

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINES REPORT 2023





A21 NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINES REPORT 2023

ONE CALL CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SLAVERY & FREEDOM.

A21 operates counter-human trafficking hotlines nationally in Greece, Bulgaria, South Africa and as of July 2023, Spain (collectively, the 'A21 Hotlines'). In 2023, the A21 Hotlines received 7,154 telephone and online contacts, resulting in the identification and/or assistance of 210 trafficking victims. Of these contacts, 79.6% pertained to human trafficking, with most calls originating from community members. Direct calls from potential victims increased noticeably across all hotlines in 2023, compared to the previous year, accounting for 5.4% of the total contacts.

During the reporting year, sexual exploitation emerged as the primary form of trafficking in all A21 Hotline countries active for the full 2023 calendar year, accounting for 77.2% of cases in Greece and over half of all cases in both South Africa and Bulgaria. False jobs remained the most common recruitment method reported to the hotlines in Greece and South Africa. Reports to the Bulgaria Hotline however supported sale by families as the highest form of recruitment there.

Throughout 2023, the A21 Hotlines continued to offer both 'job vetting' and 'safety planning' services in response to the increasing number of cases involving recruitment via a false job opportunity or through the 'loverboy method'. Individuals contacting the A21 Hotlines for 'job vetting' assistance are provided with guidance on safely seeking employment, including researching the validity of a prospective employer. 'Safety planning' services focus on basic advice for those travelling after starting a relationship online, such as keeping their documents safe or setting check-ins with a safe word with a friend or family member. These services offer the public a preventative tool from a potentially exploitative situation. A21's hotlines in Bulgaria and South Africa in particular have experienced success in protecting individuals from likely exploitative situations through these prevention tools.

In October 2023, A21 Greece increased its awareness of its 1109 Hotline through the launch of its *Can You See Me?* public awareness campaign, which both educates the public on human trafficking and empowers them with a reporting mechanism. The South African and Bulgarian Hotlines continued to utilise their respective *Can You See Me?* campaign materials to advertise their hotlines.

The A21 Hotlines rely on strong partnerships with government agencies, law enforcement and nongovernmental organisations to create a comprehensive strategy for combatting human trafficking. In 2023, the A21 Hotlines showcased the effectiveness of these collaborations which resulted in several international operations, such as repatriation support provided by the South African National Human Trafficking Hotline for a survivor from a scamming centre in Southeast Asia, and large-scale international take-downs of trafficking rings by law enforcement, resulting in part from reports to the Spanish and Greek Hotlines. These international take-down operations led to the safe recovery and assistance of dozens of trafficking victims, and the arrest of traffickers.

SPANISH HOTLINE LAUNCH

After more than a decade of operating counter-trafficking hotlines in Europe and South Africa, A21 launched its fourth hotline, Teléfono de Ayuda Contra la Trata, in Spain in July 2023. This launch included a partnership with the Spanish National Police formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support the Hotline's operation. In its first six months, the Hotline received over 150 contacts, leading to 17 police reports and the identification of six victims of trafficking.

The A21 Hotlines serve as a reporting mechanism in Bulgaria, Greece, South Africa and Spain, available 24/7 to solely receive and manage reports of human trafficking. Each A21 Hotline is equipped to receive calls in over 230 languages and web-based reports.

Specially trained, trauma-informed hotline call specialists receive, manage and refer reports of suspected human trafficking from potential victims, concerned members of the community, private organisations, public institutions and non-governmental organisations. A21 Hotlines also provide resources and referrals for direct services for human trafficking survivors.

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BULGARIA ANNUAL HOTLINE REPORT 2023

ABOUT THE BULGARIAN NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

The Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline (The Hotline) is a specialised service dedicated to supporting victims of human trafficking. Launched in 2015 by A21 Bulgaria, in collaboration with the National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, it offers advice and assistance to the general public on human trafficking issues. The Hotline is the only resource in Bulgaria committed to solely handling human trafficking reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Trained call specialists are equipped to handle calls in 230 languages through a tele-interpretation service. Given Bulgaria's status as primarily a source country in the EU,¹ the Hotline receives a significant number of reports regarding Bulgarian nationals trafficked internationally. To support this, the Hotline's call specialists collaborate closely with both Bulgarian national institutions and similar government ministries in other EU countries. This collaborative effort allows for a swift and effective response to each report, acknowledging the importance of combatting human trafficking on an international scale.

***'Thank you very, very much for your quick response
and for the overall organisation on your part.'***

—Survivor Recovered after Calling the Hotline.

OVERVIEW OF DATA²

The Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline receives reports via phone, email, text and the dedicated Hotline website (www.080020100.bg). In 2023, the Hotline received 1153 contacts, a 7.7% increase from 2022. This increase can be attributed to A21 Bulgaria's increased presence in the media throughout the year; several radio interviews publicised the Hotline's number throughout Bulgaria. Moreover, the majority of contacts (61.8%) to the Hotline related directly to human trafficking. Historically, people primarily contacted the Hotline by phone. In 2022, there was a rise in online contacts, including SMS, WhatsApp and the use of the webform on the Hotline's website. This form made up 5.1% of total contacts in 2022, but this number decreased in 2023. This highlights that phone calls remain the preferred method of communication for the general public to reach the Hotline.

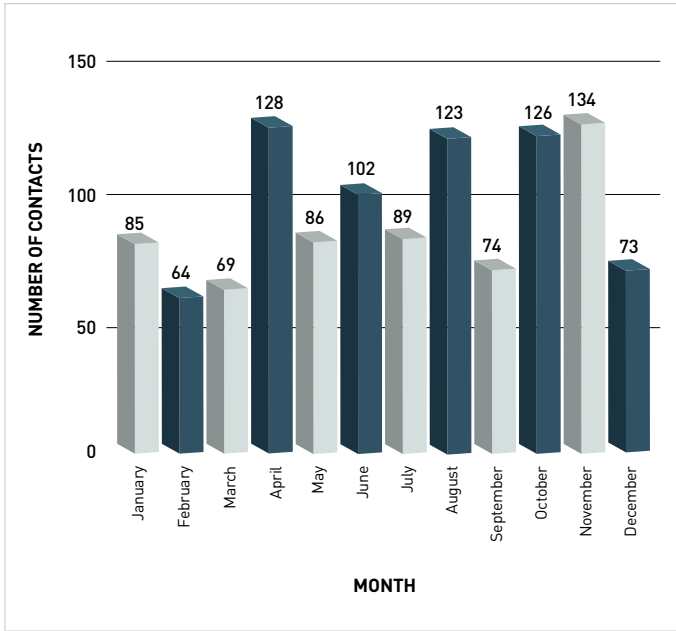
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Hotline received a total of **1153 CONTACTS**, a **7.7% increase** from 2022
- The Hotline identified and/or assisted **23 VICTIMS**
- The majority of potential victims reported to the Hotline were **FEMALE (64.2%)**
- The majority of victims reported to the Hotline were **BULGARIAN NATIONALS**
- The most common recruitment method in cases reported to the Hotline was **SOLD BY FAMILY**
- The Hotline submitted **24 POLICE REPORTS**
- There were **76.9% more JOB VETTING REQUESTS** in 2023 than in 2022
- The majority of victims to the Hotline were victims of **SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Contacts to the National Human Trafficking Hotline comprise all incoming enquiries to the Hotline through any manner, including but not limited to phone calls, emails, SMS messages and online web submissions. These enquiries include all reports on potential human trafficking, various crimes both related and unrelated to human trafficking, general queries about human trafficking, and requests for various types of assistance related to human trafficking, such as safety planning or job vetting.

The statistics in this report are exclusively drawn from substantive contacts made to the Hotline from January–December 2023 concerning human trafficking matters. This report is not a reflection of all substantive calls to the Hotline, which may include calls related to other high-risk crimes, labour exploitation, and other non-trafficking issues.

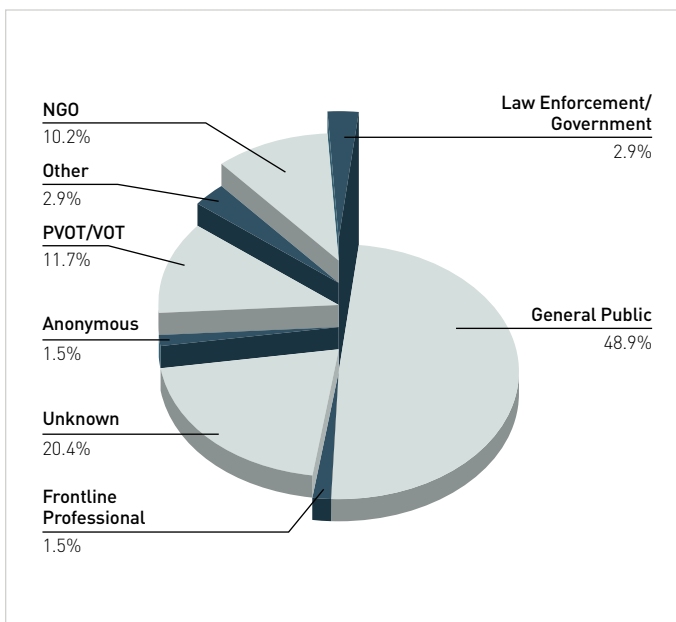
When available, disaggregated data on descriptive factors, including gender, age, type of trafficking, methods of control and recruitment methods, has been collected on each individual case.



The above chart reflects the number of contacts to the Hotline in 2023

CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

Since its inception in 2015, the Hotline has received reports from potential victims, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), law enforcement, frontline professionals and the general public. Consistent with previous years, the highest percentage of contacts in 2023 originated from the general public (48.9%). Contacts from the general public include concerned friends and family members of potential victims and community members who witness suspicious activity within the community. Over the past year, calls from potential victims have increased by 29.9% to comprise 11.7% of all calls to the Hotline. The increase in calls confirm the importance of awareness in countering human trafficking.



