Albanian Culture

A Guide for Frontline Professionals

WEST MIDLANDS ANTI SLAVERY NETWORK

Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service

west midlands police and crime commissioner

MODERN SLAVERY Organised Immigration Crime

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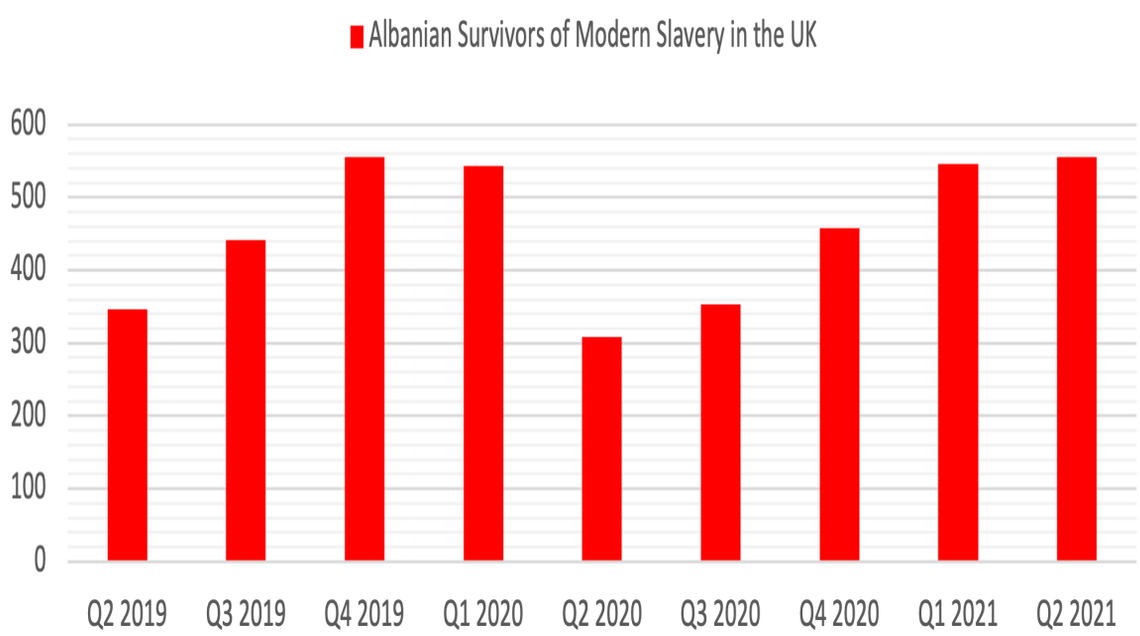

PROJECT CONTEXT

This resource aims to increase Albanian cultural knowledge amongst professionals who work with people from Albania; through doing so, improving professionals' engagement with survivors and perpetrators of crimes from the Albanian community. This resource is suitable for any frontline professional who works with anyone from Albania, although it targets professionals within policing, the criminal justice system and survivor support services. It was developed using a combination of desk-based research, consultation with statutory and non-statutory services, and co-design with Albanian people with lived experience. This resource is not specific to working with survivors and perpetrators of exploitation and it can be used in any sector.

Data from 2021 shows that the average monthly wage in Albania is 56,435 Lek (£387.95)[1]. A single person's estimated monthly costs with rent are 80,440.42 Lek (£552.48) in the city centre[2] and 68,919.62 Lek (£473.35) outside of the city centre. Exploitation is present in Albania. Forced begging is the most common type of exploitation, followed by sexual exploitation, forced labour, and forced marriage[3]. There is a rise in county lines in Albania which mainly targets boys and young men[4].

Data from the Home Office shows the numbers of Albanian survivors of exploitation are rising across the UK[5]. In addition to this, UK services have experienced challenges achieving positive outcomes for people from Albania. One example of this is the high numbers of people from Albania who are trafficked to the UK and forced to work in cannabis cultivation. If these survivors encounter law enforcement, they risk being wrongly criminalised for crimes they were forced to commit during their exploitation.

We believe that frontline professionals can use cultural awareness to build trust with people from Albania that they work with. This knowledge enables the professional to show that they understand what support someone from Albania may need to access, as well as the reasons why someone from Albania may be hesitant to access support or cannot return home to Albania.

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1 Instat – Institute of Statistics, (2021). Wage Statistics Quarter 3 2021.
http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/wages/publications/2021/wage-statistics-q3-2021/

2 Numbeo, Cost of Living Albania. https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country_result.jsp?country=Albania

3 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, (2020). Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020 Country Profile Central And South-Eastern Europe.
https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_CP_Central_and_South-Eastern_Europe.pdf

4 Balkan Insight, (2021). In Albania, a Worrying Rise in Drug Gangs Hiring Minors. https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/10/in-albania-a-worrying-rise-in-drug-gangs-hiring-minors/

5 Home Office, National Referral Mechanism Statistics.
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-referral-mechanism-statistics

GREETINGS

The way people from Albania greet each other depends on the nature of the relationship between those participating in the greeting.

