



# Albanian young people in the UK - mind the empathy gap

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Shpresa Programme

# Shpresa Programme

- \* User led charity
- \* Working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children since 2012
- \* Supported 190+ children and young people aged 12 – 20, 95% male
  - \* 46% victims of trafficking
  - \* 26% fleeing blood feuds or family / domestic violence
  - \* 16% at risk due to their sexuality
  - \* 8% fleeing religious extremism
  - \* 3.5% fleeing forced marriages

These figures are taken from responses from 144 young people out of 188 young people we were working with on a given day in 2016

- \* In the last 2 years Shpresa also worked with 44 trafficked women many aged 18-25

# The ethos behind our way of working

- \* No one knows everything – we need to work together
- \* Existing ‘joined up working’ is not joined up at a strategic level – and the children suffer
- \* Good partnerships have to have honesty and respect at the core of the relationship – grassroots community groups can struggle to achieve this

# Who is responsible for the safety and well being of unaccompanied Albanian children and young people in the UK?

- \* Central government?
- \* Local government?
- \* The Albanian government?
- \* Other statutory authorities?
- \* The third sector?
- \* Individuals?

We were initially naïve and thought responsibility would be shared...



# Transition to adulthood – what we have learnt

- \* Insecure immigration status
- \* Being disbelieved
- \* Absence of family
- \* Uncertain education
- \* ‘Illegal’ work
- \* Insecure housing
- \* Lack of safety



In 2016 Shpresa established a drop in, staffed by volunteers, one Saturday a month, to identify needs and signpost unaccompanied children and young people to statutory services that could keep them safe and protect their well being.

# Grants of asylum in the UK in 2015

Grants of asylum at first decision for nationals from these countries during the previous year were as follows

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of applications</i>	<i>Grants at 1<sup>st</sup> decision</i>	<i>%</i>
Iran	3,716	1,951	52
Pakistan	3,365	720	21
Afghanistan	2,852	594	21
Iraq	2,648	216	8
Bangladesh	1,320	86	6.5
<b>Albania</b>	<b>1,998</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0.5</b>

(National Asylum Statistics, Home Office, released 25 August, 2016)

# What an insecure immigration status means

- \* Loss of a certain future
- \* Backdrop of anxiety
- \* Sense of hopelessness and pointlessness
- \* Dread of each letter, phone call
- \* Isolation from peers and from support



*Examples from one drop in session on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2017.*

## (2) Being disbelieved – credibility

*The Heart of the Matter: Assessing Credibility when Children Apply for Asylum in the European Union* 2015, UNHCR

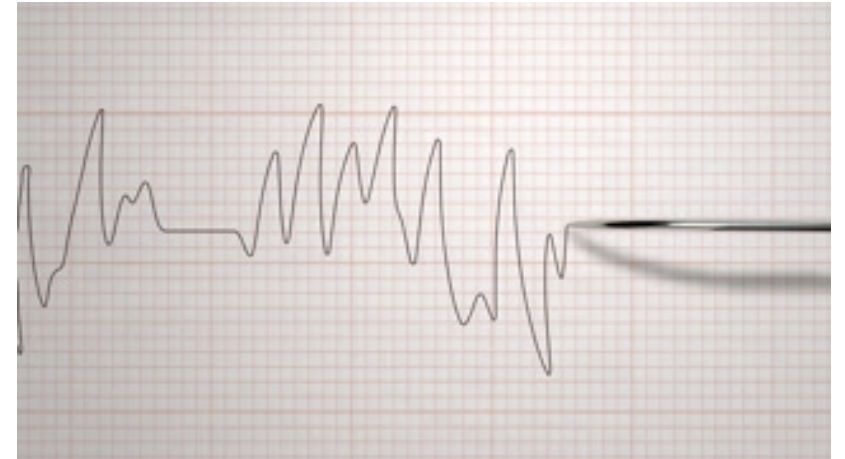
Communicating with children is a specialised function in cross-cultural context

- a) EU law recognizes the need for personnel dealing with asylum-seeking children to have the ‘necessary qualifications’, but does not explain what these are
- b) Eliciting relevant information from children requires a climate of trust between the child and the interviewer
- c) Training for interviewers and decision-makers should devote particular attention to the effect of traumatic experiences on children



# Disbelieved because

- \* Child trafficked aged 14 when interviewed in March 2013, stated that in 2012 he approached the police on one occasion and in a later interview said it was his father who approached the police
- \* Child fleeing a blood feud declared when he was aged 14 was disbelieved because when questioned three years later he did not know the occupation of the parents of the man who had married his sister



# Disbelieved by everyone

- \* By the Home Office, lawyers, Immigration Judges, social workers, foster carers, the police and teachers
- \* Being labelled 'economic migrants'
- \* Being seen as gang members, drug dealers, traffickers
- \* Being expected to fail



*'He (the IJ) said I came here to get work. I thought I was going to die in that lorry. I did not leave my family to get work... If you have not been to Albania, you know nothing about the Kanun.'*

18 year old who fled a blood feud

## (3) Absence of family

- \* Many too scared to make contact
- \* Feelings of guilt and fear
- \* Foster care is short term
- \* Semi independent living is hard
- \* Relationships are precarious
- \* Networks are very small



*‘Of course I miss my mum. She did everything for me...’*

16 year old fleeing a blood feud

## (4) Education

- \* Protective... not for unaccompanied young people
  - \* Uncertain future post 18
  - \* Lack of funding for university
- \* Used against them by decision makers
- \* What is the point?

*'If I think only about maths I can forget how scared I am of all the other things. I want to go to Oxford or Cambridge. I like to be in the library and just work and not think... but that dream will not happen.'*

17 year old survivor of trafficking, studying Maths, Further Maths, Physics and Chemistry at A level



## (5) Work

- \* To pay debts to agents or traffickers
- \* To pay lawyers
- \* To live
- \* To pay debts

*‘The lawyer needed £3,000. I was washing cars and getting construction work when I could. I was all the time too too stressed.’*

17 year old fleeing a blood feud



## (6) Insecure housing

- \* Foster carers – the good, the bad...
- \* Semi independent
- \* The streets
- \* Friends' sofas



*'I am fine. I am fine. I just don't know where I will be tomorrow. I can't give you an address or anything but I will keep in touch Tante Luli.'*

19 year old survivor of domestic abuse now in HMP Lewes

## (7) Lack of safety

- \* Physical
- \* Emotional

*‘The first night I arrived at the foster carer’s she told me to prepare my food and then go and eat in my room. I was stressed, as I was not good at cooking and it is very strange in Albania to tell people to eat alone. She was watching me and she told me to clean up as I made the food and I could not find the cloth to clean. I chewed and chewed but the food would not go down.*

*I did not eat that night.’*

16 year old survivor of trafficking



# Case study....



# How did we get here? Extreme ‘Othering’

- \* Albania – little known and little understood - a language, a culture, a heritage we know nothing of
- \* Young adult males, and women trafficked for sexual exploitation
- \* Fleeing non state agents

*‘When considering the ‘plausibility’ of a child’s account, the adjudicator has to look at his or her own assumptions and any possible preconceptions about how children in other societies live and act.’*

UNHCR’s publication [\*The Heart of the Matter: Assessing Credibility when Children Apply for Asylum in the European Union\*](#) 2015