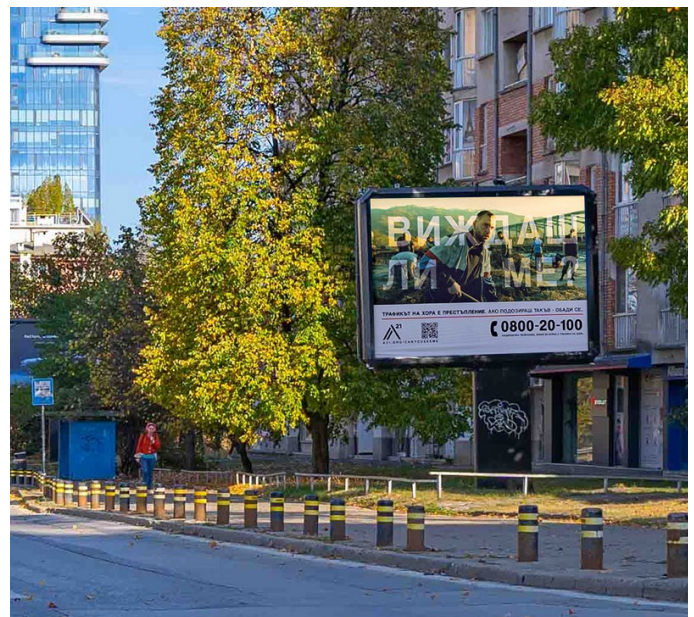
'Despite calling on Sunday, operators showed empathy and understanding of the need of urgent shelter and managed to organise everything so that a girl, who had been a victim, was recovered. I appreciate your assistance!'

— A community member who called to help a victim of sexual exploitation.

CYSM? PROMOTES THE HOTLINE THROUGHOUT BULGARIA

Throughout 2023, A21 Bulgaria focused significant efforts on promoting the Hotline's services in the media, particularly via radio interviews, the use of A21's *Can You See Me?*³ (CYSM?) campaign and A21's annual Walk for Freedom⁴ (WFF) that took place in October. In February 2023, A21 Bulgaria secured a grant from the German Federal Foreign Office to distribute the *CYSM?* campaign across Bulgaria throughout the year to both educate the general public on human trafficking in Bulgaria, as well as publicise the Hotline. With this funding, the team successfully screened the full *CYSM?* movies in cinemas, distributed billboards along key highways and in towns and featured the videos on LED screens at Sofia and Varna International Airports throughout the entire year. Furthermore, the *CYSM?* posters and accompanying educational materials were distributed across all 28 regions in Bulgaria.

Notably, the Roma TV channels broadcasted the *CYSM?* videos, reaching vulnerable Roma communities in Bulgaria, a demographic particularly at risk of being trafficked. All *CYSM?* materials advertised the Hotline's number to encourage the community to take action by reporting suspicious activities. The campaign reached over 100,000 individuals, and had 22 million impressions. Interestingly, the increase in contacts to the Hotline by victims coincided with the distribution of *CYSM?*'s campaign, which encourages victims to call the Hotline for assistance.



SIX CITIES IN BULGARIA HOST WALK FOR FREEDOM

In 2023, Bulgaria's WFF drew the participation of over 500 individuals across six cities, with most participants attending WFF for the first time. Throughout the event, volunteers distributed flyers to raise awareness about the issue of human trafficking, including the Hotline number. While WFF is a single-day event, A21 Bulgaria maximised this opportunity by utilising social media as a pre-campaign initiative to educate the general public about human trafficking. The pre-campaign initiative showcased a series of photos of Bulgarian actors, screenwriters and directors holding signs about human trafficking and their reasons for supporting WFF, and encouraging others to engage in the issue. The participation of well-known people from across Bulgaria significantly increased the visibility of both WFF and A21's work, including the services provided by the Hotline. Such initiatives likely contributed to the significant number of calls from the general public to the Hotline in 2023.



A21 Bulgaria also sought to increase the identification of potential victims of trafficking (PVOs) in 2023 through its Professional Training Program. This program recognises that certain professionals have a higher likelihood of encountering a potential victim of human trafficking due to the nature of their work. Understanding the key role of these frontline professionals, A21 provides targeted training so that these professionals understand the fundamental principles underlying human trafficking, recognise human trafficking in their country and utilise a victim-centred approach. Finally, A21 provides education on the Hotline's services to further support frontline professionals in identifying and supporting any potential victims they encounter. Over the course of 2023, A21 Bulgaria provided nine training sessions, training a total of 351 frontline professionals, including individuals from law enforcement, health care, education, social workers, government sectors and journalists. As this program progresses, the Hotline anticipates not only an increase in the number of victims identified but also an increase in collaboration between the Hotline and frontline professionals in countering human trafficking.

Indeed, proper training leads to the prevention of exploitation. Attendees have contacted the Hotline to report suspected trafficking after such training sessions. A21, together with the local Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, provided a special one-day frontline professional training in Sliven for 11 police officers and 16 social workers on identifying trafficking and providing psychosocial support for survivors of sex trafficking. Two attendees later called the Hotline to report two different potential human trafficking situations: one involved potential recruitment via the 'loverboy' scheme, and the other related to a group of individuals exploited for labour for which they were unpaid. The Hotline followed up on both cases, locating the potential victims and offering assistance.

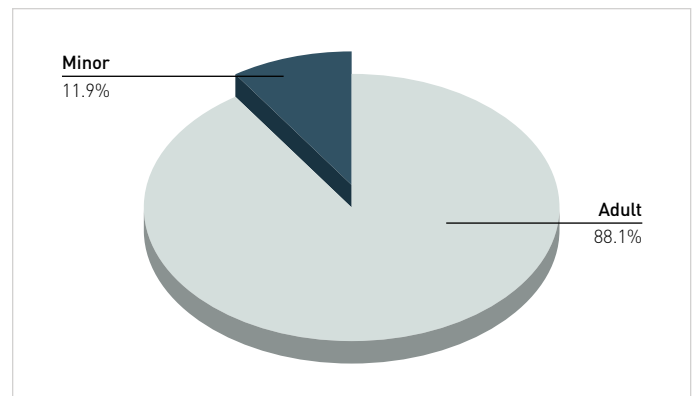
VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

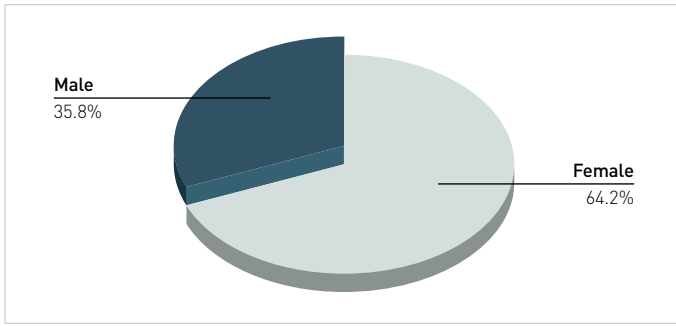
In 2023, the Hotline successfully identified and/or assisted 23 victims of human trafficking, six of whom entered A21's Aftercare Program. A21's Aftercare Program in Bulgaria aims to provide a trauma-informed, survivor-centred program to survivors of human trafficking. Since its establishment, A21's Aftercare Program has played a pivotal role in supporting numerous survivors on their path to recovery, many of whom were first identified and/or assisted by the Hotline. In 2023, A21 Bulgaria celebrated the graduation of two survivors from their program. As part of the program, these survivors received psychological support, legal advice, and regular attendance at the Freedom Centre.⁵ This holistic support proved instrumental in restoring their self-esteem, recognising their self-worth, and enhancing their skills and competencies. This restoration put them in a position where they could independently care for themselves and their families.

AGE AND GENDER

Cases involving potential female victims accounted for 64.2% of the total reported cases to the Hotline, while males formed the remaining 35.8%. This reflects a 15.6% increase since 2022, indicating a continued upward trend in the number of reported cases involving potential male victims, compared to the 6.9% recorded in 2020.

Although the Hotline experienced a 20.2% increase in cases involving minors compared to 2022, most reported cases in 2023 involved adults, accounting for 88.1% of Hotline cases.



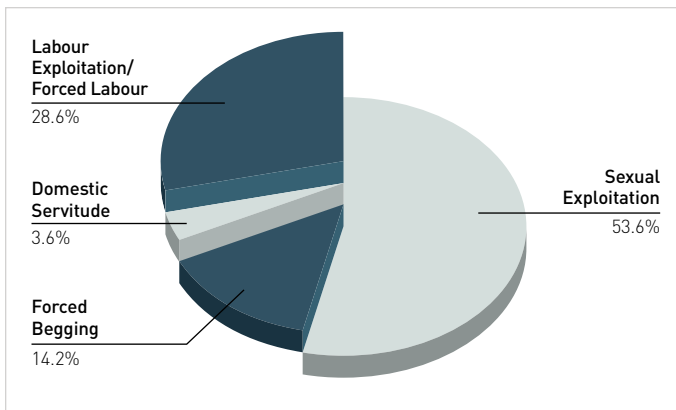


VICTIM NATIONALITY

In 2023, Bulgarian nationals comprised 78.3% of victims identified by the Hotline, with 20% of those Bulgarian national victims being of Roma ethnic origin. In contrast, in 2022, Bulgarian nationals comprised 89% of trafficking victims identified by the Hotline, with 11.1% being of Roma ethnicity, highlighting the increased vulnerability of the Roma community. While trafficking has been reported occurring within Bulgaria, victims reported to the Hotline have predominantly been Bulgarian nationals who have been trafficked internationally. Bulgaria has historically been identified as a source country, with its nationals often being trafficked outside of Bulgaria in neighbouring western countries, such as Germany and Austria.⁶ This trend continued into 2023 and is likely partly explained by the increase in unemployment rates in Bulgaria since 2022.⁷ Bulgarians seeking work elsewhere were then more susceptible to false job recruitment. Other nationalities reported to the Hotline included Romanian and Turkish.

EXPLOITATION TYPE

In 2023, labour and sexual exploitation continued to be the two most common types of exploitation reported to the Hotline, with over half of the victims identified/assisted by the Hotline experiencing sexual exploitation and 28.6% experiencing labour exploitation. Notably, there has been a significant increase in the number of victims of forced begging, from 8.6% in 2022 to 14.2% in 2023.