Men will often greet other men with a handshake if the other person is a close friend or family member. Depending on comfortability, an Albanian man may also greet a close male friend or relative by giving him a hug. Occasionally, men will also greet close male friends or male family members with a kiss on the cheek or two kisses on each cheek. Men will not greet women in a similar way unless they are close family members.

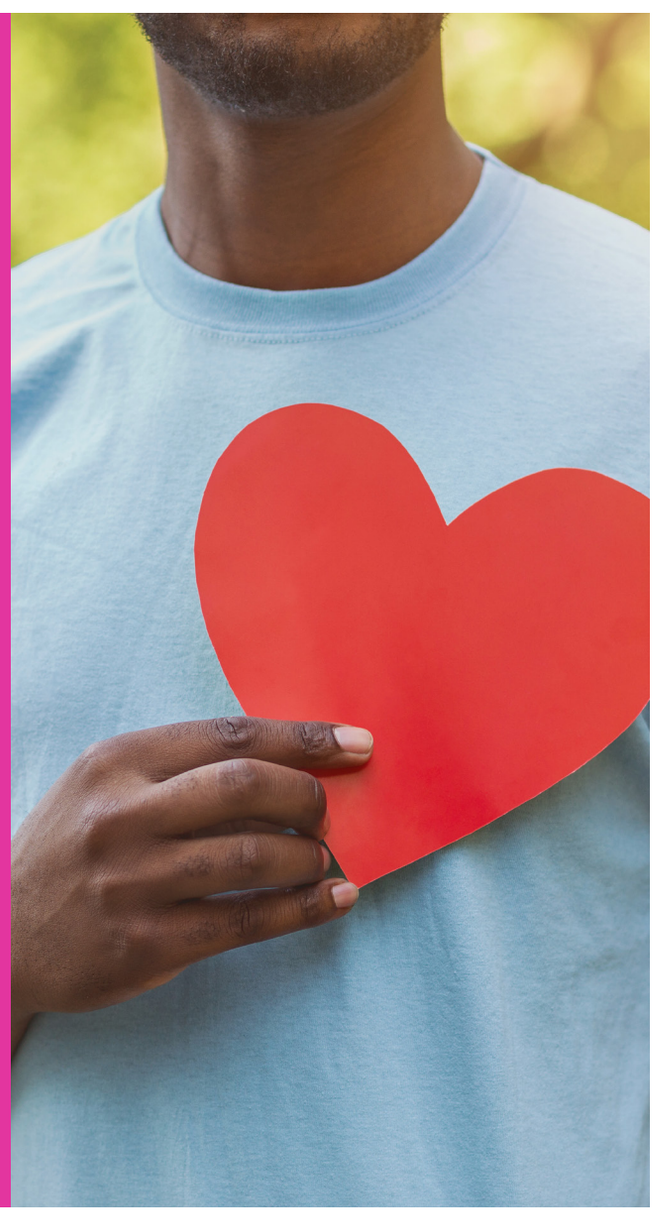
Women often greet other female friends and family members with two kisses on the cheek, but women would not greet men in this way.

CULTURE

Albanian culture, especially family life, is far stricter than it is in the UK. Talk of things like mental health and sex are almost a taboo subject. Albanian families are very welcoming and hospitable to others, Albanian people often invite others into their homes very soon after their first meeting. Food, music, and socialising can be important to people from Albania.

Men are the dominant gender in society. Children and adults are not treated equally and this manifests in many aspects of Albanian life. Older women may wear white headscarves in rural areas.

Honour is an important factor with blood feuds and revenge killings taking place, this often extends to male members of the wider family and can last for generations, the frequency of these is unknown.



RELIGION

Albania is constitutionally a secular country and is “neutral in questions of belief and conscience”.

According to the 2011 census, 57% of Albanians identify as Muslim, 10% identify as Catholic, 7% identify as Orthodox, and 2.5% identify as atheists or non-religious.

Predominant religious communities (Muslims and Christians) enjoy a greater degree of official recognition and social status due to their historical presence within the country (national holidays for occasions such as Eid al-Fitr, Easter, and Christmas).

