

# BULGARIA ANNUAL HOTLINE REPORT 2024

## ABOUT THE BULGARIAN NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

The Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline (The Hotline) is a dedicated service offering support to victims of human trafficking. Established in 2015 by A21 Bulgaria in partnership with the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Hotline provides crucial guidance and assistance to both the public and those affected by human trafficking. Available 24/7, it is the only resource in Bulgaria focused exclusively on responding to reports of human trafficking. The trained call specialists can respond to calls in over 200 languages through a tele-interpretation service. As Bulgaria continues to be primarily a source country of human trafficking within the EU,[1] the Hotline regularly receives reports of Bulgarian nationals trafficked abroad. To respond effectively, the Hotline works closely with Bulgarian national institutions and similar government ministries in other EU countries, ensuring a coordinated, rapid response to each report. This international collaboration is key to responding effectively against human trafficking.

***"Thank you for your help! If it was not for you maybe I'd be still there... Thank you for encouraging me to be strong and brave!"***

—Survivor Recovered after Calling the Hotline

## OVERVIEW OF DATA[2]

The Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline receives reports via phone, email, text and the dedicated Hotline website (www.080020100.bg). In 2024, the Hotline received 1147 contacts. Over half of these contacts (50.3%) to the Hotline were related directly to human trafficking.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Hotline received a total of 1147 CONTACTS
- 50.9% of contacts were specifically related to Human Trafficking
- The Hotline identified and/or assisted 21 Victims of Trafficking
- 38.1% of victims identified and/or assisted by the Hotline were exploited in Bulgaria
- The majority of victims reported to the Hotline were FEMALE (72.7%)
- The majority of victims reported to Hotline were BULGARIAN nationals (86.4%)
- The Hotline submitted 33 POLICE REPORTS
- 50% of victims reported to Hotline were victims of SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

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

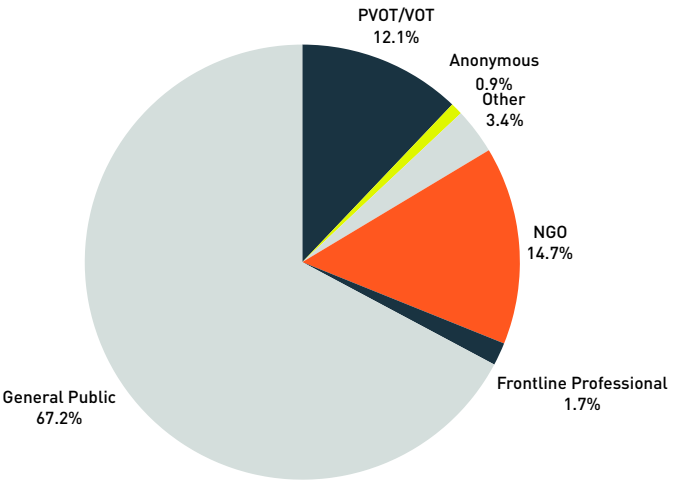
*'Reports' only include contacts to the Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline relating to a potential human trafficking situation.*

*The statistics below are exclusively drawn from substantive contacts made to the Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline from January - December 2024 concerning human trafficking matters. This report is not a reflection of all substantive calls to Bulgarian National Human Trafficking Hotline which may include calls related to high-risk crimes, labour exploitation and other non-trafficking issues.*

*Disaggregated data has been collected on each individual case based on descriptive factors including gender, age, type of trafficking, methods of control and recruitment methods. The data contained herein is based on the cases where the information was available. In the majority of cases, the call specialists were unable to glean full or specific details about the case. Therefore the data below is based on cases where the specified information was made available.*

## CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

The Hotline continues to receive reports from various sectors of the community, including potential victims, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), frontline professionals and the general public. In 2024, the majority of contacts (67.2%) originated from the general public. Contacts from the general public are characterised by concerned friends and family members of potential victims and community members who witness suspicious activity within the community. While calls by the general public have historically comprised the majority of contacts, in 2024, the Hotline observed an even sharper increase of 37.4% from 2023. This increase is likely due to the extensive awareness efforts through the Hotline's public awareness campaigns.




**CALLER TYPE**

## VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS[3]

In 2024, the Hotline successfully identified and/or assisted 21 victims of human trafficking, nine of whom entered A21's Aftercare Program. This program in Bulgaria is designed to provide trauma-informed, survivor-centred support to survivors of human trafficking, playing a crucial role in their recovery journey. While many of the survivors in the program were first identified and/or assisted through the Hotline, in 2024, an additional 15 victims of trafficking were referred to A21 through other channels, further expanding the program's reach and impact.

In 2024, the Bulgaria Aftercare Program supported 56 survivors of trafficking, offering comprehensive case management services tailored to the unique needs of each survivor.

