happy. And when I got home, there was warmth.”
(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 43)

Survivors expressed that it had been difficult and painful to leave their families in the first place. Most expressed that a desperate desire to provide money for their families was behind their decision to take the risk of migrating, and the inability to communicate with family while abroad was often expressed as one of the most important violations which made the trafficking experience traumatic.

“Even if I don’t have an occupation to find money for my family, the most important thing for me is to be able to meet them again.”
(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 30)

Different societies prioritise different forms of connection, so survivors vary in terms of the kinds of connections they find meaningful for reintegration. In Bangladesh, we saw instances where survivors had been rejected by their families because of social pressure and stigma. In Cambodia, survivors still faced pressure from society, but their connection to family mediated their interactions within wider society. Their family’s moral and emotional support helped them to overcome the social pressures they faced.

“I had no problems from the side of my family. They supported me. My husband and mother-in-law did not have any problem. But I faced some problems from society. When my husband went out on the street, he would hear a lot from society.”
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 6)

Mental health

In interviews across both countries, there were many signs that mental health is an important aspect of success. The survivors we spoke to in Bangladesh were quite aware of and articulate about mental health issues – we do not expect most survivors in Bangladesh to be so aware of mental health issues.

“After reached in Bangladesh, my condition was so bad. I was home isolated long 4 months. I was not [able to] get out from my home.”
(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 35)

In Cambodia, the respondents revealed the importance of mental health more indirectly. Many of the Cambodian survivors were reluctant to speak about their experiences, even some of those who had returned years earlier.

Several female survivors were scared and emotional in telling their stories, and appeared worried about providing the “wrong” answers in the interview or having difficulties remembering key details of their trafficking experiences. We understood these behaviours as likely indications of psychological traumas.

“I made a commitment to forget it. I saw many who were in prison. They thought about it too much until it became a mental disorder, and had to be sent to a psychological centre.”
(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 46)

One survivor in Cambodia faced taunting and bullying from some members of the community. In his understanding, this was a result of jealousy at his being given resources to begin a livelihood repairing motorcycles as part of his reintegration.

“I was afraid of people being envious of me, trying to defeat me...when I started to get a lot of work, there would be some mocking and insulting towards me.”
(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 24)

These observations may have further implications for interventions designed to support survivors. Based on interviews with social workers, provoking further discrimination or jealousy from community members is a common unintended consequence of reintegration support. This must be considered when weighing the risks and benefits of intervention.

Finding one's place in society

Survivors often face some form of stigma on their reintegration journeys. Most of the survivors interviewed for this research reported facing judgement, discrimination, shame, or at least misunderstanding from those around them.

In Bangladesh, survivors would often frame their definitions of success in terms of earning the respect and dignity of their communities – to the point of some even saying that it is better to suffer in poverty with dignity than to be seen negatively for having failed to successfully migrate.

“My identity as a returnee, or a failed returnee, has created a huge problem at the earliest time. I have to listen to bad words from my neighbour and people from where I look for work. The identity did not allow me to get work, even working as day labour at the construction site becomes difficult.”
(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 11)

In Cambodia, on the other hand, very few survivors mentioned feeling extreme judgement from their community members.

“The villagers were all happy to see me coming back to Cambodia. It was like I was dead and coming back to life.”
(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 43)

“[The society] think of me as a success for everyone said that I am brave and dare to run away. They see as a role model that I am hard-working and I take care of my family.”
(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 38)

There is something particular about each society that conditions the ways survivors feel about their trafficking experiences and how they feel they must engage, relationally, with those around them. A deeper understanding about how stigma works in a particular context is crucial for crafting effective support for survivors.

What contributes to successful reintegration?

In this section, we explore the interconnections between the different factors that impact success, to identify pathways by which the system can be changed to support successful reintegration.

Financial assistance and livelihood training must be designed in such a way that they account that survivors are likely to be in need of breaking a cycle of systemic poverty in which they are trapped, rather than a simple nudge in the right direction. This means seeing survivors in their societal context. Interventions that treat survivors as just individuals – such as providing them skills without considering the need of those skills in the marketplace – may be useless or even harmful.

