

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.

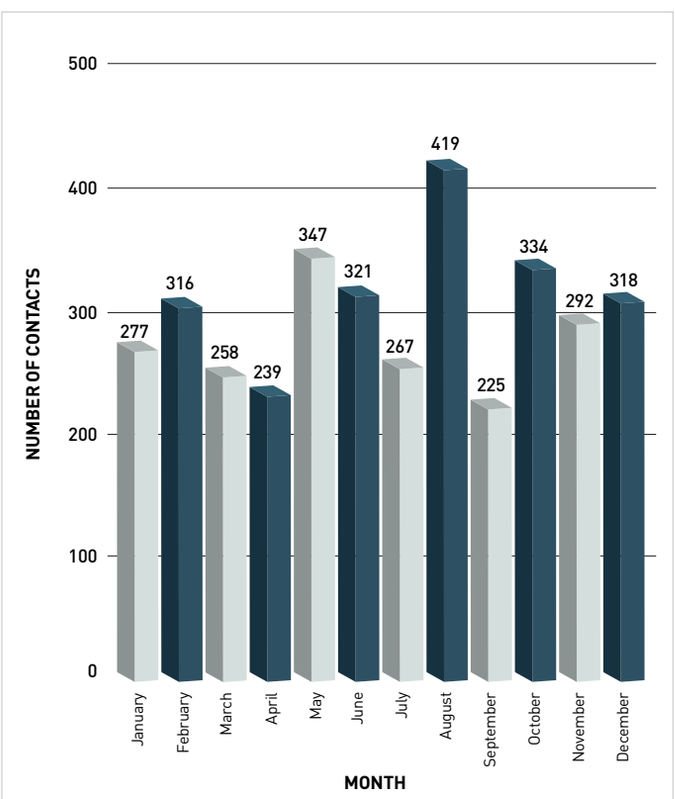
When available, disaggregated data on descriptive factors, including gender, age, type of trafficking, methods of control and recruitment methods, has been collected on each individual case.

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 DATA[3]

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]

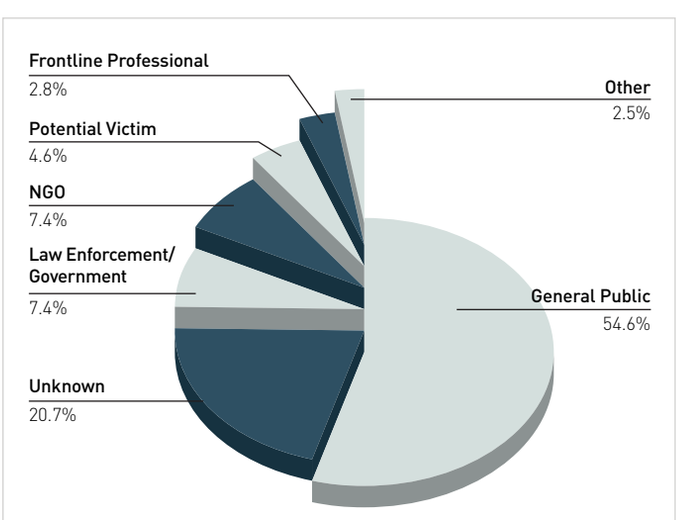


'I recall clearly the gathering of NFN members and others in Cape Town before the launch of South Africa's National Human Trafficking Hotline over seven years ago. We rallied together to learn how the hotline would work and motivated everyone to sign up to collaborate and promote the new number nationally. 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

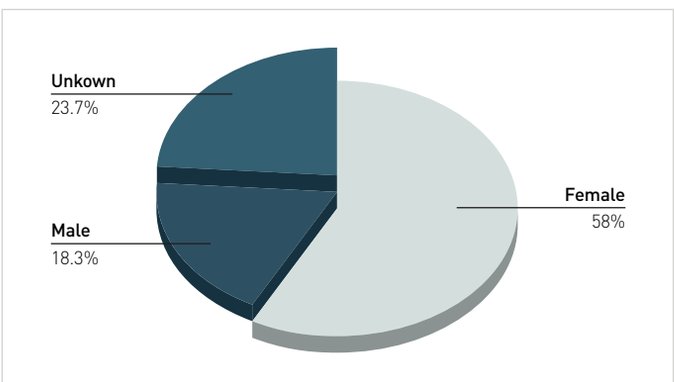
CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

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.