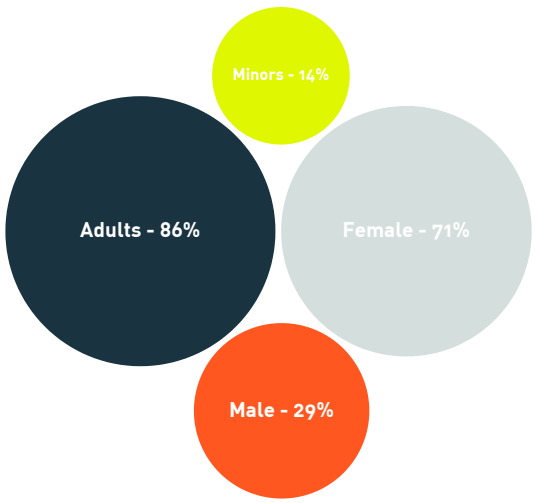
Services rendered included basic needs assistance, accommodation support, medical, psychological, and dental treatment, language lessons, financial assistance, relocation and repatriation support, and case management offered through A21's Freedom Centre. Four survivors graduated from the A21 Bulgaria Aftercare Program in 2024, symbolising the attainment of independence and restoration with low vulnerability to revictimisation.



### AGE AND GENDER

In 2024, cases involving female trafficking victims comprised 71.4% of reports to the Hotline, while male victims accounted for the remaining 28.6%. This marks a 20.1% decrease in the percentage of male victims reported compared to the previous year. However, it remains significantly higher than the 6.9% of cases involving male victims reported in 2020.

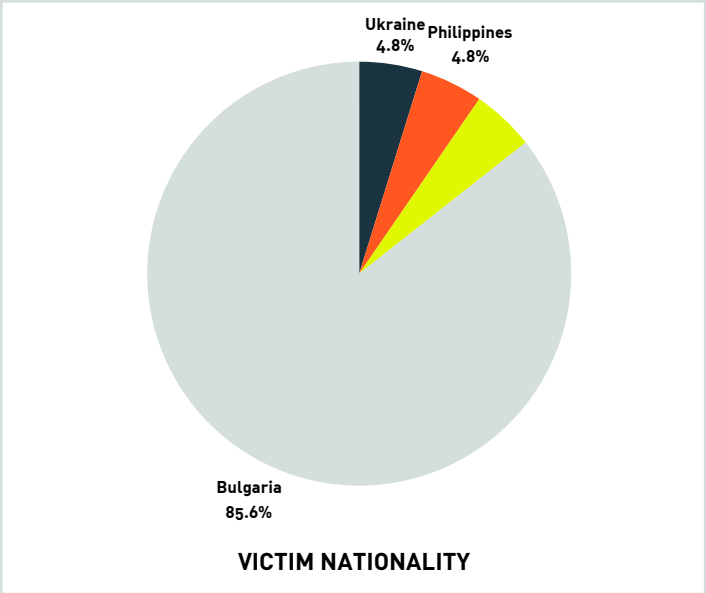
While most reported cases in 2024 still involved adults, accounting for 85.7% of confirmed victims, the Hotline experienced a significant increase (20.2%) in cases involving minors compared to 2023.




**AGE & GENDER**

## VICTIM NATIONALITY

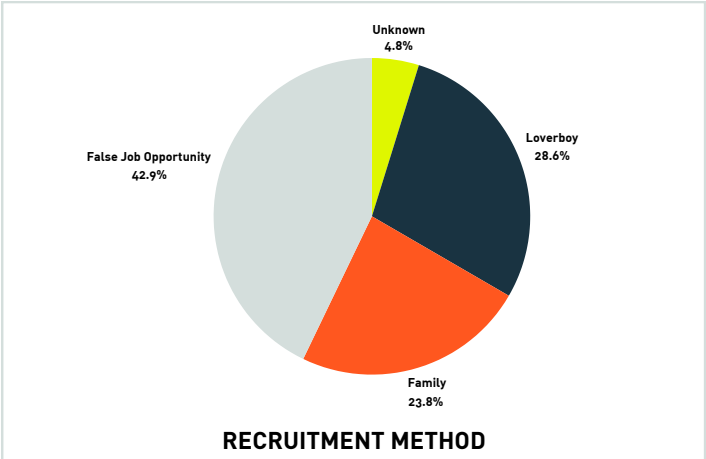
In 2024, Bulgarian nationals accounted for 85.6% of the victims identified by the Hotline, with the remaining 14.4% comprised of German, Ukrainian and Filipino nationals. Of those identified by the Hotline, the majority experienced exploitation outside of Bulgaria, with 42.9% exploited in Germany and 19% in the United Kingdom. The remaining 38.1% of victims identified were exploited in Bulgaria. Although consistent with previous years with most cases still involving Bulgarian nationals being exploited abroad, it is noteworthy that the Hotline has begun identifying cases of foreign nationals being exploited within Bulgaria.




