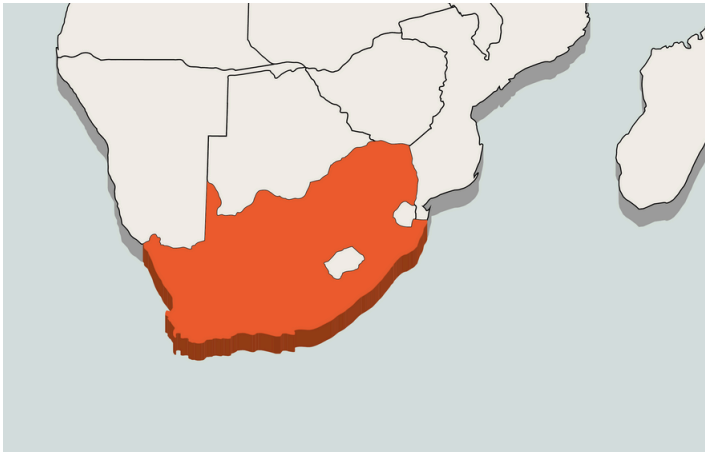


# IMPACT REPORT 2024

# SOUTH AFRICA



## A21'S RESPONSE

### Reach: Prevention, Education, and Awareness Efforts

Prevention lies at the heart of A21's mission in South Africa, enabling us to provide critical information and reporting pathways to vulnerable communities nationwide. In 2024, we saw a significant increase in demand for human trafficking awareness, with schools, NGO leaders, and the public actively engaging in our efforts. A21 participated in 268 events, reaching 180,344 people. This surge in demand was impacted by an increased media coverage of trafficking cases involving children throughout the year.

Our Reach team made a strong impact, leading 113 events in 47 schools in the Western Cape alone, delivering our prevention programmes. These prevention programmes focus on age-appropriate content, teaching the foundations of safe relationships, invited or uninvited touch and safe or unsafe secrets. In total, 25,388 individuals participated in A21's prevention programmes, gaining vital knowledge and tools to recognise the signs of trafficking in their communities.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Situated at the southernmost tip of the African continent, South Africa shares borders with six other African nations with coastlines to the south, west, and east, holding multiple commercial seaports. Boasting a population of just over 60 million people,<sup>1</sup> the perception of economic opportunity and prosperity in South Africa, particularly among individuals from the bordering and neighboring African nations, often makes relocation to the country attractive. However, with an unemployment rate of 31.9% as of the fourth quarter of 2024,<sup>2</sup> economic disparity, often driven by inequality, remains a leading factor contributing to vulnerability in South Africa. As a result, modern slavery remains a serious issue, affecting 2.7 out of every 1,000<sup>3</sup> people in the country.

Traffickers exploit foreign migrants' economic vulnerabilities and aspirations, using deception to lure their victims. This trend is reflected in the growing number of foreign nationals reported to the A21-operated National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) over the past two years. Victims originated not only from South Africa but also from Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Mozambique, Eswatini and Malawi. False job opportunities remained the most common recruitment method reported.



The growing interest in our Early Childhood Prevention Programme (ECPP) is another standout achievement. School social workers, in particular, have embraced the programme. In 2024, we reached 4,157 minors at 24 schools, a notable increase from 2,895 minors in 2023. We also launched the SeSotho and isiZulu versions of the ECPP and the Steps to Staying Safe storybook, which are now available free to download in five languages on our website. This allows even more vulnerable communities to access our resources.

## WALK FOR FREEDOM

The tenth annual Walk for Freedom proved to be a wonderfully successful event with 19 walks in four African countries, including Botswana, Malawi, and Kenya. Participants lined the streets of their cities, handing out prevention material and sharing key signs to identify situations of trafficking.



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Partnerships continue to be a driving force in expanding our prevention work. A pivotal collaboration with Community Keepers,<sup>4</sup> an NGO focused on creating supportive learning environments and providing mental health services to students, significantly boosted our access to schools. We hosted a comprehensive online training for 150 of their school social workers and counselors, introducing them to our prevention programmes and deepening their involvement.