RECRUITMENT METHODS

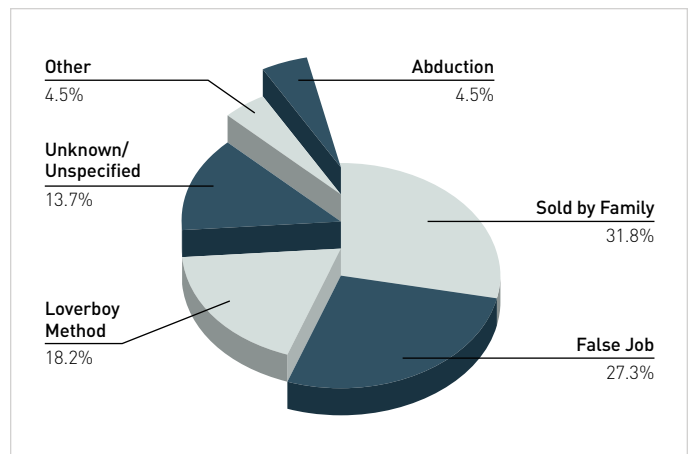
Perpetrators of human trafficking use various recruitment methods to deceive and coerce victims into situations of exploitation; these vary from the ‘loverboy’ method to false jobs and promises to being sold by a family member. Over the past year, the predominant recruitment method reported to the Hotline was ‘sold by family’, constituting 31.8% of cases. This marks a significant increase from 4% in 2022—a noteworthy

trend shift. In 2022, the primary recruitment method was through false job opportunities at 43.2%, which dropped to 27.3% in 2023. Another prevalent method is the ‘loverboy’ method, accounting for 18.2% of cases.

A21 Bulgaria’s efforts to publicise the Hotline’s number in Roma communities may have led to the emergence of this new trend. These communities, grappling with extreme poverty, face increased vulnerability. Specifically, some of these communities, and in particular the ‘Kalaydjii’ Roma community, practise the patriarchal custom of selling their teenage daughters as brides. Unfortunately, the girls subjected to this practice often become victims, either being trafficked or sexually violated directly by their husbands, and ultimately experiencing a form of modern-day slavery. Another area of this trend is the link between pick-pocketing and the Kardarashi tradition of marriage among the Roma—the more adept and skilful a woman is perceived to be, the more expensive a bride she will be. These Roma customs often force these women to steal or beg, and more commonly, as seen in the cases reported to the Hotline, these customs often place Roma women in such a vulnerable position that they are often sold for sexual exploitation by their husbands or another trafficker.

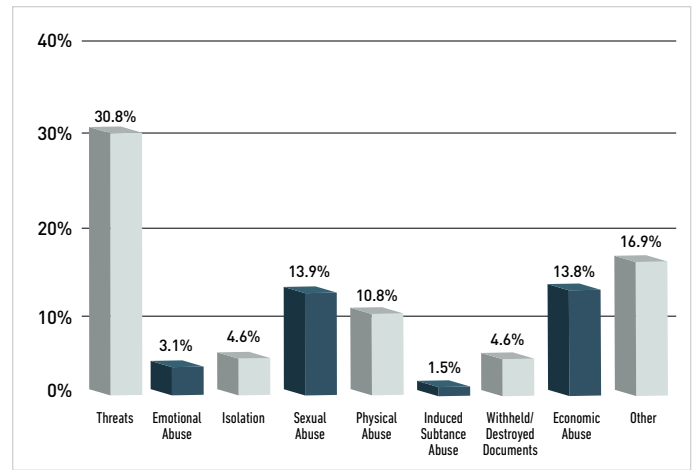
Of the human trafficking-related contacts to the Hotline in 2023, 13.5% involved a potential victim being groomed to be trafficked by the ‘loverboy’ method. Hotline call specialists intervened in each instance to prevent the continued exploitation of these potential victims. The work of the call specialists proved challenging as the potential victims believed they were deeply in love with their traffickers and struggled to acknowledge the risks associated with these romantic relationships. Most of these reports were provided to the Hotline by a concerned friend or family member of the potential victim.

In these scenarios, clear signs indicated that these individuals were at risk. A recurring pattern emerged. The initial connection was on social media, primarily Facebook, and the relationship rapidly developed. The ‘boyfriend’s’ jealousy then escalated quickly, leading to total control and isolation from loved ones. The potential victims received lavish gifts or substantial sums of money, prompting them to quit work or school and travel abroad with their ‘boyfriends’. The age range of potential victims varied from 18 to 32, all being women. As a result of reports to the Hotline and the Hotline’s immediate intervention, sometimes involving law enforcement collaboration, the majority of these vulnerable women were successfully prevented from leaving Bulgaria with the likely perpetrator.



METHODS OF CONTROL

To keep victims in exploitative situations, traffickers use diverse control tactics that include manipulation and coercion. The reported cases to the Hotline highlight methods of control such as threats,⁸ isolation,⁹ emotional, physical, sexual or economic¹⁰ abuse, forced substance misuse, and the deliberate destruction or withholding of personal identification documents. Often, victims of trafficking (VOTs) experience multiple methods of control to keep them in exploitative situations. In 2023, the Hotline observed threats as the most common method of control, involved in over 30% of cases; this included threats to the individual and their family and the threat of being reported to law enforcement. Other prevalent methods of control in 2023 included sexual (13.9%), physical (10.8%) and economic (13.8%) abuse.



HIGHLIGHTS

A21 AFTERCARE EMPOWERS WOMAN ESCAPING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Roza* spent countless time daydreaming about her future. When she was nearly 15, she was forced into an arranged marriage as a part of her Roma traditions. She moved to a small village where her husband and his family treated her as an object. She preoccupied herself with housework and taking care of her child, enduring mistreatment from her husband and growing resentful towards life as the years went by. Roza eventually found support from a man she met online. They began a relationship, and he promised to care for her and her child, giving Roza hope. After a few months, she arranged a time to meet him. He told her to leave her child at home as this was their first time together. When she arrived, the man who promised her the world locked her up in an apartment for a month without connection to the outside world. Drugs and alcohol surrounded her as he forced her to provide sexual services. Only the thought of her child prevented her from completely giving up. One night, she managed to escape and found a police officer. She explained her predicament and the officer connected her to services and a shelter. Just as she thought life was turning around, she discovered that her husband and his family informed social services that she had abandoned her child, resulting in her loss of parental rights. While she dreamed of reuniting with her child, she knew she needed to find a job. A21 financially supported her decision to start a cosmetology vocational training course. Roza diligently completed her training course and participated at the Freedom Centre. She spent time building trust-worthy relationships, receiving educational classes and counselling, and participating in A21 Life Programs. When prosecution against her trafficker commenced, she regularly travelled to testify, resulting in his conviction and imprisonment. Roza continued to work toward regaining her parental rights and eventually won them back. She can now provide for herself and her child and feels empowered to keep moving forward. She encourages other survivors, and her caseworker consistently recognises her resilience and bravery.



*Survivor name has been changed for their protection.



RAPID INTERVENTION BY THE HOTLINE LEADS TO RECOVERY

The Hotline in Bulgaria received a distress call from Ivan,* a male in his twenties who had fallen victim to human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Initially seeking employment in a major city in Bulgaria, Ivan had travelled from his small hometown to pursue work. Upon arrival, however, he was coerced into prostitution, facing threats and forced to wear women's clothing. The Hotline quickly obtained the victim's address and established contact with the local police, who successfully recovered Ivan within three hours of contacting the Hotline. Within the same day, he was reunited with his family and later reached out to the Hotline to confirm his safety. Currently, Ivan is working with the A21 Restore staff, who are supporting him in safely starting a new job.

As a service situated to support those in exploitative situations, the Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline is at the forefront of understanding emerging human trafficking trends in Bulgaria. Each year, the Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline commits to expanding its network and partners across Bulgaria and throughout Europe to ensure that the collected data accurately reflects the current trafficking trends. The Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline welcomes new partners interested in counter-human trafficking efforts in Bulgaria and Europe. Partnerships are vital to provide services to identified trafficking survivors and to increase awareness about the services provided by the Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline across Bulgaria.

080020100

Национална телефонна линия за борба с трафика на хора

info@080020100.bg

www.080020100.bg

The observations contained in this report are limited to information communicated to the Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline during the reporting period. Nothing arising from the data should be interpreted as showing the full extent or prevalence of human trafficking in Bulgaria.

ENDNOTES

¹ "2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bulgaria." US Department of State, July 2022, www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/bulgaria. Accessed 5 Feb. 2024

² To ensure data integrity, the data presented is extracted from reports submitted to the Hotline consisting of those identified as victims and likely potential victims of trafficking. This report takes a conservative approach in presenting Hotline data and analysis, omitting reports of potential victims of human trafficking which were unable to be minimally substantiated.

³ The *Can You See Me?* campaign is A21's global campaign intended to equip the general public on recognising human trafficking and reporting suspected trafficking to the country's relevant hotline. The real life scenarios depicted through the *CYSM?* campaign attempt to bring awareness of the millions of men, women and children currently trapped in modern day slavery across the world. By partnering with law enforcement, governments, businesses and NGOs, the goal is to turn awareness into action.

⁴ Walk for Freedom is a day of 'global awareness and local action' in the fight against human trafficking, where individuals engage their community through local walk events to raise awareness about human trafficking in their cities and collectively result in a ripple effect around the world.

⁵ A21's Freedom Centres are drop-in day centres, which serve as the primary avenue for survivors to receive direct case management support. They offer a safe place to meet with a caseworker, build community with other survivors, and access A21 aftercare services, which may include but are not limited to: Life Programs, job readiness and vocational training, language lessons, tutoring, cooking classes, creative activities, counselling and access to meals.

⁶ Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). (2021). Evaluation Report, Bulgaria. Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-council-of-europe/1680a249f9>

⁷ OECD Economic Surveys: Bulgaria 2023. OECD iLibrary Logo. Retrieved February 27, 2024, from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5ca812a4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/5ca812a4-en>

⁸ Threats include threats of harm to the victim, their family, or other individuals; to the victim's reputation; or to report them to the police, immigration authorities or government authorities.

⁹ Isolation may include physical isolation or deprivation of liberty, denying access to medical support, surveillance or control of the victim in public, and isolating them by moving them frequently from place to place.

¹⁰ Economic abuse includes situations of debt bondage or where traffickers limit the victim's finances either in whole or in part.