VICTIM NATIONALITY

## RECRUITMENT METHODS

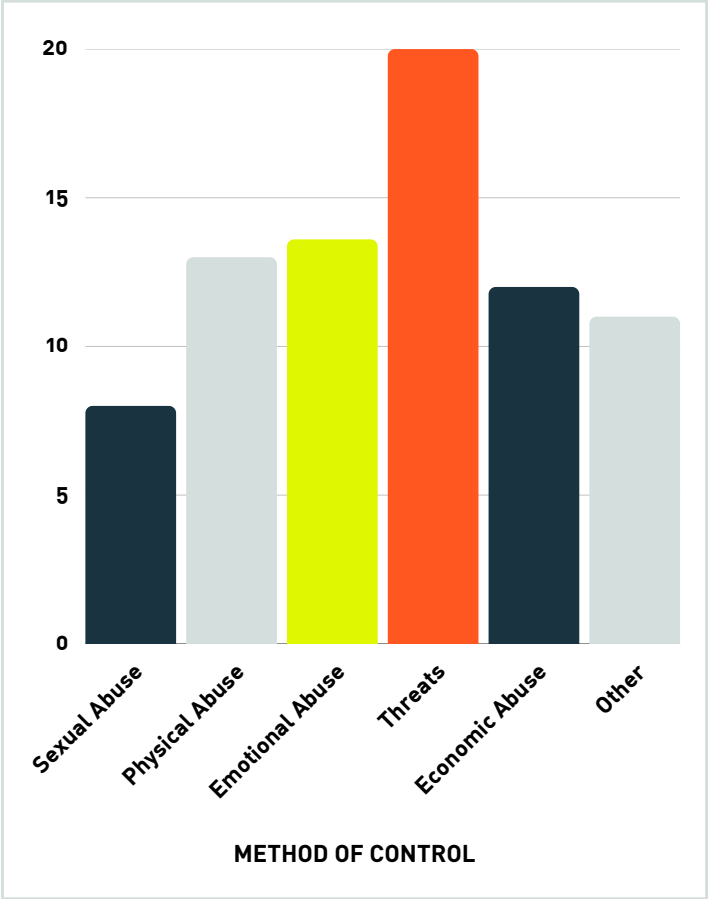
Human traffickers use a range of deceptive and coercive recruitment methods, including the 'loverboy' tactic, false job offers, and even trafficking by family members. In 2024, the Hotline recorded a 57.1% rise in cases of victims recruited through false job opportunities, accounting for 42.9% of all identified or assisted trafficking victims. Additionally, over a quarter of the victims had been groomed for trafficking through the 'loverboy' method, marking a 57.1% increase compared to 2023.




RECRUITMENT METHOD

## METHODS OF CONTROL

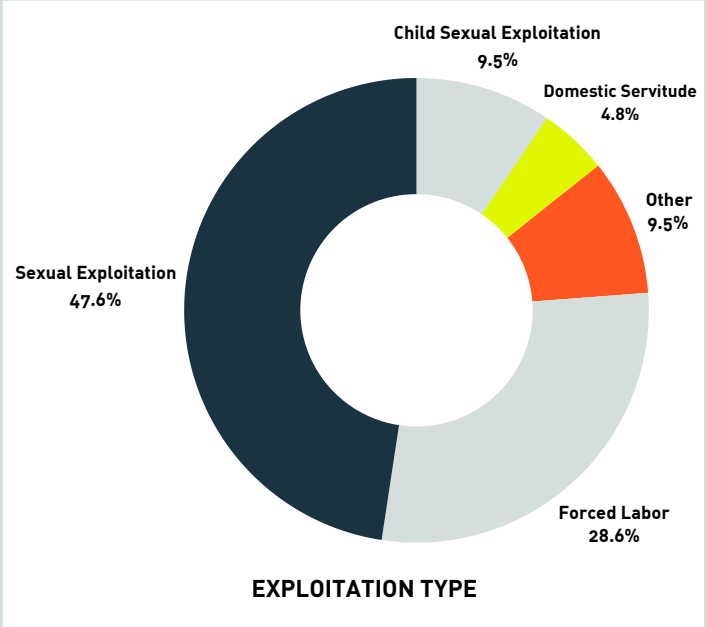
To keep victims in exploitative situations, traffickers use diverse control tactics that include manipulation and coercion. Victims identified/assisted by the Hotline highlight methods of control such as threats,[4] isolation,[5] emotional, physical, sexual or economic abuse,[6] forced substance misuse, and the deliberate destruction or withholding of personal identification documents. Often, victims of trafficking experience multiple methods of control to keep them in exploitative situations. Consistent with the previous year, the Hotline observed threats as the most common method of control in 2024, exhibited in over nearly all of the cases reported; this included threats to the individual and their family and the threat of being reported to law enforcement. Other prevalent methods of control in 2024 included emotional (57%), physical (52.3%) and economic (57.1%) abuse.




