



MINISTRY
OF INTERIOR
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A unit of the Crime Prevention Department (hereinafter referred to as the “CPD”) of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the “MI SR”), the Information Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and for Crime Prevention (hereinafter referred to as the “IC”) fulfils in accordance with Article 19 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA (hereinafter referred to as “Directive 2011/36/EU”) the task of National Rapporteur.

The National Rapporteur carries out in particular assessments of trends in trafficking in human beings (THB), the measuring of results of anti-trafficking actions, including the gathering of statistics in close cooperation with relevant civil society organisations active in this field, and reporting to the European Commission. For this reason, as the National Rapporteur and the coordinator of the specialised Programme of Support and Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (hereafter referred to as the “Assistance Programme”), the IC prepared the seventh Situation Report for the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings in the Slovak Republic (SR) in 2024, this time for the year 2023 (hereafter referred to as the “Situation Report”).

The Situation Report is based on available statistical data, daily practice in the field of assistance to victims of THB (hereinafter referred to as the “victim”), cooperation with a specialised unit of the Police Force (PF) - the National Unit of Fight against Illegal Migration of the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the PF (hereinafter referred to as the “NUFIM”) and various State and non-State entities involved in the fight against THB. The evaluation of statistical data is based on partial statistics of the IC, the NUFIM, the General Prosecutor’s Office of the SR, the Ministry of Justice of the SR and the non-governmental sector. For the MI SR, the annual processing of the Situation Report also follows from Measure No. 11 of the Action Plan of Fight against THB for 2024 - 2028 (hereinafter referred to as the “Action Plan”), which is part of the strategic document for the fight against THB, the National Programme of Fight against THB for 2024 - 2028 (hereinafter referred to as the “National Programme”) approved by the Government of the SR by Resolution No. 522/2023.

In order to adequately address a complex crime, which THB undoubtedly is, it is essential that comprehensive and reliable data is relied upon. It is estimated that a significant proportion of THB cases are not reported, which is one of the factors that hinders a full understanding of the extent of THB within the European Union¹ (EU). Collecting and evaluating statistical data on victims in line with EUROSTAT (EU Statistical Information Service) recommendations, taking into account the statistical categories collected and aiming for a comprehensive picture of the situation of THB, is a challenge in the long term. Aggregate data on identified victims is compiled annually by the IC from data on victims formally

¹Explanatory Memorandum to the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2011/36/EU

identified by the police and victims who entered the Assistance Programme in a given year. In 2023, we statistically report both categories of victims, and in rare cases a victim enters the statistical system repeatedly at different parts of the calendar year (e.g., if one victim is aggrieved in two cases and each case has a different perpetrator and a different time of the offence). The above occurred in two cases in 2023. We draw particular attention to these cases in the text.

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1. ASSESMENT OF TRENDS

In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, we see persistent trends, which are confirmed by the data from 2023:

- When dividing victims by sex, men are predominantly victims of labour exploitation and women of sexual exploitation.
- When victims are broken down by age, persons under 18 years of age (hereinafter referred to as “children”) are the most frequent victims of sexual exploitation, and adults are the most frequent victims of labour exploitation and forced begging.

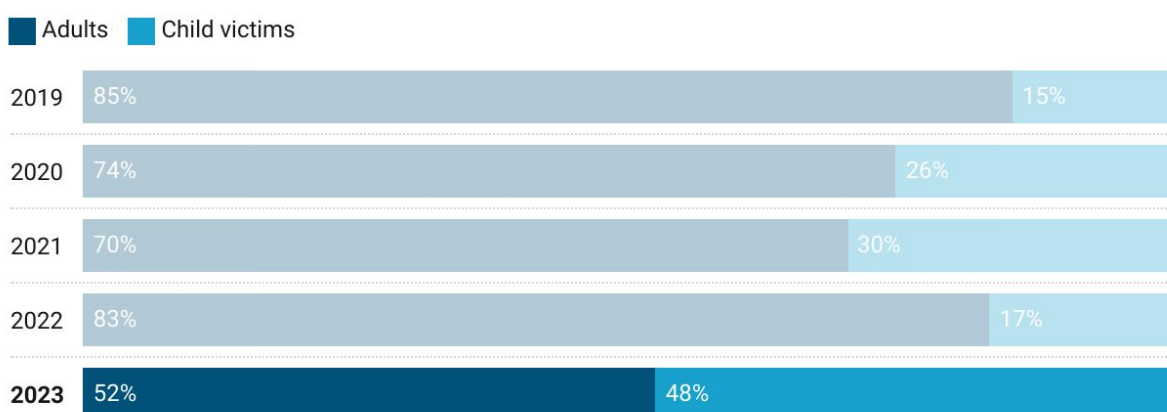
The age of the victims is statistically recorded at the time of the commission of the offence (i.e. at the time of recruitment), therefore the age of the child victims in the year when the relevant authorities become aware of them and enter them into the statistics for that year may be different and some child victims may reach adulthood in the meantime.