GREECE ANNUAL HOTLINE REPORT 2023

ABOUT THE 1109 HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

For the past 11 years, A21 Greece has operated the 1109 Hotline, a nationwide counter-human trafficking hotline. The 1109 Hotline, accessible via phone, email, social media and an online web form, is the only hotline in Greece solely dedicated to both responding to reports of and supporting victims of human trafficking. Specially trained call specialists receive calls in Greek and English, with support for an additional 230 languages through a tele-interpreting service. Moreover, the Hotline offers general information about trafficking in Greece and responds to requests for training. The 1109 Hotline collaborates closely with law enforcement, other government agencies and civil society organisations to ensure fast and effective responses to each case.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN 2023

Throughout 2023, the 1109 Hotline observed victims being recruited from Latin American countries to Greece under the false pretence of legal sex work, only to be forced into sex trafficking through debt bondage upon their arrival. This same recruitment from Latin America has been observed across European countries where A21 operates. As a result of information to the 1109 Hotline highlighting this trend, the 1109 Hotline successfully provided critical intelligence to law enforcement, leading to successful large-scale operations by law enforcement on four occasions. These efforts resulted in the recovery of over 60 trafficking victims from Latin America and arrest of traffickers. Tips from concerned citizens were vital, with one operation alone resulting in the recovery of 52 sex trafficking victims after a concerned neighbour reported her suspicions to the 1109 Hotline. In another case, the 1109 Hotline passed on a tip reported to A21 Spain, prompting law enforcement to conduct a major operation in Greece. This operation led to the recovery of 10 victims, predominantly from Venezuela, and the arrest of six members of the trafficking ring. In response to this trend, A21 has increased prevention and awareness efforts targeting this vulnerable group in Greece and other European countries.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The 1109 Hotline received **2,394 CONTACTS**, a 41.7% increase from 2022
- **88.1%** of contacts were specifically related to **HUMAN TRAFFICKING**
- The Hotline received reports about **370 POTENTIAL VICTIMS** of trafficking, of which **87.6%** were **FEMALE**
- **37%** of confirmed victims of trafficking were from **LATIN AMERICAN** countries
- **46.2%** of all contacts came from the **GENERAL PUBLIC**
- The top three cities where trafficking was reported were **ATHENS (28.9%)**, **THESSALONIKI (26.6%)** and **ISTANBUL (9.1%)**
- **143** reports were sent to Greek Law Enforcement
- The 1109 Hotline identified and/or assisted **145 VICTIMS** of trafficking, **111** of whom entered the A21 Aftercare Program

Contacts to the 1109 Hotline comprise all incoming enquiries to the Hotline through any manner, including but not limited to phone calls, emails, SMS messages and online web submissions. These enquiries include all reports on potential human trafficking, various crimes both related and unrelated to human trafficking, general queries about human trafficking, and requests for various types of assistance related to human trafficking, such as safety planning or job vetting.

The statistics in this report are exclusively drawn from substantive contacts made to the Hotline from January–December 2023 concerning human trafficking matters. This report does not reflect all substantive calls to the Hotline, which may include calls related to other high-risk crimes, labour exploitation, and other non-trafficking issues.

When available, disaggregated data on descriptive factors, including gender, age, type of trafficking, methods of control and recruitment methods, has been collected on each individual case.

'This police operation wouldn't be as successful without A21's contribution. The news of this case has travelled all around the world.'

—Minister of Civil Protection

OVERVIEW OF DATA ¹

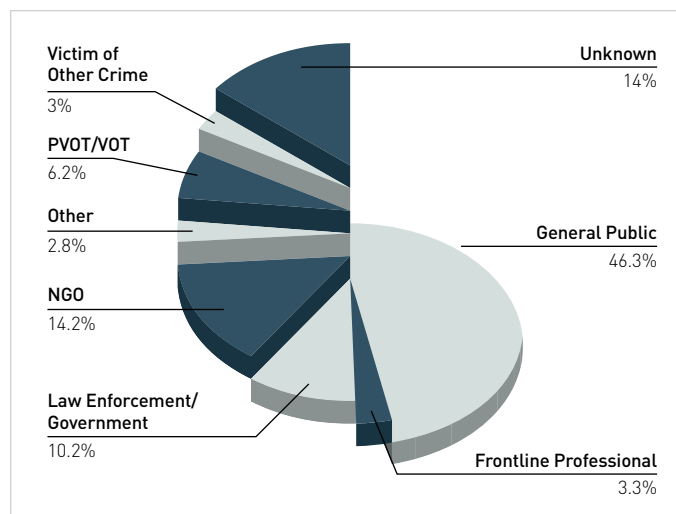
In 2023, the 1109 Hotline received 2,394 contacts via phone, email, social media and the online web form available on the Hotline's webpage (1109.gr). This marks a 41.7% increase in contacts from 2022. Of these contacts, 536 were new unique cases, of which 349 involved a human trafficking-related issue. The Hotline continued to collaborate with law enforcement in 2023, not only with the specialised anti-trafficking units in Athens and Thessaloniki, but also with local police stations, resulting in the submission of 143 reports to the police. Most individuals discovered the 1109 Hotline through an internet search, while others came across it from public service announcements aired on Greek TV channels for three months in 2023. Moreover, frontline professionals and partner organisations received comprehensive information about the Hotline's services through A21's training programs.

In September, A21 launched its *Can You See Me??* (CYSM?) public awareness and hotline campaign in Greece in collaboration with the Ministry of Civil Protection and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. This campaign included two short films to educate the general public about sex and labour trafficking in Greece and empower them with the tools to report potential trafficking to the 1109 Hotline. Several distinguished guests attended including the Deputy Minister of Migration and Asylum, the head of the Security Police Division of Attica, the U.S. Ambassador to Greece, the General Secretary for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection and the National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings, amongst others.

CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

Following patterns observed in 2022, the general public comprised 46.3% of all contacts to the Hotline. Such reports include individuals observing a suspicious situation, such as friends, family or even concerned neighbours of a potential victim. Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) continue to contact the Hotline, accounting for 14.2% of all callers, primarily to refer potential trafficking victims for supportive services from A21. In 2023, the 1109 Hotline supported the referrals of 58 potential victims of trafficking, mainly from the migrant and refugee populations. Law enforcement or other government institutions contacted the Hotline on 60 occasions, primarily to request assistance for potential victims of trafficking, accounting for 10.2% of contacts. Potential victims themselves increasingly called the Hotline to seek support, accounting for 6.2% of all callers in 2023, a 177% increase from last year. Ensuring that the 1109 Hotline offers a 24-hour interpretation service has proved to be essential, given

that most potential victims are foreign nationals. While contacts often involve reports regarding foreign nationals, 86% of hotline contacts originated from within Greece, with 52.3% from its two largest cities, Athens and Thessaloniki and 24.8% from rural areas throughout the country.

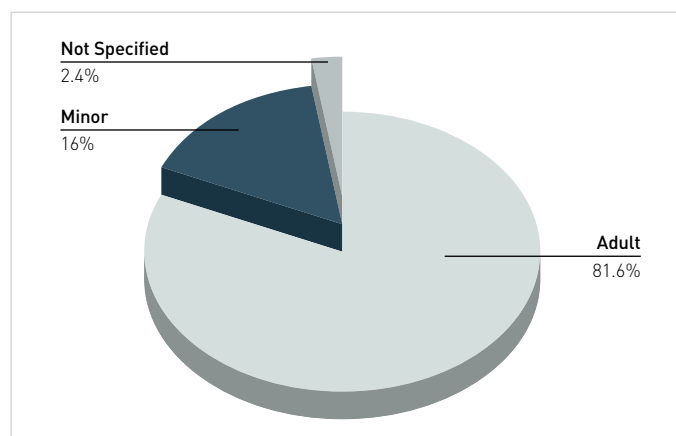


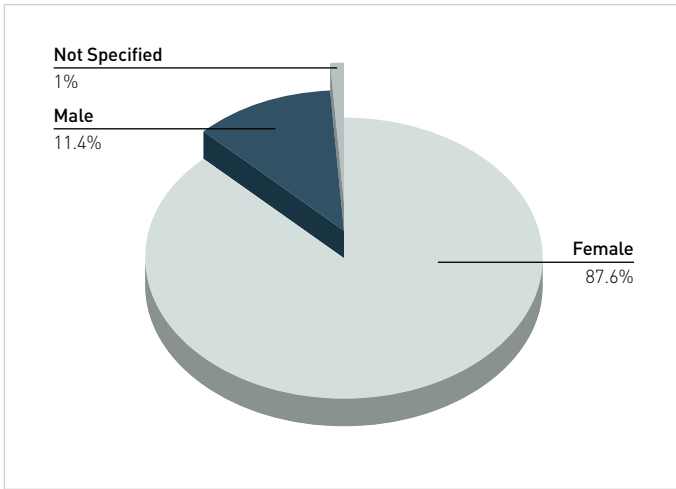
VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

The 1109 Hotline call specialists are specially trained to identify and respond to human trafficking situations in Greece. In 2023, call specialists' responses to contacts to the Hotline resulted in reports involving 370 potential victims of trafficking. While the majority of these reports involved exploitation in Greece (69.3%), a significant percentage involved trafficking in Turkey (14.9%) and in African countries (8.1%).

AGE AND GENDER

Adults constituted the majority of potential victims reported to the 1109 Hotline in 2023, accounting for 81.6% of the reports, with minors at 16%, a 29.5% decrease since 2022. Regardless of gender, forced begging was the predominant form of exploitation experienced by minors. The majority of potential victims reported were female (87.6%), an 18.6% increase compared to 2022, mainly for sexual exploitation.



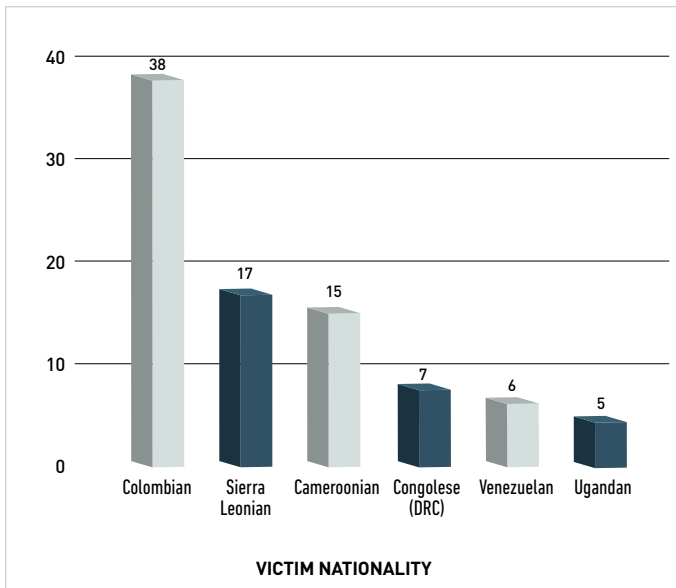


The most common forms of exploitation reported were sexual exploitation (45.8%), forced begging (27.6%), forced labour (8.1%) and domestic servitude (5.7%). These figures highlight the correlation between the high proportion of female victims and sexual exploitation.

VICTIM NATIONALITY

Call specialists' protocol in responding to calls varies depending on the caller. When potential victims contact the Hotline directly, call specialists conduct screening interviews. This process allows the call specialists to ask specific questions about the trafficking situation. In 2023, the 1109 Hotline conducted 133 such screenings. The following data was derived from confirmed victims of trafficking identified directly by a 1109 Hotline call specialist or referred to the 1109 Hotline by a partner organisation.