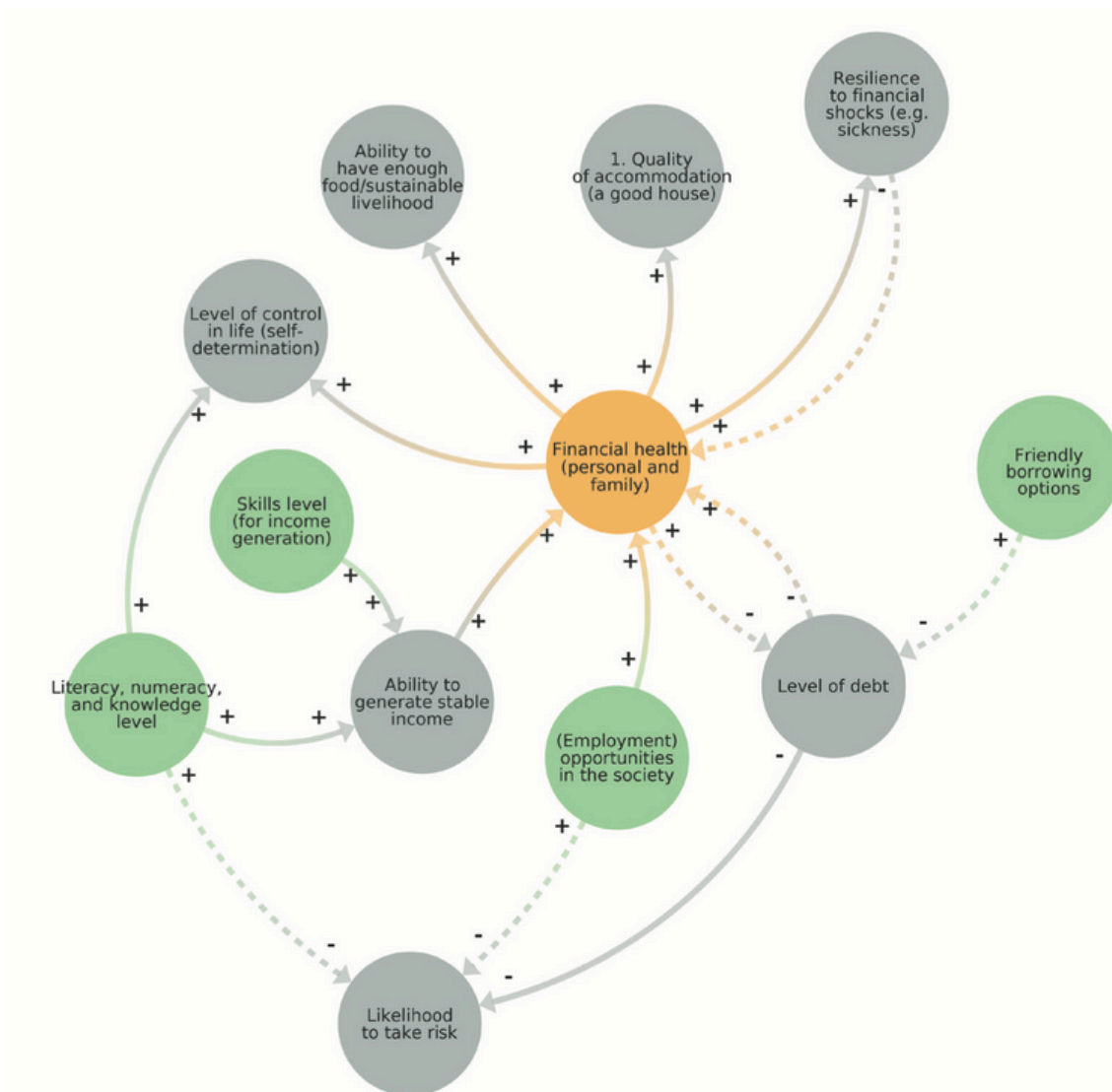


Figure 3. Factors related to financial health.

Debt and microfinance

Nearly every survivor mentioned that the ability to pay off their debts was a key component of successful integration. Debt was not only a factor that determines success in reintegration; it is a major factor that drives trafficking and afflicts communities across both countries.