In other notable partnership developments, in August 2024, we partnered with an orphanage in Eswatini and community members in Lesotho to deliver our prevention programmes to children in the community as well as provided training for local churches and early childhood educators on the ECPP.

Additionally, alongside Operation Mobilisation (OM)<sup>5</sup> and Hope on the Street for Children (HSC)<sup>6</sup>; A21 conducted prevention-based workshops with community members in Sierra Leone.

In 2023, A21 was awarded an \$18,000 grant to train facilitators from two high-risk provinces on the Early Childhood Prevention Programme (ECPP). This funding enabled the training of 219 teachers from 141 schools. Due to the success of the project, a second grant was awarded with Dow Industries that allowed A21 to train an additional 89 teachers from 48 Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) on the ECPP in 2024.



## STRENGTHENING FRONTLINE RESPONSE TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A fundamental objective of A21 is to increase opportunities to identify victims of trafficking and to utilise a survivor-centred approach during the intervention process. To this end, A21 prioritises training those who have a high likelihood of encountering potential victims of trafficking through the performance of their daily duties. These “frontline professionals” include law enforcement, social workers, health professionals and airline staff.

In continued partnership with the Department of Health, A21 trained 190 health professionals. Studies show that victims of trafficking often access healthcare while being exploited, placing healthcare professionals in a unique position to identify and assist victims.<sup>7</sup> One of these training sessions resulted in a victim being identified during a clinic consultation. The clinic contacted the NHTH who swiftly coordinated an extraction with local Law Enforcement. This highlighted the need to train more clinic staff in similar hotspot areas to empower efficient and safe decision-making when similar situations arise.

Through longstanding partnerships with the Department of Social Development and like-minded non-governmental organisations (NGOs), A21 trained 253 social workers in 2024. Social Work professionals work closely with high-risk individuals who may already be in situations of exploitation or face increased vulnerability to common trafficking recruitment tactics.

By equipping social workers with specialised knowledge and skills, A21 enhances both prevention efforts and the identification of victims—ensuring that cases that might have otherwise gone unnoticed due to limited awareness can now be recognised and addressed within their communities.



Due to continued collaboration with Airlink airlines, A21 ran a second installment of the train-the-trainer facilitator training with six aviation staff trainers. Another key partnership was strengthened with the International Labour Organization (ILO) through a series of workshops and consultations. A21 contributed to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for irregular work conditions for fishers, including trafficking in vessels. As part of the response to these workshops, ILO, A21 and members of the Provincial Task Team in the Western Cape trained 48 Border Management Authority (BMA) officials. Representing a landmark advancement in coordinated efforts, this partnership equipped border officials to identify, intervene, and support victims of trafficking in the fishing industry more effectively. Overall, in 2024, A21 trained 923 professionals across 23 training sessions, demonstrating 29% growth in its outreach and impact from 2023.



## NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE EXPERIENCES RISE IN CYBER SCAMMING-RELATED CASES:

Integral to intervention and identification operations, A21 operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH), a 24-hour service able to receive reports of potential cases of trafficking, identify victims of trafficking and provide referrals to key services across the country and the wider continent. In this way, the NHTH serves as an important bridge, connecting community members with law enforcement and frontline professionals, offering both support and guidance.

In 2024, A21 identified 55 victims of trafficking referred by a variety of sources, including community members, frontline professionals, and law enforcement. Sexual exploitation (61.8%), domestic servitude (7.3%), forced criminality (7.3%), and labour (1.8%) were among the exploitation types reported.



False job opportunities remained the most common recruitment tactic, accounting for 56.4% of reported cases. The second most common method, recorded in 23.6% of cases, involved traffickers manipulating victims through trusted individuals, such as family members or friends, who sold or deceived them into trafficking situations. Complex and nuanced recruitment methods as these make detection challenging and reinforce the need for specialised training to help frontline professionals recognise subtle signs of exploitation.

The impact of the NHTH can be found in the 2024 Hotline Report.

## DISRUPTING TRAFFICKING THROUGH FINANCIAL INVESTIGATIONS

A21 actively contributed to two groundbreaking “Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Financial Flow” training sessions hosted by the South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force (SAMLIT).<sup>8</sup> These sessions equipped 136 investigators and law enforcement officers with the knowledge and tools needed to trace financial transactions linked to trafficking and build strong investigations.