The six most frequently reported nationalities of trafficking victims to the Hotline were Colombian, Sierra Leonean, Cameroonian, Congolese, Venezuelan and Ugandan. Among confirmed victims, 37% were from Latin American (LATAM) countries, with Colombia being the most common nationality.



In 2023, the 1109 Hotline observed a significant emergence of victims from LATAM countries, predominantly from Colombia, within the sex industry in Greece. Traffickers lure these women to Greece under false pretences, enticed with promises of substantial earnings within three months. However, upon arrival, they discover themselves in debt bondage, required to reimburse overpriced costs, including airfare, accommodation and transportation expenses, ultimately finding themselves with little or no income.

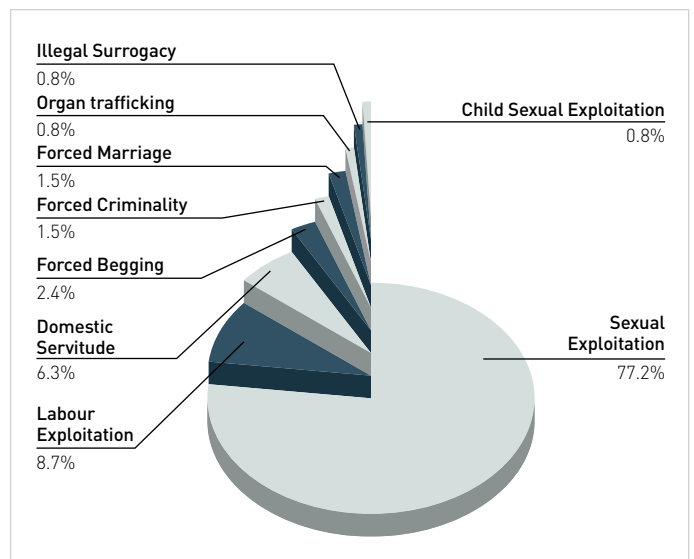
As for the other African nationalities shown in the chart, these victims primarily come from the migrant and refugee populations. Their exploitation occurs either in their home country or in one of the transit countries along their journey towards Europe.

EXPLOITATION TYPE

In 2023, sexual exploitation constituted the most common type of exploitation in the confirmed cases of human trafficking reported to the Hotline at 77.2% of cases, followed by forced labour (8.7%) and domestic servitude (6.3%). The large number of victims recovered during law enforcement operations relating to the sexual exploitation of Latina women also highlights an emerging pattern.

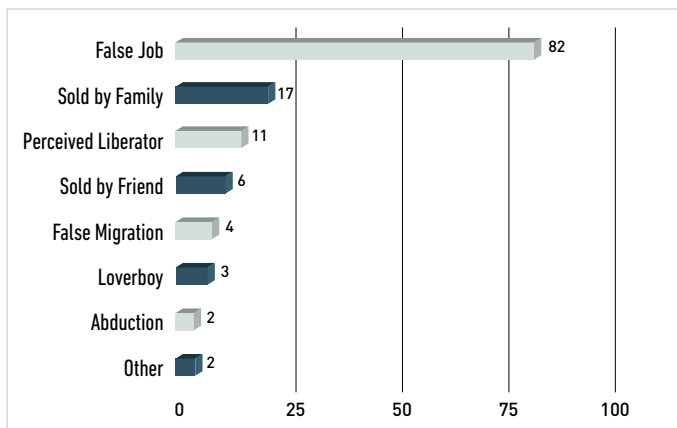
Men comprised the majority of labour exploitation victims reported to the Hotline. Of the 11 confirmed victims of labour exploitation reported to the Hotline, only two were exploited in Greece, both within the agricultural sector. The others had been exploited before their travel to Greece. The limited number of labour trafficking cases however should not be seen as representative of the reality of labour exploitation in Greece. Instead, this merely suggests that while labour trafficking does occur in Greece, it often remains concealed and goes largely unreported.

A rare type of exploitation emerged in 2023 involving a trafficking ring that targeted vulnerable women for egg 'donation' and illegal surrogacy. While the trafficking of individuals for organ or human tissue removal has been rarely highlighted in Greece, according to information provided by investigators, this particular trafficking ring has been active in Greece for more than a decade.



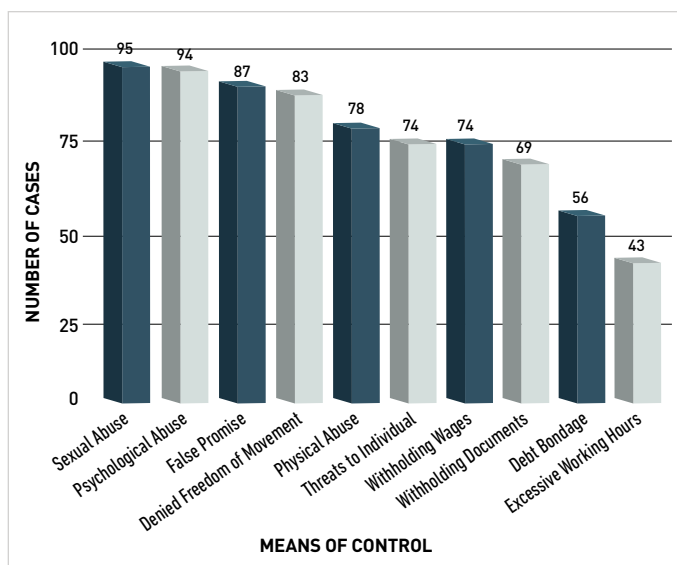
RECRUITMENT METHODS

Consistent with 2022, the three most common recruitment methods used by traffickers in 2023 based on reports to the 1109 Hotline were the promise of a false job, victims being sold or tricked by their family members and perceived liberators.³ For trafficking cases where the exploitation occurred within Greek borders, the most common recruitment method was the promise of a false job. Recruitment through the promise of a false job extends beyond circumstances where victims are given different work than initially agreed upon. Rather, it also includes misrepresentation of working conditions. Recruitment through sale by family or perceived liberators has been mainly observed in cases involving individuals from the migrant and refugee populations. Many times, a pattern emerged where the family acts as a liaison between the victim and the exploiter. In the perceived liberator circumstances, victims may rely on individuals offering assistance from difficult living conditions, only to discover they've been unwittingly recruited into trafficking.



METHODS OF CONTROL

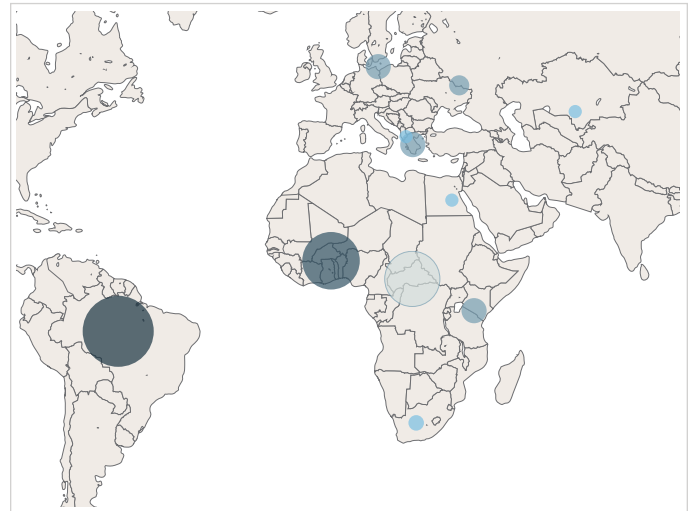
To keep victims in exploitative situations, traffickers use several methods of control. In 2023, the 1109 Hotline observed sexual abuse to be the most common method of control. Traffickers also prevalently used psychological abuse, false promises and denied freedom of movement to control their victims.



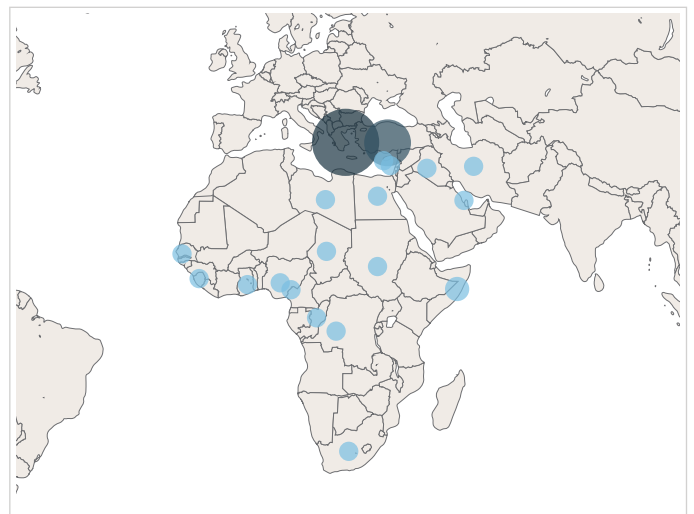
RECRUITMENT AND EXPLOITATION LOCATION

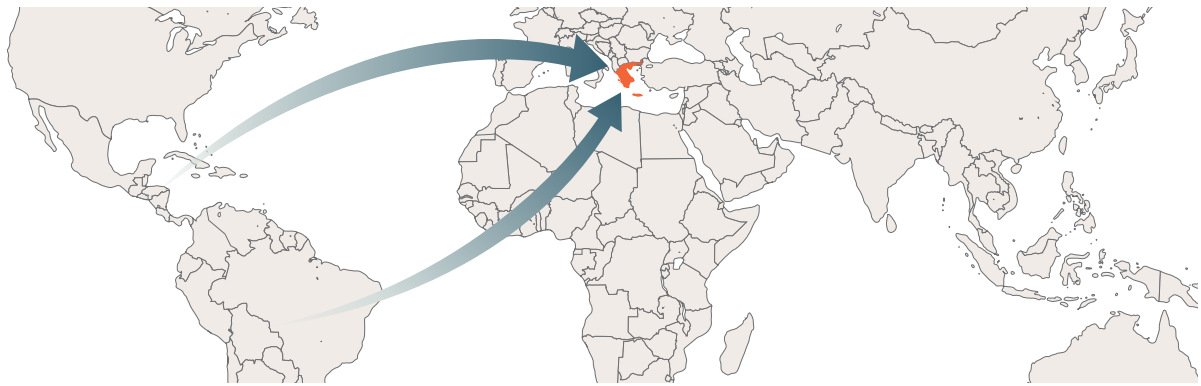
Of the victims identified and/or assisted by the 1109 Hotline in 2023, traffickers heavily recruited individuals from Latin America (32.3%) and Africa (49.6%). While the majority of victims were recruited overseas, the exploitation most often occurred in Greece and Turkey, comprising 81.9% of the reported exploitation locations, with the remainder being countries in Africa and the Middle East.