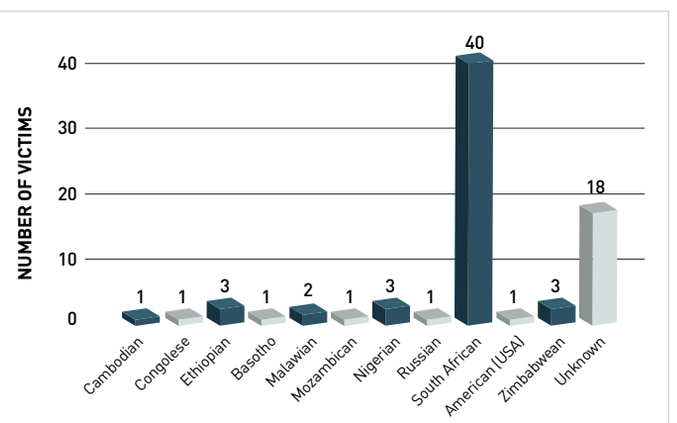
Adults comprised 60.3% of victims reported to the NHTH. Among the adult victims, 58% were female, presumably due to the increased amount of reported sex trafficking cases that year. The percentage of minors reported in 2023 increased from 12% in 2022 to 22.9%. The increase in the exploitation of children 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

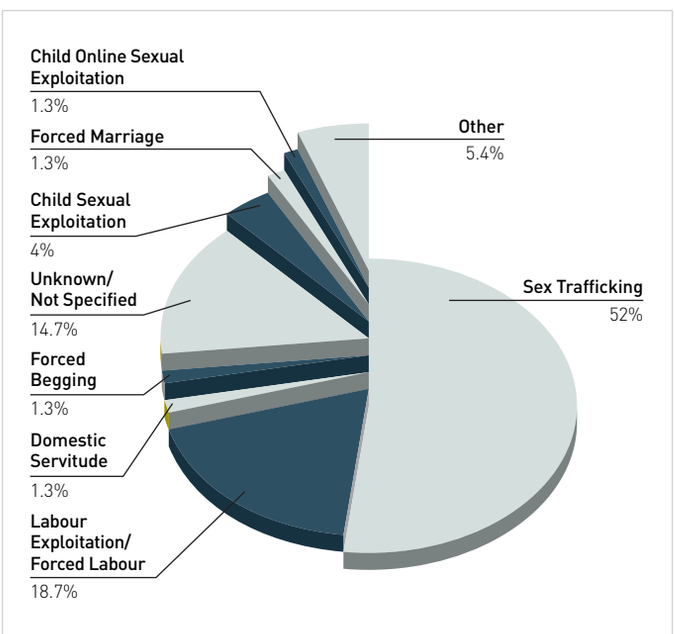
While South African nationals remained the predominant nationality of victims reported to the NHTH at 53.3%, this is a 22.9% decrease since 2022. This decrease may be the result of the increase of foreign nationals recruited from neighbouring countries into South Africa compared to the previous year. 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.



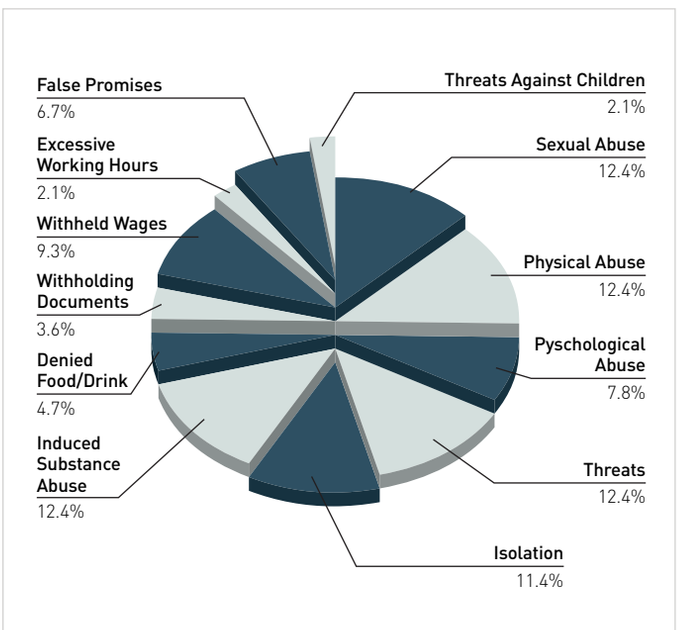
EXPLOITATION TYPE

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.