## AFTERCARE PROGRAMME

In 2024, A21’s Aftercare Programme supported 55 survivors, with 31 new survivors entering the programme, a continued steady increase from 17 and 23 in 2023 and 2024 respectively. A21 attributes this continued growth to strategic partnerships, robust professional training leading to increased detection and identification, and increased reputation of the service provided by A21 aftercare services within the Freedom Centre.<sup>9</sup>

Survivors in the A21 Programme hailed from South Africa (74.19%), Nigeria (9.67%), Mozambique (3.22%), Malawi (6.45%), Democratic Republic of Congo (3.22%), and Eswatini (3.22%).

The recruitment methods utilised against survivors entering the programme in 2024 include false job opportunities (51.6%), being sold by a friend or family member (22.5%), the ‘loverboy’ method (6.5%), abduction (3.2%), and forced marriage (3.2%). False job opportunities are most often informal, verbal job offers. Sex trafficking remained the most prevalent exploitation type (80.64%) reported by new survivors entering the programme, with domestic servitude, forced and bonded labour as well as forced marriage also seen.



At the Freedom Centre, survivors access services designed to support their personal growth and journey toward independence. Life programmes form a core component of these services, each focusing on key areas of development and skill-building. Throughout 2024, 14 survivors participated in seven different life programmes, resulting in 33 programme completions.

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***“I am so grateful for the life programs we received at the centre. It allowed me to manage life and be more aware of my emotions and feel more empowered to be independent”.***

—A21 South Africa Freedom Centre Participant

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Economic empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving independence. To support this, A21 facilitates survivors to have the opportunity to enroll in vocational training or pursue further education. In 2024, two survivors completed vocational training, while two others secured and sustained employment.

A significant milestone in many survivors’ paths to independence is the decision to return to their hometown or country of origin. A21 facilitated 14 domestic relocations and five international repatriations, including successfully returning home three South African survivors who had been exploited abroad.

### AFTERCARE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

When the survivor joined the program back in 2022, she was facing significant challenges. Her history of substance abuse had led her to a point where she was living on the streets, lacking direction, accountability, and hope for the future.

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***“If it was not for the life programmes, I do not know where my life would have ended up”.***

—A21 Survivor

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Today, in 2024, the survivor stands as a testament to the power of perseverance and support. She has not only secured a stable job but also maintains a steady income. She has taken full responsibility for her finances, managing them with diligence. The survivor’s journey is an example of how dedication and encouragement can foster incredible personal growth.

## ENDNOTES

1. South African Census (2022). Retrieved June 28, 2024, from <https://www.gov.za/about-sa/south-africas-people>
2. Department of Statistics South Africa Media Release of Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS). Retrieved on 21 February, 2025, from <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Media%20Release%20QLFS%20Q4%202024.pdf>
3. Walk Free. (2023). Modern slavery in South Africa, Global Slavery Index 2023 Country Snapshot. <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/09/28085853/GSI-Snapshot-South-Africa.pdf>
4. Community Keepers is a non-profit organisation with the vision is to improve the social and emotional well-being of learners and promote supportive school communities where learning and development can prosper.
5. Operation Mobilisation is a global christian ministry with a mission to take the gospel to all parts of the world.
6. Hope on the Street for Children is a non-profit organisation founded in Africa, with a mission to train and equip individuals to work with traumatised and or homeless children as well as developing prevention strategies.
7. Lederer and Wetzel (2014) The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities. <https://www.icmec.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Health-Consequences-of-Sex-Trafficking-and-Implications-for-Identifying-Victims-Lederer.pdf>
8. SAMLIT is South Africa's Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force. It is South Africa's first public private partnership, between the banking sector and government regulatory authorities, aimed at enhancing collaboration and coordination in combating financial crime, money laundering and terrorist financing.
9. The Freedom Centre acts as a drop-in centre to provide support for survivors of human trafficking on their journey to independence. The centre seeks to minimise the risk of re-trafficking by offering a safe place where survivors have the opportunity to access A21's Aftercare Program, including case management support, counseling, restorative group programs, educational and vocational training and peer support activities.