In 2019, child victims accounted for one-sixth of identified victims, in 2020 it was already one-quarter and in 2021 it was almost one-third of all identified victims. In 2022, the SR returned in the number of identified child victims of THB to the 2019 data, where almost one in six identified victims of THB was a child (i.e. 10 children out of 58 identified victims). In 2023, the situation has changed dramatically and as many as 21 of the total number of victims (44) were children, which is almost half.

Chart No. 1

Evolution of the ratio child victims

Percentage of adult and child victims identified in 2019 - 2023



Source: Information Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and for Crime Prevention of the Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic • Created with Datawrapper

Child victims in 2023 were both girls and boys aged 9 to 16 at the time of recruitment who were exploited

- for the purpose of committing forced criminal activities in combination with sexual exploitation (1 case),
- for forced begging (1 case), and
- sexually exploited (20 cases, 1 of which in the above-mentioned combination with forced criminal activities).

Since 2019 to 2021, the most dominant region in terms of the origin of the victims was the Košice region. In 2022, there was a change and the highest number of victims came from the Prešov Region (18 and of which 12 were men and 6 women). **There was also a change in 2023, when 32% of the total number of identified victims came from the Banská Bystrica region.** Of the total number of victims coming from this region, the **majority were children at the time of recruitment (out of 14 victims, 8 were children)** and all victims were abused for the purpose of sexual exploitation (of which in 1 case a combination of sexual exploitation and forced begging occurred).

The data shows that protection measures targeting potential child victims need to be given due attention and cooperation between authorities who can identify child victims in routine contact needs to be improved, as well as **educational activities focusing on this target group need to be carried out; this would not only ensure awareness-raising of the pitfalls, indicators and possibilities for assistance, but would also serve a preventive purpose.** More detailed information on child victims is provided in descriptive section 1.3.

In the past, the Slovak Republic was considered predominantly as a source country, but this category has also changed and the **Slovak Republic in terms of identified victims in 2023 can be considered predominantly as a country of internal (domestic) exploitation, and thus also as a destination country.** Of the total number of identified victims in 2023 (44), a total of 32 victims reported the SR as the country of exploitation. Of these, in two cases there was a combination of target countries, namely the SR and Italy for sexual exploitation which was also combined with forced begging and in the other case the SR and Austria for sexual exploitation of a child. For the victims identified in **2023, the Slovak Republic was also a target country of exploitation for foreigners**, namely for two women (originally from Moldova and Bulgaria) and one man from Bulgaria. Among the victims identified in 2023, we have also noted cases in which the SR can also be seen as a **source country**, but on a relatively smaller scale and number than in the past. In only 14 cases was a foreign country mentioned as the country of exploitation, and in two of these cases there was the aforementioned combination of countries - the Slovak Republic and Italy and the Slovak Republic and Austria. Surprisingly, compared to the outputs of previous years, Switzerland (3) and the Netherlands (3) are among those target countries where the most exploited Slovak nationals were identified as victims in 2023. Other target countries include the Czech Republic (2), Italy (2), Germany (1), Austria (1), Ireland (1), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (hereinafter referred to as the “United Kingdom”) (1).

In terms of the **assistance provided to victims**, we also see a change in 2023, with only one quarter of all identified victims interested in joining a specialised Assistance Programme. This is a decrease compared to 2022, as in that year as many as one third of the identified victims expressed an interest in joining the Assistance Programme. A similar situation as in 2023 is also observed in 2021. The number of victims who are in a formal status of the aggrieved party in criminal proceedings and at the same time receive assistance also remains very low, on the order of only a few individuals per year. In 2023 it was no different, and of the victims who were in a formal position of aggrieved parties, only 15% expressed an interest in joining the Assistance Programme. On the other hand, those victims who first enter the Programme, almost all choose to cooperate with the police. This fact is not fully reflected statistically because of the methodology of statistical data collection. **We are convinced of the importance of legal counselling services for victims who are in the position of aggrieved parties in criminal proceedings, not only in terms of the THB investigation itself, but also for the purpose of properly claiming compensation.**

A long-standing trend, and a shortcoming for the Slovak Republic cited in many evaluation reports, is the number of identified foreigners, which remains very low. During the reporting period, three adult foreigners (2 women and 1 man) originating from Moldova and Bulgaria were identified as having been exploited in the Slovak Republic for the purpose of forced labour and forced begging. One foreigner was also formally identified by the police as a victim in 2023. All three victims were provided with assistance and support through the services of the Assistance Programme. Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, no THB cases with links to Ukraine or involving persons from Ukraine as victims or perpetrators were investigated in 2023. Similarly, in 2023, no THB cases were investigated in connection with the ongoing massive migration wave along the Western Balkan route, which also passes through the territory of the SR.