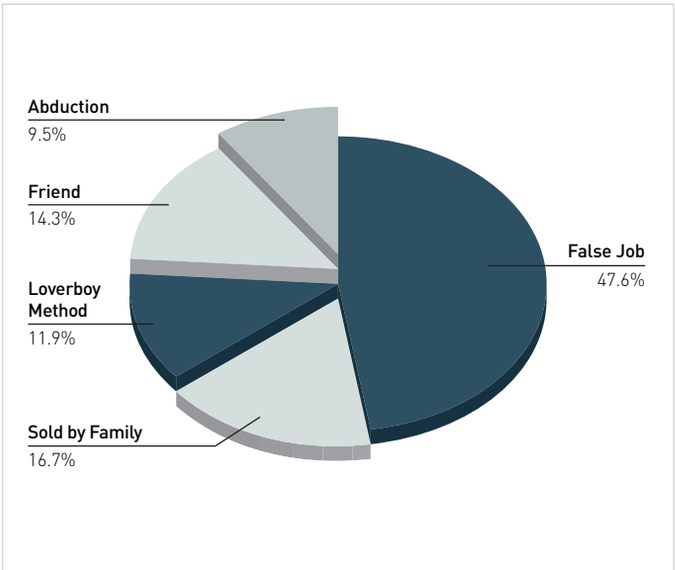
METHODS OF CONTROL

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.



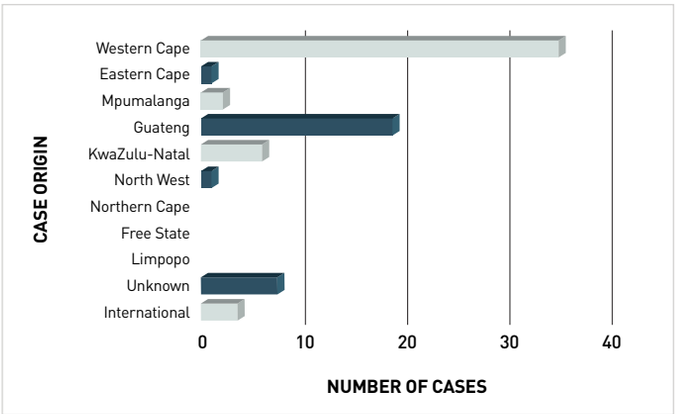
RECRUITMENT METHODS

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.



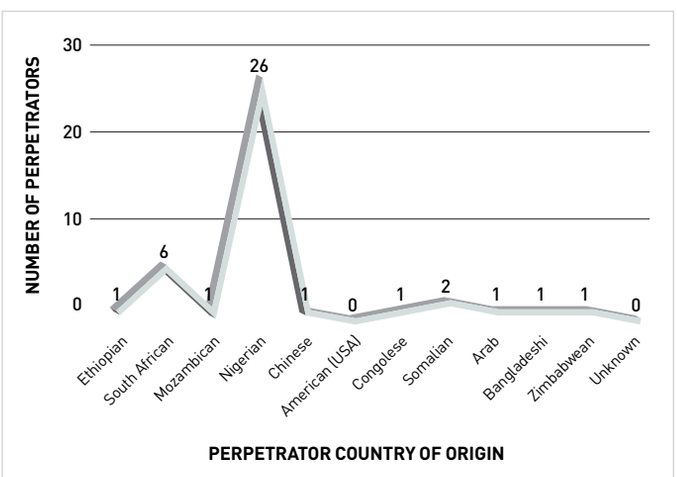
CASE ORIGIN

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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HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

info@0800222777.org.za **www.0800222777.org.za**

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.

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