COUNTRY OF RECRUITMENT



COUNTRY OF EXPLOITATION





1109 HOTLINE TIP RESULTS IN THE DISMANTLING OF AN INTERNATIONAL TRAFFICKING SYNDICATE AND RECOVERY OF 52 LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN

The Hellenic Police, with INTERPOL, Spain's National Police, and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations via the U.S. Embassy in Athens, dismantled an international human trafficking syndicate, safely recovering 52 victims. According to investigators, these women, primarily from Latin America, were trafficked into Greece with promises of well-paying jobs and great working conditions. When it became evident that they had been deceived, their traffickers threatened, demeaned and forced them to work in brothels. The traffickers forced the women to work long hours, even when unwell, for little to no pay, generating an estimated profit of €160,000 a month for their traffickers. The 1109 Hotline in Greece contributed significantly to the criminal investigation by providing intelligence to the anti-trafficking police department about one of the main locations of the trafficking. The 1109 Hotline received several calls from a concerned citizen over four months, enabling the call specialists to submit multiple police reports with extensive information about the victims and trafficking circumstances. After months of ongoing investigation, the Hellenic Police coordinated a take-down with various international law enforcement and arrested 22

perpetrators of the trafficking ring. A21's aftercare team remained involved following the recovery of these women by providing direct services. The support provided to these survivors varied depending on their individual needs and desires and included providing for their basic needs and emergency housing. In addition, A21 provided legal assistance through a victim's attorney to represent the survivors' interests in the ensuing criminal prosecution. Finally, with the support of other NGOs in various countries, these survivors were repatriated back home and received ongoing support as needed.

After this successful operation, the Minister of Civil Protection invited A21 to a meeting with the General Chief of Police and other high-ranking officials to discuss further collaboration. Within this meeting, A21 had the opportunity to share the full story of the case and the degree of support provided to the survivors. All those present highlighted the significance of the 1109 Hotline and A21's involvement in this operation, and the Minister of Civil Protection announced he would fully support future initiatives to increase awareness across the nation.

As a service situated to support those in exploitative situations, the 1109 Hotline is at the forefront of understanding emerging human trafficking trends in Greece. Each year, the 1109 Hotline commits to expanding its network and partners across Greece and throughout Europe to ensure that the collected data accurately reflects the current trafficking trends. The 1109 Hotline welcomes new partners interested in counter-human trafficking efforts in Greece and Europe. Partnerships are vital to provide services to identified trafficking survivors and to increase awareness about the services provided by the 1109 Hotline across Greece.



The observations in this report are limited to information communicated to the 1109 Hotline during the reporting period. Nothing in the data should be interpreted as showing the full extent or prevalence of human trafficking in Greece.

ENDNOTES

¹ To ensure data integrity, the data presented is extracted from reports submitted to the Hotline consisting of those identified as victims and likely potential victims of trafficking. This report takes a conservative approach in presenting Hotline data and analysis, omitting reports of potential victims of human trafficking which were unable to be minimally substantiated.

² The *Can You See Me?* campaign is A21's global campaign intended to equip the general public on recognising human trafficking and reporting suspected trafficking to the country's relevant hotline. The real life scenarios depicted through the *CYSM?* campaign attempt to bring awareness of the millions of men, women and children currently trapped in modern day slavery across the world. By partnering with law enforcement, governments, businesses and NGOs, the goal is to turn awareness into action.

³ Recruitment through a 'perceived liberator/benefactor' occurs when a perpetrator promises to liberate someone from exploitation, harm or hardship, only to then exploit them.

SOUTH AFRICA ANNUAL HOTLINE REPORT 2023

ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

Operating since 2016, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) is a dedicated service that supports victims of human trafficking and provides advice and assistance on human trafficking issues. The NHTH collaborates with law enforcement, key governmental departments, and non-government organisations (NGOs) within South Africa. The NHTH operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, receiving reports of suspected trafficking through phone calls and electronic means. All reports are handled by call specialists specifically trained in the area of human trafficking, utilising a trauma-informed and victim-centred approach.

The call specialists are equipped to respond to calls in English, Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans, and Shona, plus an additional 230 languages through a tele-interpreting service. Additionally, the NHTH provides a 'job vetting' service, where the NHTH conducts research on potential job opportunities to verify their legitimacy. Call specialists then provide feedback to the callers on the potential risk or possible exploitation involved with the opportunity, as well as advice on safely pursuing employment.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN 2023

A growing global trend of online scam centres has emerged in Southeast Asia, with victims originating from various areas around the world, including Africa. The NHTH has received some reports involving the use of scam centres in Southeast Asia to target and recruit Africans, including South Africans, through false job opportunities.¹ This recruitment tactic involves advertising seemingly legitimate employment in Thailand. Historically, false job opportunities reported to the NHTH have advertised informal work opportunities, such as domestic work as a nanny or house cleaner. However, the employment opportunities used by scam centres focus on specialised fields or require previous work experience, thereby presenting a sense of legitimacy.² Reports from victims have included signed contracts, accommodation viewings and arranged transport. Upon arrival in Thailand, these

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The NHTH received a total of **3,613 CONTACTS**
- **79.2%** of contacts were **HUMAN TRAFFICKING RELATED**
- **SEX TRAFFICKING** was the most common form of exploitation, reported at **52%**, an increase of **24.4%** from 2022
- **131 POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING** were reported to the NHTH
- **MINORS** accounted for **22.9%** of cases reported, an increase from **12%** reported in 2022
- 54.6% of all contacts originated from the **GENERAL PUBLIC**
- **FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS** constituted **10.2%** of all contacts to the NHTH
- 31.1% of victims were **RECRUITED** from **GAUTENG PROVINCE** compared to **22%** in 2022
- **47.6%** of trafficking victims identified were recruited through **FALSE JOB OPPORTUNITIES**
- The NHTH identified and/or assisted **42 VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING**

Contacts to the National Human Trafficking Hotline comprise all incoming enquiries to the Hotline through any manner, including but not limited to phone calls, emails, SMS messages and online web submissions. These enquiries include all reports on potential human trafficking, various crimes both related and unrelated to human trafficking, general queries about human trafficking, and requests for various types of assistance related to human trafficking, such as safety planning or job vetting.

The statistics in this report are exclusively drawn from substantive contacts made to the Hotline from January–December 2023 concerning human trafficking matters. This report is not a reflection of all substantive calls to the Hotline, which may include calls related to other high-risk crimes, labour exploitation, and other non-trafficking issues.

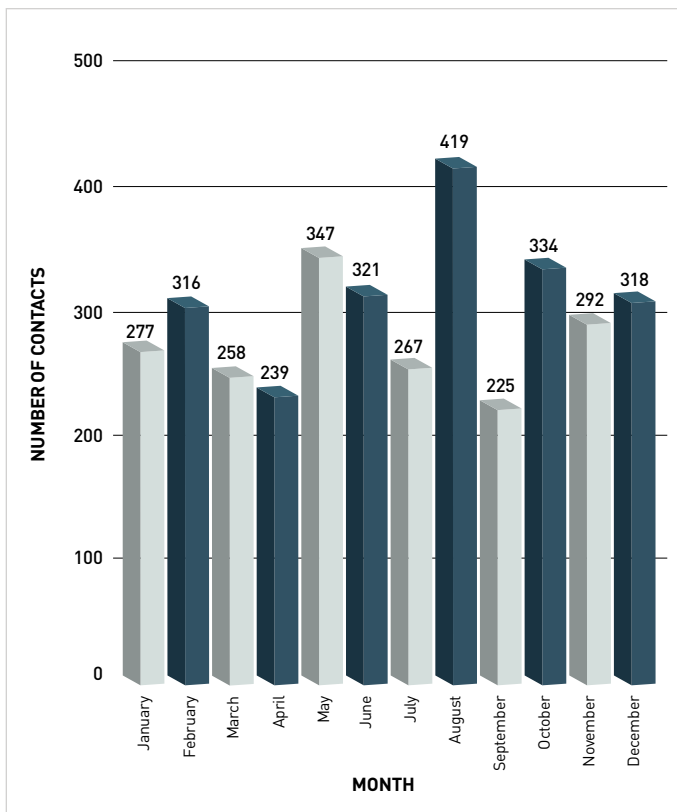
When available, disaggregated data on descriptive factors, including gender, age, type of trafficking, methods of control and recruitment methods, has been collected on each individual case.

unsuspecting victims often find themselves trapped in extremely exploitative and dangerous situations.

One such case reported involved a South African male seeking assistance. The victim was lured to Thailand through a false job opportunity. Upon arrival in Thailand, he and other victims embarked on a treacherous journey ending at a compound surrounded by armed guards, where he was forced to participate in online scamming activities. After escaping from the compound, the victim contacted the NHTH and the call specialist connected the victim with the South African Embassy in Bangkok. The NHTH then worked with the embassy to procure an emergency travel certificate, as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in South Africa to successfully repatriate the victim back to South Africa.