The NUFIM, as a unit of the PF specialised in operational search, screening and investigation of THB crimes, **initiated prosecutions for the commission of THB crimes under Article 179 of the Criminal Code in 20 cases in 2023**, which is a decrease compared to 2022, when prosecutions were initiated in 25 cases. **A total of 18 perpetrators were charged** by the NUFIM investigators in 12 cases in 2023, of which 9 were men and 9 were women. The age range of persons charged with human trafficking offences in 2023 was very wide. The adult perpetrators (15) were between the ages of 18 and 60. There were also three perpetrators recorded in 2023 who were juveniles (2 men and 1 woman) aged 15 - 16 years. In terms of nationality, 15 accused persons were Slovak nationals, 2 accused persons were Turkish nationals and 1 accused person was a national of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Based on the amendment to Act No. 82/2005 Coll. on illegal work and illegal employment and on the amendment to certain acts, effective from 1 January 2023, the control of illegal work and illegal employment is carried out by the Labour Inspectorate. Due to the amendment to the aforementioned Act, the control of illegal work and illegal employment is not carried out by the employees of the Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (hereinafter referred to as the “CLSAB”) and the Offices of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and is exempted from the designated competence of the CLSAB in Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on

employment services and on the amendment to certain acts, as amended (Article 11, Article 12 and Article 68 of the aforementioned Act).

Through Act No. 458/2022 amending Act No. 583/2008 Coll. on the prevention of crime and other antisocial activities and on the amendment to certain acts, as amended, of 29 November 2022 and with effect from 1 February 2023, the inclusion of information offices for victims of crime (hereinafter referred to as the “Information Office”) in the organisational structure of the MI SR was achieved, which should ensure systemic services for victims of crime. At the same time, through the amendment, Article 7(3) of the Act in question deleted the IC from the Act, which from 1 December 2023 was organisationally incorporated as a unit under the CPD of the MI SR and the CPD itself was separated from the Office of the Minister of Interior of the SR and established as a separate department of the MI SR. Organisationally, the CPD was placed under the 1st State Secretary of the MI SR and also the National Coordinator for combating THB.

Government Resolution of the SR No. 665/2022 of 26 October 2022 adopted the Contingency Plan of the Slovak Republic for dealing with the emergency situation in connection with the mass influx of the population of Ukraine to the territory of the SR caused by the escalation of the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine for the period October 2022 to March 2023 (hereinafter referred to as the “Contingency Plan”). **By Government Resolution of the SR No. 346/2023 of 26 June 2023, the Contingency Plan was updated** for the period July - December 2023. One of the strategic objectives of the Contingency Plan was to give increased attention and protection to persons with specific needs, in particular unaccompanied minors, persons with disabilities and women who are victims of THB and/or sexual and gender-based violence.

The Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) sent to the SR a **Questionnaire** of 30 June 2023 **for the evaluation of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the SR in the framework** of the fourth round of evaluation and **thematic focus: Addressing vulnerabilities to human trafficking**. The opinion on behalf of the SR was sent to the GRETA group of experts by the deadline of 2 November 2023. This was followed up by a GRETA evaluation visit to the Slovak Republic from 26 February to 1 March 2024.

At its meeting on 18 October 2023, which is also the EU Anti-Trafficking Day, the **Government of the SR, by Resolution No. 522/2023, approved a new, sixth strategic document for combating THB in the Slovak Republic, the National Programme**. The National Programme is intended to build continuously on the previous, fifth National Programme of Fight against THB for 2019 - 2023², to apply best practices in practice, thus contributing to the elimination of the space for perpetration of THB crimes, as well as to the

² Approved by Government Resolution of the SR No. 495/2018, available online in downloadable documents: [Informačné centrum na boj proti obchodovaniu s ľuďmi a prevenciu kriminality, Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky \(minv.sk\)](https://www.informacne.centrum.sk/)

support of mechanisms to provide assistance and support to victims, taking into account the recommendations addressed to the Slovak Republic within the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of international organisations and communities (such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), the EU), and the US administration³.