In many cases, the survivors or their families were members of microfinance schemes. These schemes are based on the assumption that access to finance will help people escape poverty; however, they often lead to increased poverty through unsustainable debt burdens, and the schemes themselves can be predatory.

Rather than drowning in debt, many families make the decision to gather whatever they can together to send one family member abroad to work. It may mean taking additional loans. Given the high cost of migrating legally, many families opt to go illegally via a broker. When things go wrong, the migrant is left vulnerable and isolated. Then, upon returning from trafficking, survivors often face even higher levels of debt, which becomes a major roadblock for achieving successful reintegration.

By considering the role of debt, it becomes clear that aspects of extreme poverty that drive trafficking in the first place also inhibit successful reintegration, keeping survivors, their families, and communities trapped in extreme poverty

Intersections among skills, literacy, and opportunities

In general, survivors were trafficked while pursuing low-skilled manual labour opportunities in another country. People without skills tend to have fewer options for earning an income, meaning they sometimes must take extreme risks for the chance to earn enough to survive.

“The biggest problem is the financial problem...then the problem is lack of education. I was not educated; they would not let me go out of the house. I did not even know the roads of the village. So it was easy to deceive me.”
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 8)

It is common for social workers to support survivors in learning new skills that may lead to better livelihood opportunities. However, some of the social workers we spoke to reported that it is sometimes difficult to connect with survivors, and they often drop out or fail to really benefit from the training. Our research suggests this might happen when survivors are not able to read or write, as lacking literacy can make attending a skills training very difficult and inaccessible.

**“My parents and I were illiterate; we had no idea of what a fraud was.”
(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 47)**

Many support services offered to survivors do attempt to address mental health challenges. However, a survivor in need of acute mental health treatment may not be able to benefit from skills training. At the same time, having the support of a skills training programme may also help survivors with their mental health. Survivors we spoke with reported experiencing these conflicting feelings over time.

Additionally, having new skills does not guarantee a job. In many of the communities we visited, the local economy is very limited and declining. Many of the survivors in this study expressed a desire to migrate again if they could – either to a bigger city, or across borders.

Family, community, and social norms

Every society contains sets of social norms that condition people's everyday experiences, including the role of individuals within the collective of society, and what it means to be a woman or man. It is important to understand how particular social norms condition the experiences survivors have in reintegration.

**“I am still afraid that my son will be taken away from me. I was also afraid that my family would force me to be with the husband from China.”
(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 27)**