OVERVIEW OF DATA³

The NHTH receives reports via phone, email, text and the dedicated website (www.0800222777.org.za). In 2023, the NHTH received 3,613 contacts through various communication channels, averaging 300 contacts per month. Of these, 79.2% were human trafficking-related, a 3.4% increase since 2022. The increase in human trafficking-related contacts has been a consistent four-year pattern, a clear indication that more callers are contacting the NHTH specifically to report human trafficking. This trend may be attributed to the focused attention on training frontline professionals, as well as the promotion of the NHTH’s number through A21’s *Can You See Me?* campaign.⁴

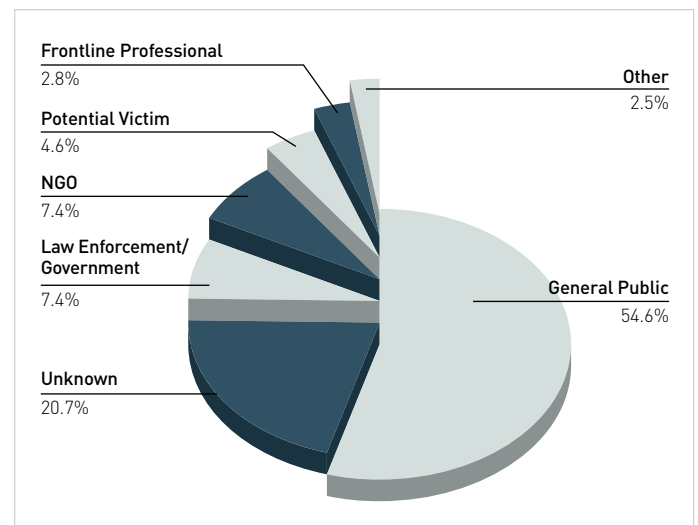


'I recall clearly the gathering of NFN members and others in Cape Town before the launch of South Africa's National Human Trafficking Hotline over seven years ago. We rallied together to learn how the hotline would work and motivated everyone to sign up to collaborate and promote the new number nationally. It is a privilege to work with the hotline in providing assistance to them or communicating with them regarding situations which are suspicious and need investigation. With excellently trained trauma-informed victim-centred call specialists, they gather relevant information and then initiate the mobilisation of the mandated government departments and others who assist further. In addition to this, the hotline has a key role to play in providing statistics for South Africa; however, A21 continuously develops other new areas of services which are needed to fill gaps which they observe. We are grateful for the dedication and commitment to making a difference!'

—Marina Reyneke, Operations Manager,
National Freedom Network

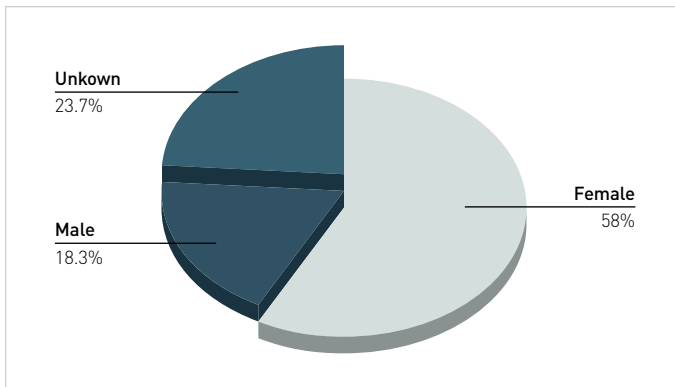
CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

Calls from the general public accounted for the highest percentage (54.6%) of contacts to the NHTH, emphasising the importance of having the option to report human trafficking-related matters anonymously to a non-law enforcement body. For this reason, the NHTH continues to build a strong working relationship with relevant law enforcement bodies to ensure a timely response when a situation warrants official intervention. Law enforcement in need of assistance identifying or requesting direct services for potential victims comprised 7.4% of contacts. Frontline professionals constituted 2.8% of contacts, a 55.5% increase compared to 2022, potentially as a result of increased training by A21 with frontline professionals in 2023. The number of self-identifying victims who contacted the NHTH for assistance increased significantly by 27.8%, accounting for 4.6% of total contacts.



VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2023, the NHTH received reports of 131 potential victims of trafficking. In each case, call specialists assessed the likelihood of human trafficking and submitted relevant reports to law enforcement where the situation warranted further intervention. This process resulted in the identification of 42 confirmed victims of trafficking. Following the identification of a trafficking victim, the NHTH ensures both the notification of correct reporting bodies in each province and the availability of direct services for the survivors. The NHTH regularly refers survivors identified in the Western Cape to A21 for aftercare services, as well as to the government and other NGOs. In 2023, 23 survivors assisted out of trafficking by the NHTH subsequently entered A21's Aftercare Program.



Adults comprised 60.3% of victims reported to the NHTH. Among the adult victims, 58% were female, presumably due to the increased amount of reported sex trafficking cases that year. The percentage of minors reported in 2023 increased from 12% in 2022 to 22.9%. The increase in the exploitation of children in South Africa has been noticeable more so in the recent economic climate, which continues to be exacerbated by the continuing war in Ukraine and the subsequent rise in the cost of living. Children are recruited from other provinces or neighbouring countries, such as Malawi, and forced to work to contribute financially to their households. In 2023, the NHTH received a number of reports of Malawian minors employed in tuckshops, or 'spaza shops', located in informal settlements within South Africa. The NHTH, especially in December 2023, observed a noticeable increase in reports of minors travelling suspiciously on buses, usually unaccompanied or accompanied by an adult with no relation to them or of a different nationality.

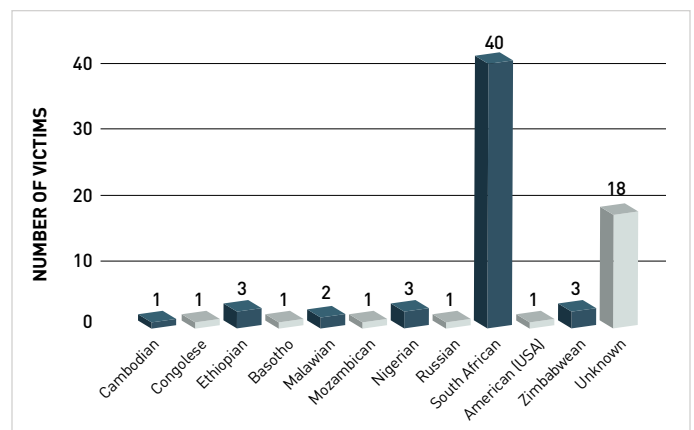
Reports involving males accounted for 18.3% of the cases reported to the NHTH. In 2023, the NHTH received reports of males being transported, and potentially trafficked, into South Africa from countries such as Ethiopia. The callers submitted these reports after observing that these males appeared to have limited freedom of movement and lived in questionable conditions. Notably, these groups often involved minors. However, further investigation of these reports resulted in a finding of insufficient evidence to substantiate an allegation of human trafficking as opposed to smuggling. It must be noted that many initial human smuggling endeavours later develop into a trafficking or other exploitative situation. As a result of these reports to the NHTH and subsequent

intervention, it is unclear whether the perpetrators were limiting their criminal act to smuggling, or whether they ultimately intended to traffick or otherwise exploit these foreign nationals. It is worth noting that generally, smuggled individuals are highly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking situations, thereby highlighting the importance of intervention as a preventative mechanism.

VICTIM NATIONALITY

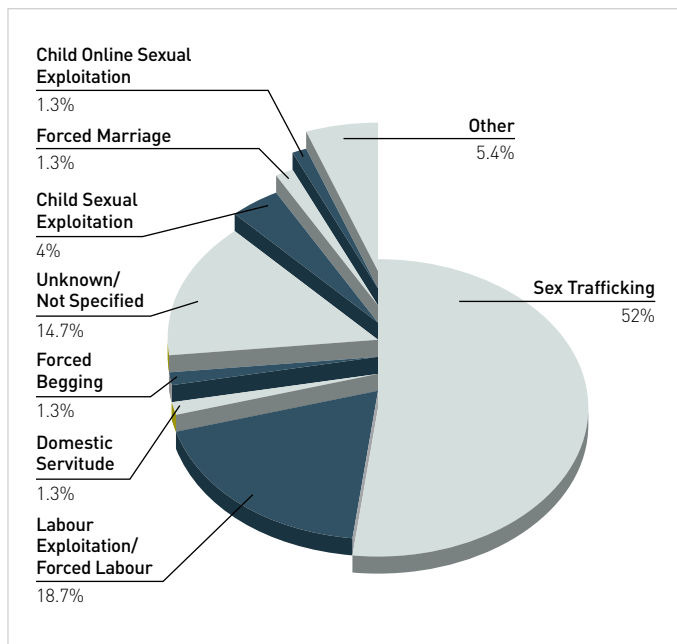
While South African nationals remained the predominant nationality of victims reported to the NHTH at 53.3%, this is a 22.9% decrease since 2022. This decrease may be the result of the increase of foreign nationals recruited from neighbouring countries into South Africa compared to the previous year. The countries reported include Zimbabwe, Malawi and Nigeria. Victims trafficked to South Africa have typically been recruited through false job opportunities. Upon arrival to South Africa, traffickers either force these victims into prostitution or exploit them for labour.

Over the past year, the NHTH observed a new trend of victims trafficked from Mozambique into South Africa. Recruiters, most commonly men familiar with the rural and impoverished areas of Mozambique, target young female residents of those areas with false employment opportunities. These recruiters then organise and pay for the victims' travel to South Africa. The victims are always transported by car, and the driver is provided with detailed instructions to ensure the women's entry into South Africa at the border, despite the lack of proper documentation. Upon arrival in South Africa, these women are then sold to men for various purposes. Some are forced to play the role of 'wife', with the expectation of cooking, cleaning and other common homemaker duties, including sexual relations. Others are forced into domestic servitude only, and still others are used for sexual gratification. While the exploiters' treatment of these women varies, even the situations with seemingly 'wife-like' roles are exploitative. The dynamic is never relational, and the women are treated as commodities to serve the men's orders, similar to a forced marriage type of trafficking. If the victims retaliate or refuse to comply, the men physically assault them. These men also deny the victims freedom of movement and the ability to work. In some instances, the Mozambican women, initially trafficked as teenage minors, ultimately escape from their exploitation once they are adults, often pregnant or with an infant.



EXPLOITATION TYPE

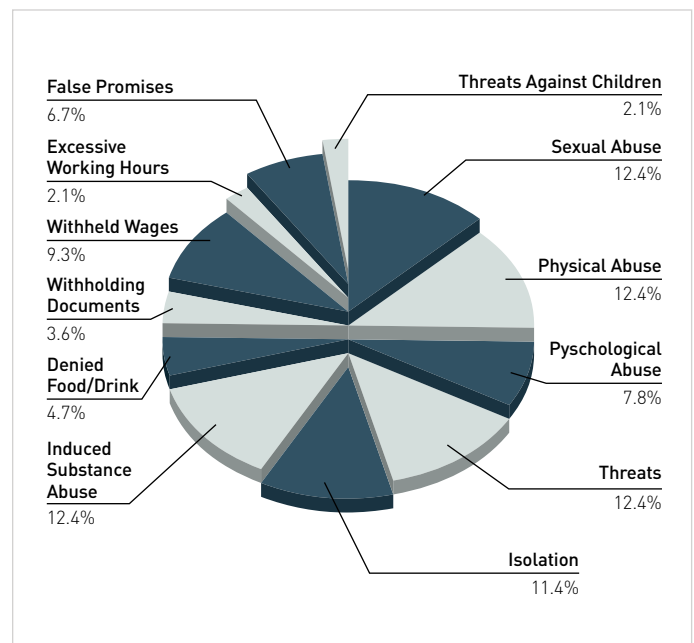
Sexual exploitation continues to be the most prevalent type of trafficking reported to the NHTH, comprising 52% of the cases reported in 2023, a 5% increase from 2022. The Brooklyn area in Cape Town, Western Cape, has remained a hotspot for sexual exploitation throughout 2023, with multiple reports confirming active trafficking in this area. Recruiters approach females in person from various areas in South Africa, most commonly in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, with promises of employment opportunities in Cape Town. The recruiter then provides a bus or flight ticket. Upon arrival in Cape Town, the victims are taken to various locations in Brooklyn, where they are sexually exploited. Reports of trafficking to the NHTH in the Brooklyn area doubled in 2023 from the prior year. Through its work on these cases, the NHTH has built a relationship with a local NGO in Brooklyn based at the local police station. As a result of this relationship, the local police refers all identified victims to this local NGO who in turn refers them to the NHTH for further assistance. The NHTH has also established relationships with other organisations in Brooklyn in positions to encounter trafficking victims. Through these targeted efforts and an increase in awareness of the NHTH’s services, the NHTH anticipates increased reports from Brooklyn.