The activities of the labour inspection bodies aimed at monitoring compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment fall within the scope of competence of the labour inspectorates and were carried out by the latter on an ongoing basis throughout the calendar year 2023. In 2023, a total of 18,465 inspections were carried out in 16,614 inspected entities. During these inspections, 34,508 natural persons were inspected at the workplaces of the inspected entities. A total of 1,172 natural persons were found to be illegally employed, which represents 3.3% of the inspected persons, and this number consists of 1,008 **illegally employed citizens of the SR (i.e. 86% of the total number of illegally employed persons and approximately 2.8% of the total number of inspected persons)** and 162 **illegally employed foreigners (i.e. 14% of the total number of illegally employed persons and approximately 0.5% of the total number of persons inspected)**. The labour inspection authorities also focused on inspections of legal employment of foreigners. Four extraordinary tasks were carried out in 2023. The findings of the completed inspections of compliance with the ban on illegal employment completed in 2023 are already part of the overall results of the labour inspectorates' activities in the area of control of compliance with the ban on illegal employment as described above. The data used are from the Labour Protection Information System updated as of 12 January 2024. In 2023, the labour inspection authorities continued to cooperate with the relevant units of the PF. The labour inspectorates were cooperative in inspections to which they are invited by the relevant PF units. Ad hoc collaborative inspections were limited due to the workload of individual PF units with other duties in relation to the situation caused by the ongoing armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine. In cooperation with labour inspectorates in 2023, officers of the Police Force carried out inspections of 77 business entities, during which they checked 437 persons, including 266 Slovak citizens and 171 foreigners. The inspections detected 2 business entities that violated the provisions of the Act on Illegal Work and Illegal Employment by illegally employing 2 citizens of the SR and 5 foreigners. Foreigners from the following countries of origin were employed illegally: Ukraine 1 and Moldova 4. These inspections have not identified any THB victim.

³The United States of America (USA) Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "TVPA") requires the U.S. Secretary of State to submit an annual report to the U.S. Congress. The purpose of this report is to spur activity and create international partnerships to combat human trafficking. The U.S. Government's approach to combating trafficking in human beings is consistent with the TVPA and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (commonly known as the "Palermo Protocol"). Each country covered by the minimum standards of the TVPA must be included in the annual report and assigned to one of the three levels or Watch List. The Report also includes a recommended action plan outlining key areas to achieve the minimum standards for suppression of trafficking in human beings as defined in the TVPA. According to the US administration's assessment in the form of the Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 (the TIP Report), the Slovak Republic does not yet fully meet the minimum standards for the suppression of trafficking in human beings, but it is working hard to do so. The TIP Report is published annually. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>. The Government of the SR took note of the Information on the publication of the TIP Report, which was submitted to the Government of the SR by the Minister of Interior of the SR as an initiative material on 21 September 2022.

In 2019, the NUFIM submitted an application for a grant for the project “Fight against THB and application of prevention tools”. Based on the above, an instruction was issued on 16 August 2019 by the Service Office of the MI SR to provide the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the PF (hereinafter referred to as the “BBFP P PF”) with a grant for the implementation of the national project under the Internal Security Fund and subsequently new instructions were issued in 2021 and 2022 to extend the project up to 2023. The objective of the project was to improve the efficiency of fight against organised, in particular cross-border criminal activities such as THB, and also to enforce and promote cooperation between States in the interest of fight against THB. The fulfilment of the set objective implements one of EUROPOL’s priorities, i.e. the fight against THB, and at the same time enables the officers of the NUFIM, who are the only ones within the PF with the competence to investigate and clarify THB crime, to streamline their activities, especially in the field of information exchange, observation, monitoring and documentation of organised and criminal groups. For the project duration, two working-level coordination meetings took place at which NUFIM officers met with members of partner units from Serbia and Germany. The aim of these meetings was for participants, based on their own experience in detecting and investigating THB crime, to arrive at an outcome that would be useful and usable in practice for the NUFIM as well as for partner countries, and that would help to improve the effectiveness of the results in the fight against THB. The working-level coordination meetings also strengthened international cooperation. The allocated amount of the project was EUR 287,580, financed 75% from the Internal Security Fund (EU) and 25% from the state budget. The above project was completed in December 2023. The outcome of the project is the construction and equipment of two specialised interrogation rooms technically and architecturally adapted for the interrogation of particularly vulnerable victims, the improvement of the language skills of the NUFIM officers, the improvement of the cooperation with the partner forces of Germany and Serbia, as well as the technical equipment for the detection of THB for the NUFIM officers.

Due to the change of the security situation in Europe caused by the war conflict in Ukraine, which led to a more massive presence of a group of the population of another state on the territory of the SR, during 2022 the MI SR applied for an amendment of the decision on the provision of a non-repayable financial contribution, the application was approved, on the basis of which selected activities of the national project⁴ were extended with the end of implementation in December 2023. As part of the extension of the national project, from August 2022, due to the war conflict in Ukraine, the activities of the Information Offices are also specialised for victims from other countries on the territory of the SR, including victims of THB. For the implementation period, the budget of the national project for the period August 2022 to December 2023 was increased by EUR 1,308,800.92.