Albanians generally do not view religion as a dominant factor in their lives “the faith of the Albanian is Albanianism” (quote by renowned Albanian writer, Pashko Vasa). For the most part, there is acceptance amongst the Albanian community for all religious preferences and beliefs. People are not usually discriminated against on the basis of their religious beliefs. However, in some parts of the country, there is less tolerance of Muslim women, particularly those who overtly express their religious beliefs through practices such as wearing headscarves and Hijabs and in a few rural villages, inter-faith marriages can be condemned.

FEAR OF AUTHORITIES

Albanian authorities are often seen as distrustful by the Albanian populace. The Albanian government is frequently seen as corrupt and lacking in transparency. This can transcend into a broader distrust of political parties, the police, the broader criminal justice system, and healthcare provision. That said, people from Albania are likely to be more trusting of religious institutions as these are often seen as dependable and trusted.

GENDER & SEXUALITY

Patriarchal norms persist in Albanian culture, and women typically have fewer opportunities for education, work, and career progression. It is often the case that women are raised with the expectation that they will marry, have children and remain as housewives, although this is less common in urban areas. Due to the patriarchal culture, domestic abuse and violence is very common and it can be extremely difficult to seek support.

Albania has a low tolerance to diverse sexual preferences. The LGBTQ+ community are mostly negatively discriminated against and may be targeted for abuse and hostility. Some people are becoming more accepting of different sexualities and identities, but in general discrimination means that many individuals hide their identities and, in some cases, flee the country in fear.

ASPIRATIONS

Aspirations are very individual, and can vary hugely depending on someone's experience, gender, age, educational level, and background. However, underpinning these individual dreams are often some commonly shared aspirations for many Albanian people in the UK.

Many Albanians feel that Albania is extremely corrupt and unsafe, following years of political instability. Wages are generally very low; there are few opportunities for career development, and accessing a job is usually only possible through personal connection rather than meritocracy.

This means that basic aspirations, such as going to university, buying a house, developing a career, and having a safe environment in which to build a family, are often seen as only available to rich or powerful people. Developing a career can also be much more difficult for women, as the pressures of a patriarchal society mean that they are generally expected to finish school earlier, get married, and look after the home.

Leaving the country can be one of the few ways to earn income and enable people to have a better future. Many Albanians have a deep desire for freedom and safety, and want to work hard, access education, and improve their standard of living for themselves and their families.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Family is extremely important in Albania. The family structure is usually patriarchal, with the father at the head of the family. Families often have several children and are very close knit. Extended family commonly live nearby, and grandparents regularly remain living with the family, meaning that households are usually fairly large. The patriarch of the family can arrange or force the marriages of women in the family. If a marriage ends in divorce, the woman can be blamed and ostracised from the community. Boys are often seen as more important than girls and women can be expected to keep having children until a boy is born. However, there are big differences between rural and urban areas; in urban areas women are not expected to be housewives and university education is encouraged.

People want the best for their families and if one person suffers the whole family suffers. If someone is seen to bring dishonour to the family (such as being exploited) they can be disowned and rejected outright. Albanians who experience exploitation often come from families where there is domestic violence, alcoholism, and/or mental health issues.

The concept of community in Albania is inextricably linked to identity and a sense of belonging. Where there is a lack of community support it has a profound effect on individuals. Albanian communities in the UK are microcosms of the community structures that exist within Albania. The community acts as a support network for people. If something happens, either good or bad, community members tend to get involved. Pressures from within the community mean that people aren't always free to live their lives as they would like for fear of public scrutiny.

FOOD

Pie and crepes are popular foods to make at home, and people will often grow vegetables in their garden including strawberries, garlics, leeks, or beans. Traditional food is also very important, and many Albanians enjoy beans, pickles, and meat, with fresh food often being found in Turkish shops.

For those who do celebrate, all birthdays are generally celebrated by being with family and friends, receiving presents, singing, dancing, and eating cake – either at home or a restaurant. As expected with the traditional cultural roles in the home, Albanian women are usually in charge of all cooking.

KEY DATES AND CELEBRATIONS

All of the dates listed below are national holidays in Albania in 2022. Some dates will change every year depending on the occasion.

Date (2022)	Celebration
1st January	New Year's Day
2nd January	New Year's Day (Day 2)
3rd January	Day off for New Year's Day
14th March	Summer Day
22nd March	Nevruz Day
17th April	Easter Sunday
24th April	Easter Sunday (Orthodox)
1st May	International Worker's Day
2nd May	Day off for International Worker's Day
3rd May	Eid-al-Fitr
10th July	Feast of the Sacrifice
5th September	Mother Teresa Beatification Day
28th November	Flag Independence Day
29 November	Liberation Day
8th December	National Youth Day
25th December	Christmas Day
26th December	Day off for Christmas Day

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