METHODS OF CONTROL

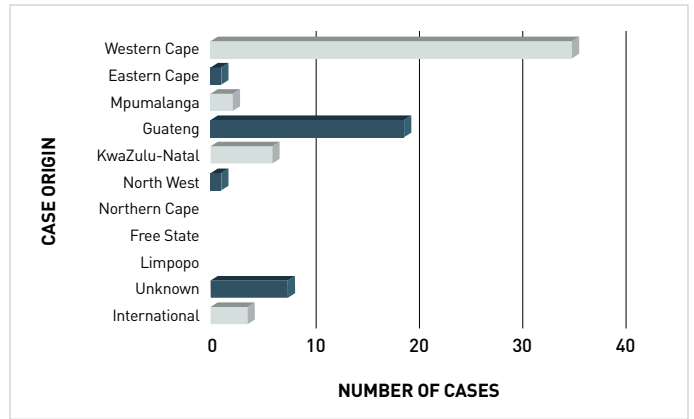
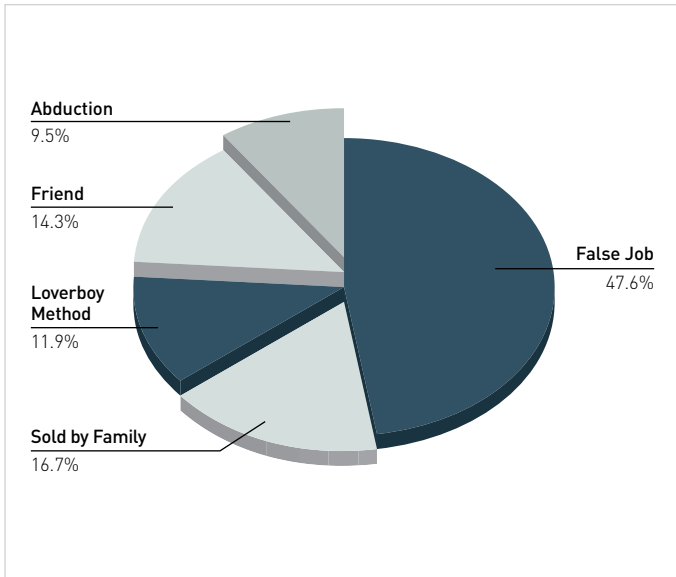
Those unfamiliar with human trafficking may not understand why victims of trafficking cannot simply leave their situation. Traffickers use various tactics to control victims and create a circumstance where escape is nearly impossible. According to data collected by the NHTH, the primary methods of control include sexual abuse (12.4%), induced substance abuse (12.4%), isolation (11.4%), physical abuse (12.4%) and threats (12.4%). In instances of confirmed sex trafficking reported to the NHTH, perpetrators typically compel victims to consume drugs before coercing them into engaging in commercial sex. As a result, victims often develop a dependence

on substances, effectively trapping them in the situation. Fear of ‘consequences’ is another key factor to consider; frequently, during telephonic screenings, victims of trafficking have expressed their fear of facing physical abuse and threats if they attempt to leave or resist complying with the trafficker’s demands, essentially ‘keeping’ them in the exploitation. These control tactics can be seen in this highlighted case from Brooklyn, Western Cape. In this case, after a victim called the NHTH requesting assistance, the NHTH worked out a safety plan and arranged an extraction. However, thereafter, the victim expressed fear and reluctance to leave, promising to reach out again when ready. Respecting the victim’s decision, the call specialist continued to offer support telephonically, building trust through multiple conversations until the victim eventually gathered the courage to activate the extraction and exit the exploitation. These types of challenges are not uncommon when working to coordinate extractions for victims being actively trafficked.



RECRUITMENT METHODS

According to reports submitted to the NHTH, false job opportunities (47.6%) and being sold by family (16.7%) remain the most prevalent recruitment methods recorded in 2023. This is consistent with findings in 2022 and may be attributed in part to the economic desperation experienced by a large portion of the population in the past year. The NHTH continues to observe families selling their children into trafficking situations to generate income for their households. This phenomenon occurs not just in South Africa but in families in neighbouring countries, as previously highlighted. The next prominent method of recruitment into trafficking, at 11.9%, is through the loverboy method, a manipulative tactic where traffickers form a romantic relationship with victims to coerce them into ‘agreeing’ to an exploitative situation. Often victims may not recognise they are being victimised, and despite the exploitation, believe themselves to be in a romantic relationship with the trafficker.

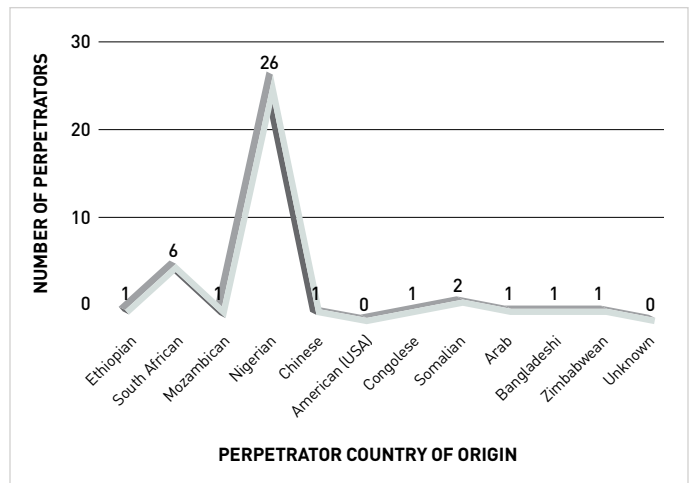


CASE ORIGIN

According to reports to the NHTH, the primary regions of exploitation originate from the Western Cape (46.7%) and Gauteng province (25.3%). The NHTH observed a notable 51% increase in reported cases in the Western Cape. This increase in reported cases, however, may not necessarily indicate a higher prevalence of exploitation in these areas compared to the prior year but may be attributed, at least in part, to increased reporting and coordination leading to the identification of trafficking victims. Awareness of the NHTH and its services has grown among frontline professionals and the general public, and coordination and communication between key government stakeholders has improved. This suggests that the increase in the use of the NHTH number and coordination between stakeholders in other provinces could yield an increase in the identification of potential trafficking situations and victims.

PERPETRATOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Among the confirmed trafficking cases reported to the NHTH, Nigerian nationals comprised 63.4% of suspected perpetrators, compared to 19.6% in 2022. This increase may be attributed to the high number of cases and victims identified in the Brooklyn area of Cape Town, notorious for the Nigerian-operated trafficking rings.





THE NHTH ASSISTS IN A SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY AND REPATRIATION

The NHTH received an online report from a victim of forced drug trafficking. The victim disclosed that while in his home country of Nigeria, his brother told him of a job opportunity where he would be earning R500/day. After accepting this job offer, the trafficker paid for his expenses to travel to South Africa. Immediately upon arrival, the victim was taken to an apartment, where he discovered that he would be forced to work in a drug trafficking syndicate. The organisation locked the victim in the apartment for long hours with no food, water or rest breaks and forced him to package all the drugs for distribution. The victim contacted the NHTH for assistance.

However, after this initial contact, the NHTH was unable to make contact with the victim for several weeks despite several attempts until one day, the victim managed to call the NHTH asking for assistance in escaping. A call specialist retrieved his address and contacted specialised law enforcement, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPIC)/HAWKS in Gauteng, the provincial Trafficking in Persons coordinator, as well as relevant stakeholders in that region. Law enforcement then swiftly recovered the victim from the residence and arrested the trafficker. Thereafter, the Nigerian Embassy assisted the survivor with repatriation back to Nigeria.

As a service situated to support those in exploitative situations, the South African National Human Trafficking Hotline is at the forefront of understanding emerging human trafficking trends in South Africa. Each year the NHTH commits to expanding its networks and partners across South Africa to ensure that an accurate scope of trafficking is reflected in the data collected. The NHTH welcomes new partners interested in counter human trafficking efforts in South Africa. Partnerships are vital not only to provide services to identified trafficking survivors and communities requesting training, but also to increase awareness about the services provided by the NHTH across South Africa.



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The observations contained in this report are limited to information communicated to the South African National Human Trafficking Hotline during the reporting period. Nothing arising from the data should be interpreted as showing the full extent or prevalence of human trafficking in South Africa.

ENDNOTES

¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of High Commission (OHCHR) at page 10. (2023). Online scam operations and trafficking into forced criminality in Southeast Asia: recommendations for a human rights response. Retrieved February 27, 2024, from <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ONLINE-SCAM-OPERATIONS-2582023.pdf>

² See also Ibid, (2023), page 7 for the profile of some scam center victims as having higher educational degrees.

³ To ensure data integrity, the data presented is extracted from reports submitted to the NHTH consisting of those identified as victims and likely potential victims of trafficking. This report takes a conservative approach in presenting NHTH data and analysis, omitting reports of potential victims of human trafficking which were unable to be minimally substantiated.

⁴ The *Can You See Me? (CYSM?)* campaign is A21's global campaign intended to equip the general public on recognising human trafficking and reporting suspected trafficking to the country's relevant hotline. The real life scenarios depicted through the *CYSM?* campaign attempt to bring awareness of the millions of men, women and children currently trapped in modern day slavery across the world. By partnering with law enforcement, governments, businesses and NGOs, the goal is to turn awareness into action.