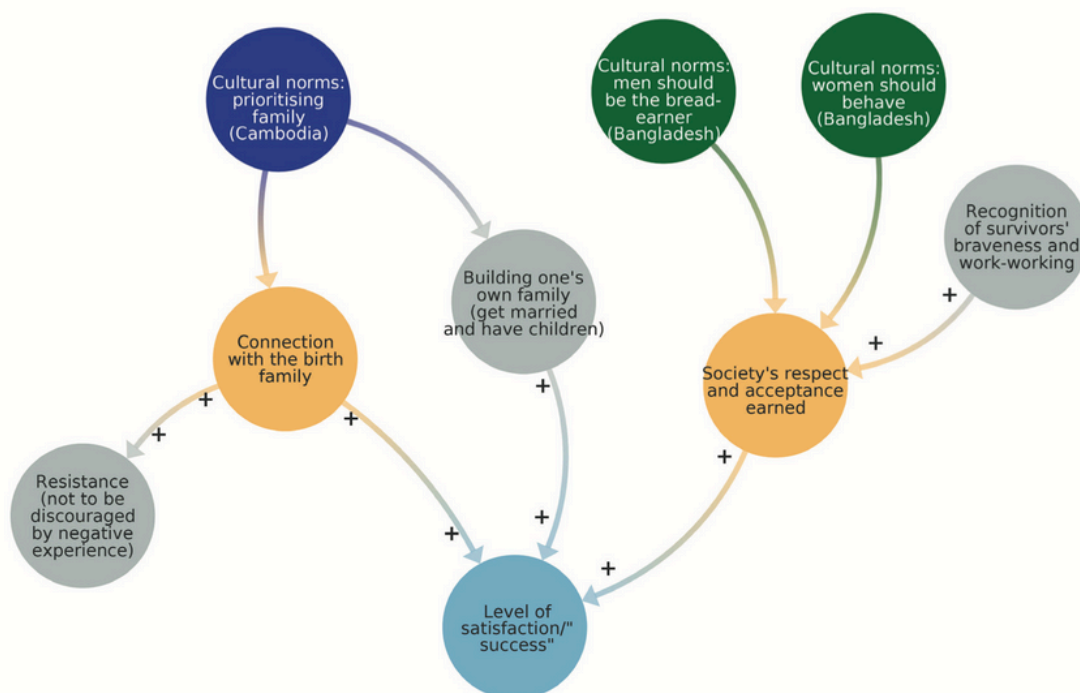


Figure 4. Factors related to family and social norms.

In Bangladesh, female survivors reported shame and stigma based on not conforming to the idea of a “good woman”. Male survivors also reported suffering from stigma for their inability to fulfil the role of breadwinner in their family.

In both Cambodia and Bangladesh, men and women have strongly gendered life experiences, and gender is an important factor mediating how survivors reintegrate into family and society. This suggests that stigma and social exclusion faced by survivors are often not a result of their trafficking experience necessarily, but because of the ways the trafficking experience impacts their abilities to conform to gendered social norms. Failing to fulfil these ideals of “normal” can trigger exclusions that exacerbate the trauma experienced during trafficking.

**“In Cox’s Bazar, most of the people think that the female victims are harmful to the other girls of the society.”
(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 1)**

For example, some community members in Bangladesh were not aware that migration can turn into trafficking, so they tended to judge trafficking survivors for failing to provide for their families. This also demonstrates the potential power of sharing one’s story, as shame and stigma appeared to diminish the more community members could understand and relate to the survivors’ experiences.

The idea of committing suicide because of the pressures of social exclusion came up in 10 interviews with female survivors in Bangladesh. These women also explained that the support groups had been helpful in finding social acceptance and healing. This suggests that where social norms of one kind lead to exclusion, survivors can form alternative arrangements in which they can establish more supportive norms. Suicide was not mentioned in any interviews with survivors, social workers, family, or community members in Cambodia.

**“Sometimes, it feels like if I could commit suicide. This would have been the only solution. I am just at the middle of the sea of problems.”
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 16)**

Inhibitors and enablers for mental health

Survivors mentioned several factors related to their mental health, as shown in figure 5. Experiences of various forms of violence were mentioned as traumatic. Some survivors experienced beatings and other physical abuse. Some had experienced threats from their traffickers – either brokers, bosses, or husbands. After returning, most survivors reported it was a considerable amount of time before they could bear to face social interactions such as leaving the house, looking for work, or even interacting with service providers. Several reported having regular nightmares about their experiences, including the possibility that their traffickers were going to find them.