METHOD OF CONTROL

## EXPLOITATION TYPE

In 2024, labour and sexual exploitation continued to be the most common forms of exploitation reported to the Hotline. Nearly half (47.6%) of all victims identified or assisted by the Hotline were sexually exploited and 28.6% experienced forced labour. The Hotline also received reports of domestic servitude and child sexual exploitation. Among the identified or assisted minors, two-thirds were Bulgarian nationals who had been sexually exploited.




## WALK FOR FREEDOM IN BULGARIA

A21 Bulgaria continued its strong efforts to promote the Hotline's services through A21's Can You See Me?[7](CYSM?) campaign and its Walk for Freedom[8] (WFF). In 2024, participation in the WFF increased by 68% compared to 2023, with over 840 participants across eight cities - two more cities than the previous year. During the event, the Hotline number was distributed alongside materials designed to raise awareness and understanding of human trafficking. Beyond the event itself, the campaign reached an even wider audience through a promotional campaign aired on national television and displayed on large screens at train stations across the country. This strategic outreach potentially reached millions, further amplifying awareness of human trafficking throughout the country.




## *CYSM?* HIGHLIGHTS HOW TO RECOGNISE AND REPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING TO THE HOTLINE

Throughout 2024, the team secured advertising space for the CYSM? campaign in both the metro and the national railway. As part of their Metro campaign in Sofia, 50 banners were displayed across the trains, resulting in an estimated 1 million impressions in a single month. Additionally, through a partnership with the national railway, CYSM? posters, films and flyers were distributed across more than 10 stations starting in October, with an estimated 2 million impressions. In addition to advertising the CYSM? posters, A21 Bulgaria also showcased a 30-second version of the CYSM? video at Arena cinemas as a trailer before popular movies across 2 months. As a result of this cinema campaign, 183,200 people were reached.

***"Thank you for your assistance, thank you for everything, to the entire team. I wish there were more good people like you to reach out. I wish you all good health and good luck, may the most wonderful thing happen in your life. May there be more people like you - so caring and dedicated."***

—Survivor Recovered after Calling the Hotline

## FRONTLINE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

In 2024, A21 Bulgaria continued its efforts to enhance the identification of potential victims of trafficking (PVOTs) through its Professional Training Program and, for the first time, trained prosecutors alongside the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Local Commissions for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. This program provides targeted training to certain professionals more likely to encounter trafficking victims due to the nature of their work. A21's training equips frontline professionals with a foundational understanding of human trafficking, the ability to recognise trafficking situations and the skills to apply a victim-centred approach. Additionally, the program educates participants on the Hotline's services, enabling them to better identify and support potential victims. In 2024, A21 Bulgaria conducted 13 training sessions, training a total of 296 frontline professionals, including prosecutors, law enforcement officers, healthcare workers, educators, and immigration and border officials. The Hotline has observed a correlation between an increase in professional training with contacts by frontline professionals. In 2024, reporting of potential victims of trafficking by frontline professionals increased by 13.3% from the prior year.

### *CASE STUDY: DOMESTIC SERVITUDE IN BULGARIA*

*Liz*, a woman from Southeast Asia, was employed as a maid for a wealthy family in Bulgaria. A community member became concerned after she described her working conditions: 16-hour days, restricted movement, confiscated documents, and constant surveillance. Fearing she was a victim of trafficking, he contacted the hotline. Liz was only allowed out briefly on Sundays under supervision. She had no internet access and could only use a phone to communicate with her employers. Threatened with arrest or deportation if she tried to leave, she feared for both her safety and her family's survival back home. Following hotline guidance, the community member attempted to provide her with the hotline number, but she soon disappeared. Days later, she secretly obtained a SIM card, allowing the Hotline to establish contact. Initially fearful, she hesitated to trust that help was possible. When it became clear she couldn't leave on her own, authorities were dispatched to intervene. The extraction was swift and without complications, though her employers denied holding her documents. Liz was placed in a shelter for trafficking survivors, where specialists began assisting in her recovery. Liz also entered the A21 Aftercare Program where she participated in A21' Life Programs at the Freedom Centre, a safe environment where she could freely express her opinions and emotions, and continued in her restoration journey with the support of the A21 team. Liz has now found safe, stable employment and is thankful for her freedom.*

***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.***

0800 20100
NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

**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 U.S. Department of State. (2024). 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bulgaria. https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/bulgaria/

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 Data only represents cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in Bulgaria, it does not include those reported to A21 Bulgaria through other means.

4 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 other government authorities.

5 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.

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

7 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 bring awareness of the millions of men, women and children 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.

8 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.


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