In 2023, the MI SR participated in the research project “A comprehensive approach to preventing and combating child trafficking”. The project is implemented by the Ministry of the

⁴ Note: a national project from the European Social Fund under the Operational Programme Effective Public Administration entitled “Improving access to services for victims of crime and creating contact points for victims”.

Interior of the Czech Republic and the consortium of institutions ACCENDO - Centrum pre vëdu a výzkum, z.ú. and Charles University. The objective of the project is to ensure a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating child trafficking through an expert study and the development of a methodology for identifying and providing assistance to child victims, an educational programme and a standard prevention project. The project was not completed in 2023.

The modus operandi of the perpetrators is not significantly different for those identified in 2023 compared to previous years, nor has it resulted in a massive shift of perpetrators' activities to the online space, although it can be stated that there have been cases where victims have been lured not by face-to-face contact but through social networking sites. However, this form of recruitment is not the majority. In most cases, recruitment is by personal contact, as it has been in the past. However, perpetrators are increasingly using the online space to share offers and find clients. **Compared to 2022, we have seen a decrease in the number of identified victims in 2023.**

In the context of the challenges faced by the Slovak authorities also in 2023, here are the most important ones that need intensive attention in the coming period:

- 1. Unification and formalisation of the procedures of the structures involved in the victim referral process within the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), while maintaining the promptness of referral to support systems and consistently applying the system of non-discrimination. Taking into account the changes in the framework of the European Referral Mechanism with overlap to the Slovak Republic Referral Mechanism.**
- 2. Harmonising and formalising the procedures of the structures involved in the referral of victims, while consistently applying the principle of non-discrimination to support systems.**
- 3. Modification of legislation to ensure adequate and fair sanctioning of perpetrators by increasing the level of the sentencing tariff for the basic body and qualified body of the offence of trafficking in human beings with a view to minimising the imposition of suspended prison sentences by making use of the possibility of exceptional reductions in prison sentences, as well as creating possibilities for effective compensation for victims.**
- 4. Adoption of legislative measures aimed at reducing the demand for the services of victims of all forms of exploitation when they are knowingly exploited.**
- 5. Improve the identification of victims among foreign nationals who can be intercepted in transit or who are on the territory of the SR in various legal or illegal situations.**
- 6. Consistent application of criminal law institutions with a view to imposing an adequate and proportionate punishment on the perpetrator.**
- 7. Seeking solutions to prevent the concealment of the employment relationship, as well as solutions to sanction those who facilitate employment for remuneration and temporary employment agencies when they deliberately abuse their clients.**

1.1 Modus operandi

Formally and informally identified victims for 2023 were 44, of which 39 were formally identified by the NUFIM (of which 6 victims were enrolled in the Assistance Programme) and 5 were informally identified and enrolled in the Assistance Programme. Subchapter 1.1 discusses the victims formally identified by the NUFIM. Victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme are addressed in Chapter 2 and, marginally, in Subchapter 1.3.

By summarising information from the NUFIM, descriptions of the perpetration of THB crimes were created. From the data available to the NUFIM, the most significant change in trends in the subject crime for 2023 is the large increase and proportion of child victims in the total number of identified victims, with as many as 21 of the 39 identified victims being children, which represents as much as 53% share. Sexual exploitation remains the most frequent form of exploitation, as has been a long-standing trend, and largely outweighs other forms of exploitation; it is also the most dominant form of exploitation among child victims. Only one child victim was exploited for forced begging and one was exploited for criminal activities in addition to sexual exploitation.

1.1.1 Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation was the most dominant form of exploitation among identified victims of THB in 2023. Victims of sexual exploitation in 2023 were mainly exploited in Slovakia, with only two investigated cases involving exploitation of victims abroad, namely in the Czech Republic and Switzerland. Sexual exploitation has also long been the most frequent form of abuse of child victims, with their share of the total number of identified victims of sexual exploitation rising to 65% in 2023, a very significant increase compared to the previous year (i.e. 36% in 2022).

In 2023, investigations were initiated for the offence of THB where the purpose was sexual exploitation in a total of 12 cases involving a total of 29 victims, of which 19 victims were children aged 9-16 years. The victims of sexual exploitation were mainly women (26 victims), 3 victims were men. Two prosecutions were taken over from the Criminal Police departments in 2023, where they were conducted for the offence of pimping and endangering the moral education of youth, and were subsequently reclassified as a THB offence. In three cases, charges were also brought against the responsible perpetrators in 2023.

Similarly, two cases where the purpose of the exploitation was combined were also investigated in 2023; the first case was a combination of sexual exploitation and forced criminal activities with the place of exploitation in Slovakia, the second case was a combination of sexual exploitation and forced begging with the place of exploitation in Slovakia and Italy.