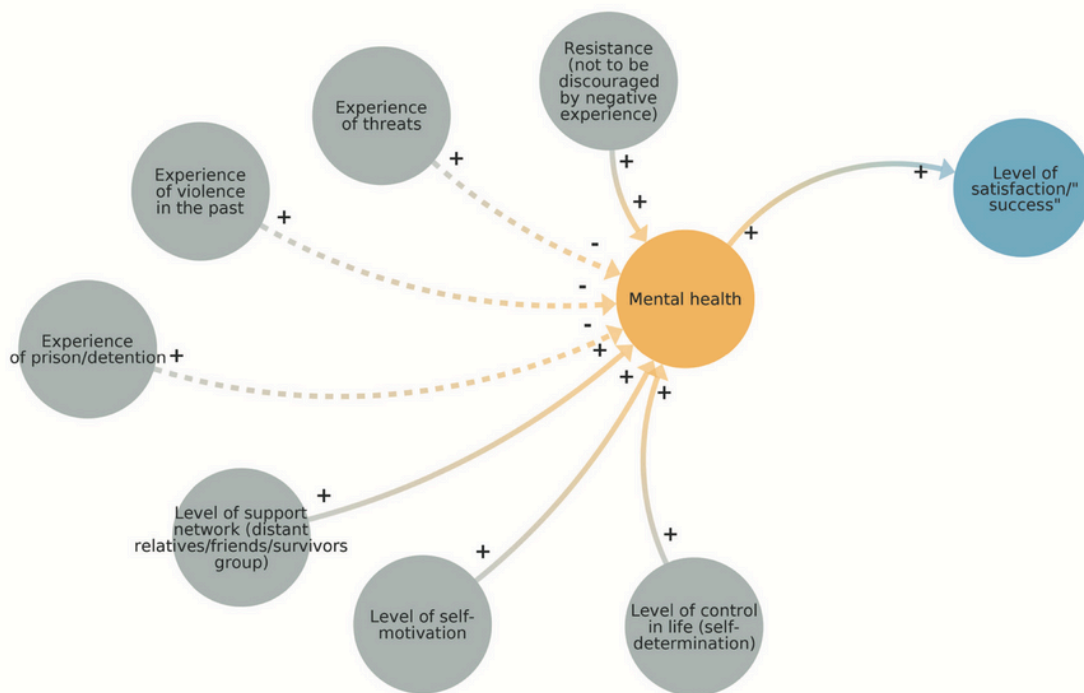


Figure 5. Factors related to mental health.

In several instances, men from Cambodia were detained or arrested in Thailand, treated as criminals for violating migration and labour laws. They reported the experience of detention as being highly traumatic. Reintegration after detention or imprisonment should be treated as sensitively as reintegration after other forms of trafficking.

Immediate family are important to survivors' success, yet it is important not to assume families have no unhealthy dynamics of their own. When rejected by their families, some survivors reported the benefit of having support from their wider network, which was ultimately instrumental in supporting their healing, creating the conditions for improved mental health.

**"Sometimes, I dreamed that I'm back in that jail, then I woke up with shock."
(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 46)**

**"I went back to my home and my parents didn't accept me. I had to stay at my cousin's home. Then I gave birth to my child."
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 3)**

The thorny problem of pursuing justice

While survivors reported that justice would indeed contribute to their successful reintegration, survivors in Cambodia and Bangladesh had low expectations of obtaining justice.

In Cambodia, where cases were always pursued with the support of an organisation, some survivors won a small amount of money and reported it to be very helpful. However, more often than not, the cases had either come to nothing or would drag on. Access to justice appears to be quite rare and difficult to obtain, and it requires going through an alienating bureaucratic process, meaning that these survivors did not feel it was something tangible that they could do themselves.

**“There is no law for the poor.”
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 4)**

Many noted that taking legal action against brokers would invite retaliation. Brokerage is a complex phenomenon, with different actors making up different parts of a long supply chain. Sometimes a broker is acting in good faith to try to help people around them; other times, the broker is aware of their actions, but they may be in close relation to the survivor or even a local leader.

In Bangladesh, there was a sense that important social costs are associated with pursuing a case. One woman explained: **“If I file a case, there would be a lot of talk in the society about what I did, why I did it, questions would arise. That’s why I did not file any case to keep my dignity. In my opinion, justice would not have been done, only my values would have been disrespected...It is better not to file a case.”**

In the end, survivors must make individual decisions about the likelihoods of various costs/risks of taking legal action. There is a great deal of potential for successful legal outcomes to support the survivors in achieving successful reintegration. However, both the legal and social systems involved would need to function differently for this to be a more common source of support.

**“It’s common to be harassed by the police. Most of the court orders go to the traffickers’ way. The administration harasses us.”
(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 2)**

Triangulating with other perspectives

Although this research was centred on the perspectives of survivors; we were also able to speak to people around survivors to gain additional details about key factors and causal pathways. In this section, we report on what we learned from family, community members, and social workers.

Lessons from family members

In Cambodia, we observed that the survivors identified as members of a core family unit, rather than as independent individuals. In this case, it is important to understand that reintegration is something not only experienced by survivors, but by their entire families. This would suggest that support from a family is essential for success in Cambodia.

In spite of appearing to be profoundly important to success, families were not presented as perfect or without struggles. In fact, some survivors reported that family members had led them into trafficking in the first place. These dynamics appeared to condition how survivors reintegrated, but neither ruled out success nor led them to pursue reintegration apart from the family.