The perpetrators in the cases of THB, in order to sexually exploit the victims, mainly exploited their unfavourable financial situation, often also their drug addiction, and then forced them to perform sexual services by threat of violence, as well as by means of violence, or by

serving alcoholic beverages or narcotic and psychotropic substances, while the **clients were also provided through social networks (Pokec.sk, Azet.sk, Facebook) and the Messenger application.** The provision of sexual services took place mainly in the perpetrators' flats and in the clients' motor vehicles. In cases where the perpetrators were the parents of the victims themselves, the perpetrators mainly abused their position, dependence and subordination of their children, but often did not shy away from the use of violence by beating, pulling hair or threatening violence. In one case, the victims were lured to the Czech Republic for a lucrative job, where they voluntarily travelled and were subsequently forced by the perpetrators to perform prostitution on the street under the threat of violence as well as by means of violence. In one of the cases, the victims were three siblings, boys aged 9, 10 and 11, who were transported by persons close to them, through other persons not yet identified, to Switzerland in 2015, where the minors were sold for the purpose of providing sexual services, and at the same time sound and visual recordings were made of the minors' naked body parts, with payments from the clients being directed to Slovakia.

Only in the case of sexual exploitation were social networks detected as a means of contact, but they are used to a greater extent not so much to attract victims, but to offer the services of victims and to attract clients. For other forms of exploitation, online platforms were not used to communicate and attract victims or clients.

1.1.2 Labour exploitation / Forced Labour

Labour exploitation was the most frequent form of exploitation of identified victims in 2022, but this trend was not confirmed in 2023, when only 4 new victims were identified in the two investigations opened for the crime of THB. The place of exploitation in both cases was another EU Member State, namely Germany and the Netherlands.

In the first case with a place of exploitation in Germany, a 25-year-old woman was lured by her boyfriend under the pretext of a better life and job, then he secured a job for the victim in a hotel, opened a bank account for her, keeping the bank card as her identity document, which he stole from her. He provided the victim only with food and housing, restricted her personal freedom and did not allow her to leave the flat at all, only driving her to and from work. At the same time, the victim was denied access to a telephone and contact with her relatives, forced to work in the hotel and in the perpetrator's parents' flat under threats against her person and her relatives, as well as by means of physical violence consisting of beatings, hair pulling and dragging on the ground, and the victim, when unwatched, managed to escape and return to Slovakia.

In the second case, three Slovak citizens, men aged 18, 18 and 31, were lured in a Roma settlement in eastern Slovakia, taking advantage of their poor social and financial situation to work for financial gain in the Netherlands, where they were transported in passenger motor vehicles, accommodated in an unfurnished room of a block of flats, where they slept on the floor. The perpetrators arranged for them to work in various positions, with the financial remuneration for the work done by them being paid into the bank accounts of the perpetrators, who retained it in full.

In labour exploitation, recruitment is dominated by personal contact between the victim and the perpetrator, offering to improve the victims' living conditions.

1.1.3 Forced begging

In 2023, we record three new cases of forced begging. In two cases the place of exploitation was Slovakia and in one case the victim was exploited in Italy.

In the first case, the victim is a 12-year-old boy whose defencelessness was exploited by his own mother, who forced him, even with his consent, to beg in front of a department store in the town of Rimavská Sobota, while his mother controlled him while he was begging. A social worker passing by accidentally alerted the mother to the illegality of her actions and the begging of the minor was stopped only by the arrival of a patrol of the municipal police.

In the second case, a 31-year-old man was lured by the perpetrator, probably using the threat of violence or other serious harm, to the Italian city of Bergamo, where he was forced by the perpetrator to beg under psychological duress.

The victim in the third case of THB was a 19-year-old Moldovan citizen who was lured by the perpetrator to the town of Nowy Targ, Poland, under the pretext of securing work in Poland, where she was looking after his younger sisters in the perpetrator's household and, after about a month, he put her into a car and drove her to Slovakia, where he dropped her off in front of a department store and forced her to beg under threats to call the police and to kill her and members of her family. For the purpose of begging, the victim was regularly driven to Slovakia by the perpetrator. All the money she had begged was taken from her. To prevent her from escaping, her personal documents were also taken away and her mobile phone was regularly checked. The victim was checked by the trafficker at the places where the begging was carried out. The THB was only ended after the victim was checked by the PF officers who, on finding that the victim had no documents on her, handed her over to the foreign police and subsequently the victim was identified as the victim of THB.

1.1.4 Forced marriage

Within the modus operandi of forced marriages as a form of THB, we distinguish between forced marriages of adult women for the purpose of legalising the residence of third-country nationals in the EU and forced marriages of children. These two forms of forced marriages have different motivations and processes.

In 2023, only one victim of THB for the purpose of forced marriage was identified, who was lured by the perpetrators to live in their house after finding herself on the street with her two-year-old daughter in an advanced stage of pregnancy; they provided her with accommodation and food, and told her the very next day that she would marry a Turkish citizen, which the victim eventually agreed to due to her lack of finances and living without a home. Together with the perpetrators, they went to the municipal office to apply for marriage, but the victim changed her mind and did not agree to the marriage, whereupon the perpetrators locked

her in the flat, guarded her to prevent her from escaping, took her ATM card and behaved aggressively towards her. The victim managed to escape when unwatched and was at the municipal office to cancel the planned date of the marriage. The victim was subsequently contacted by telephone by the perpetrators, who forced her by threats of killing and psychological violence to agree to the marriage again, which ultimately did not take place after the intervention of the office staff and the municipal police.

In the above case, the NUFIM investigator brought charges against a total of 3 perpetrators, 2 citizens of the Slovak Republic and 1 citizen of Turkey, and the investigation was also completed in 2023 with a proposal to indict the perpetrators.

1.2 Perpetrators, organised groups, financial investigation

The NUFIM, as a unit of the PF specialised in operational search, screening and investigation of THB crimes, initiated prosecutions for the commission of THB crimes under Article 179 of the Criminal Code in 20 cases in 2023, which is a decrease compared to 2022 (25 cases). A total of 18 perpetrators were charged by the NUFIM investigators in 12 cases in 2023, of which 9 were men and 9 were women. The age range of persons charged with THB offences in 2023 was very wide. In the case of 15 perpetrators, the perpetrators were adults aged between 18 and 60 years, three perpetrators were juveniles (2 men and 1 woman) aged between 15 and 16 years.

In terms of nationality, 15 accused persons were Slovak nationals, 2 accused persons were Turkish nationals and 1 accused person was a national of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Table No. 1
Overview of investigated cases and accused persons - NUFIM

Year	Commenced criminal prosecution – cases	Charges brought – cases	Number of persons accused		Nationality of accused persons
2023	20	12	18	9 men	15 Slovak 2 Turkish 1 Pakistani
				9 women	

The perpetrators of THB crimes accused in 2023 came from the districts of Prešov (2 accused), Revúca (2 accused), Nové Zámky (2 accused) and one accused each from the districts of Košice-okolie, Trebišov, Kežmarok, Hlohovec, Šaľa, Rimavská Sobota, Komárno, Brezno and Malacky, 2 accused were from Turkey (both permanently resident in Austria) and 1 accused from Pakistan (permanently resident in Ireland).

The accused persons committed criminal activities mainly as individuals (in 7 cases), as a pair of perpetrators (in 4 cases) and as a trio of perpetrators (in 1 case). **The proportion of**

male and female perpetrators was balanced in 2023, with 9 accused being male and 9 female. Women were the perpetrators in cases of sexual exploitation (5 accused), forced marriage (2 accused), labour exploitation (1 accused) and forced begging (1 accused). Men were the perpetrators in cases of sexual exploitation (6 accused), forced marriage (2 accused) and labour exploitation (1 accused).

In 2023, **investigations were concluded** by NUFIM investigators with a **proposal to file an indictment** against 10 accused persons in 6 THB cases for the purpose of sexual exploitation, against 7 perpetrators in 2 THB cases for the purpose of forced marriage, and against 2 accused persons in 1 THB case for the purpose of labour exploitation. One case of THB for sexual exploitation was concluded with a **proposal for plea bargain** against two accused persons.

The perpetrators accused in 2023 abused **the victims' vulnerability in particular, or the otherwise vulnerable position** in which they were, especially given the **poor financial circumstances** from which they came, **using a ruse to lure them or, to exploit them, they used the threat of violence in the form of physical or psychological violence, threats of bodily harm to the victims or their families, threats of violence or the use of physical violence, taking advantage of their drug addiction;** in the case of child victims, where the perpetrators were their own parents, **they took advantage of the victims' subordination and dependency.**

In 2023, as regards the persons accused of THB crimes, no case was investigated committed by an organised group of perpetrators.