Families would take additional risks and fall deeper into traps of poverty and debt to help the survivor. In one case, a family described finding out that their son had been imprisoned in Thailand for breaking migration laws, and they sold their land to go and be near him in Thailand. After being released, this survivor and his entire family had to start over.

We observed that in many households, multiple members had migrated for work. In some cases, a survivor was attempting to reintegrate while knowing another member of their family was suffering elsewhere. In this way, trafficking and reintegration in a family can combine, leading to a repeating pattern of vulnerability, risk-taking, and suffering.

Community members and leaders

In Cambodia, community members were generally aware of the experiences of the survivors, though it was not always clear to them that what the survivors had experienced was 'trafficking'. Where there was clarity in understanding 'trafficking', it was the result of deliberate work by NGOs that had been done in the area to raise awareness. Regardless of their awareness, community members appeared to be remarkably understanding and empathetic about the traumas faced by the survivors.

Some of the local leaders we spoke to in Cambodia were open about the challenges of trafficking in their villages. They spoke frankly and urged greater resources to address basic poverty and vulnerabilities amongst villagers and to find ways of supporting them to migrate legally. Some leaders did appear to misunderstand the nature of trafficking, only recognising the most extreme forms of trafficking. This low level of awareness would pose serious challenges for effective identification of survivors, meaning that many survivors may not be accessing support services they are entitled to.

“If a victim doesn’t understand that he was trafficked, then it is possible to be trafficked again. It is essential to give them the whole idea of human trafficking. They need to be understood clearly.”
(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 2)

Speaking to local leaders and community members helped reveal the extent to which neither trafficking nor reintegration happen in isolation to individuals. Vulnerabilities are widespread in these villages, and forces that pull people into trafficking also serve to impede successful reintegration because they operate throughout the society and at multiple levels.

Lessons from social workers

One clear pattern across the social worker interviews was an appreciation of successful reintegration as an incredibly complex phenomenon. Social workers in Cambodia echoed the survivors’ emphasis on family and income as the main components of successful reintegration. Helping survivors support themselves through an effective livelihood is something that runs through all the interviews and is connected to all the services provided by the organisations we spoke with.

Although the social workers we spoke to showed compassion towards survivors and a deep understanding of the complexities and difficulties they face while reintegrating, it appears that some can struggle to make sense of survivors’ actions and choices. For example, social workers we spoke to appear to hold a deep conviction that successful reintegration means not remigrating. However, many survivors mentioned the importance of family but still explained the need to take risks to attain the kind of lives they desired, such as migration.

In our observations, social workers have their own positionality, their own interests, and their own perspectives about how the process of reintegration can and should proceed.

“Education plays a role, as education is needed for a good job. Sometimes the survivors expect a decent job but they don’t have a proper education.”
(Bangladesh, Social Worker No. 9)

This research has attempted to capture and emphasise the voices and perspectives of survivors in defining what success looks like. However, it is important to note that their voices are still not the most prominent, and the voices of advocates, no matter how earnest, will never perfectly channel those of the most affected.

Conclusion

Recentering the discussion of reintegration around the perspectives and aspirations of survivors is helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of how reintegration works and how it is situated alongside other big systemic issues such as extreme poverty, migration, health, and gender-based discrimination.

We affirm the need for services to support survivors in healing from their traumas, to improve their mental health, to attain useful skills, and to achieve better livelihoods. More resources for these forms of support are urgently needed and would be effective – especially if services are provided in caring and culturally appropriate ways. However, reintegration should not be viewed in isolation, and it should not be considered as a simple linear process.

When survivors come from conditions of extreme poverty, going back into those conditions can never be considered a successful reintegration. The structures and dynamics that keep people in poverty traps must be understood so that services can be designed to counter them. Migration and re-migration must not be ruled out as part of successful reintegration. The legal, policy, and economic incentive structures that drive people to travel in search of opportunity and to do so in risky and vulnerable ways must be better understood so that effective services and advocacy efforts can counter them.

Service providers and social workers must walk alongside survivors to build better lives and communities together – this means resisting the tendency to only focus on services, which can unfairly cast survivors as passive recipients and portray them as ungrateful. In each of these areas, our findings support recommendations for how these challenges can be overcome to more effectively support survivors.

Recommendations

General	Specifics
<p>Ensure better financial services and borrowing options, especially for people in rural, vulnerable settings, who may be illiterate</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform regulatory policies to eliminate predatory microfinance services. For example, by working to ensure transparent and fair pricing of services and appropriate debt collection practices to improve consumer protection. • Incentivise other financial institutes to provide friendly borrowing options to the most vulnerable. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the best borrowing options for survivors and provide clear information to support informed financial choices. • Provide numeracy training and training on money management to raise awareness of predatory lending and support better savings and spending priorities.
<p>Recognise that survivors (usually) belong to family units, and this can make interventions that treat survivors as individuals ineffective</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise and support the need for survivors to stay connected with their families. For example, survivors in shelters may need extra visits and calls to stay connected with families. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific interventions targeting survivors (for example skills or literacy trainings) should also be extended to the wider family, where possible.

Counter harmful social norms with helpful social norms rooted in society

For governments:

- Make prominent statements about trafficking as a policy priority. In addition to the direct impact of such policies, they can contribute to changing perceptions and attitudes toward unhelpful norms and promote changes in behaviours to reduce stigma and discrimination.

For NGOs:

- Challenge norms through cultural channels – perhaps through children’s books, movies, and short films that help people feel empathy and acceptance towards survivors.

Contribute to healing by addressing trauma as part of a constellation of issues

For governments:

- Ensure professional psychology specialists and experts in trauma are involved in policy design when it comes to supporting the reintegration of survivors.

For NGOs:

- Ensure support networks are in place and accessible (for example, by organising survivors’ groups or running support hotlines so that survivors have a way to be heard and understood).
- Provide regular and ongoing training and support to social workers on psychological counselling, skills strengthening and acquiring knowledge needed to assess survivors’ mental health and to effectively provide support and referrals.

As many survivors dropped out of schooling at a young age, support beyond skill training, including literacy and numeracy, is essential to help generate income and gain a sense of autonomy

For governments:

- Provide pathways for adults who seek to complete their basic education, particularly in literacy and numeracy, possibly with scholarships

For NGOs:

- On top of existing skill training programmes, evaluate and identify survivors who may need support in literacy and numeracy. Provide pathways to support survivors in these aspects, possibly with scholarships

Reduce the push factors in areas that suffer from pervasive poverty. Foster potential employment opportunities and support safer, legal migration

For governments:

- Incentivise factories and companies to operate in areas with high rates of unemployment and poverty. As a system-level intervention, this should include survivors and non-survivors alike.

For NGOs:

- Collaborate with social enterprises or ethical companies to create employment opportunities for survivors, generally. Do not simply arrange for special hiring of survivors, as this can lead to unwanted attention, discrimination, and inappropriate working environments.
- Recognize that in areas facing population and economic decline, the best option for successful reintegration may be remigration. Support survivors in obtaining documentation and overcoming the barriers to legal migration.

<p>Ensure key stakeholders, particularly frontline government workers and community leaders, have a clear understanding of human trafficking</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of human trafficking trends and experience via mass media, publications, and policy. In particular, to help to resolve confusion over the differences between migration issues and trafficking. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate, work with a range of stakeholders, including government officials and community leaders, on Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC). This should help to develop understanding and empathy towards survivors as well as to combat discrimination, negative attitudes, and stereotypes that undermine identification and reintegration. • Sharing anonymized stories from survivors may help build understanding in public consciousness
<p>Having proper documentation in the first place can help people see a legal way of migrating, avoiding the likelihood of getting caught and imprisoned, or taking risks going with a broker</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure basic documents like birth certificates, ID documents, and passports are easily accessible for all families, especially those who are particularly vulnerable. • Fight corruption and coordinate with destination countries for safe employment of migrant workers. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance on how to migrate legally and safely. Some examples include free hotlines, social media presence, and access to networks of returned migrants who can share knowledge and advice about the process.

For the complete bibliography please refer to the [full report](#).



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