In criminal cases conducted by NUFIM investigators for the crime of THB, also in 2023, **financial investigations** were conducted in relevant cases, consisting of examining the property profile of the persons prosecuted, ascertaining the transfer of funds derived from the commission of the crime and the amount of unjust enrichment from the commission of the crime, on the basis of which the body of the offence was qualified. Financial investigation is carried out in accordance with the methodological guide to financial investigation issued by the Presidium of the PF in September 2016, which consists mainly in sending requests to banks and various entities in the Slovak Republic, such as the real estate register, securities depository, vehicle and vessel registers, etc. In general, however, it is still the case that the perpetrators of THB crimes investigated in the framework of cases in the SR continuously consume the profits derived from the commission of these crimes for their own use, i.e. there is no accumulation of funds of a larger volume that could be seized in the framework of criminal proceedings with the subsequent application of the institutions of Act No. 301/2005 Coll., Code of Criminal Procedure, as amended, relating to the seizure of the property of the perpetrator, or used for the commission of other types of crime.

Statistical data from the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic⁵ show that in 2023, **27 persons were prosecuted** at the level of prosecutor's offices, **of whom 12 were women and 15 were men**, which represents a **slight decrease** compared to 2022, when a total of 34 persons were prosecuted. It should be noted, however, that **we also saw a decline in the number of prosecuted persons in 2022** compared to 2021. **There were 25 persons indicted, of which 12 were women and 13 were men**, which also represents a decrease compared to 2022, when a total of 30 persons were indicted. **The indicted persons included persons under the age of 18 years, namely 1 girl and 1 boy aged 16 to 18 years.** The age structure of the indicted persons is from 16 years of age and above, the upper limit is not precisely defined, as in the statistical outputs of the General Prosecutor's Office of the SR in 2023, a person in the age category 61 and above was also indicted. For the crime of trafficking in human beings, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic records 10 persons as repeat offenders. The General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic records only the sex and age of the persons prosecuted, but not the nationality or the purpose of exploitation.

Table No. 2
Overview of persons prosecuted and indicted
– General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic

Year	Number of persons prosecuted		Number of persons indicted		Plea bargain – number of persons
2023	27	12	25	12	0
		women		women	
		15 men		13 men	

The Ministry of Justice of the SR has provided the National Rapporteur with official statistics on the number of legally completed court proceedings and the number of persons finally convicted of a THB offence in 2023. These data show that in 2023, the courts of the SR issued 17 decisions related to trafficking in human beings and a total of 18 persons were convicted and 9 persons were acquitted for the commission of trafficking in human beings. Compared to 2022, this is an increase of almost 100% in the number of decisions (9 in 2022), as well as in the number of persons convicted (10 in 2022) and acquitted (4 in 2022) of the indictment. For 3 persons, the case was discontinued. The specific purposes and number of victims are not recorded by the Ministry of Justice of the SR. The Ministry of Justice of the SR publishes on its website the decisions of the courts of the SR⁶, but **this system is not fully implemented by courts, so it was not possible to have all the decisions of the courts of the SR for the year 2023.** A study of publicly available anonymised decisions of the SR courts yielded findings on the sentences imposed as well as the purposes of exploitation that were adjudicated in 2023. **Out of a total of 30 persons concerned by the decisions of the SR courts issued in 2023 in the procedural position of defendants, a total of 9 persons (4 men and 5**

⁵<https://www.genpro.gov.sk/statistiky/statisticky-prehľad-trestnej-a-netrestnej-cinnosti-za-rok-2023/> status as of 19 March 2024.

⁶<https://www.justice.gov.sk/sudy-a-rozhodnutia/sudy/rozhodnutia/?pageNum=1&size=10>

women) were acquitted, for 3 persons (1 man and 2 women) the case was discontinued and for 1 person the court refrained from imposing a summary sentence, as the 12 years' custodial sentence imposed by an earlier final judgment was considered by the court to be sufficient for the protection of the society and the correction of the perpetrator. A further 13 persons were given suspended prison sentences, mostly with probation supervision, or even a prohibition of contact, a prohibition of approaching the victims. Only 4 persons were sentenced to imprisonment. In one of the available judgments, the court also dealt with the imposition of an obligation to compensate the victims, two women who had been sexually exploited by two perpetrators, for the damage caused (damage to health and moral damage), in the amount of EUR 6944.40 by one perpetrator and EUR 7062.50 by the other perpetrator.

The specific purposes of exploitation and the number of persons aggrieved are not statistically recorded by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, however, from the publicly available anonymised judgments that have been published, it has been found that **in the convictions (12) the courts decided on THB cases for the purpose of sexual exploitation of children (girls), but also sexual exploitation of adult women, forced marriage of children and forced marriage of an adult, where the person aggrieved was an adult woman.** In the case of sexual exploitation of children, the perpetrators were persons who were close to the children, such as the child's sister or the child's mother. In cases of THB for the purpose of sexual exploitation of adult women, the perpetrators in the recruitment process lured the victims abroad in search of well-paid work and improved living conditions. The exploiters were persons known and close to the victims (such as the victim's partner). In THB for the purpose of forced marriage of children, the perpetrators were the parents of the children.

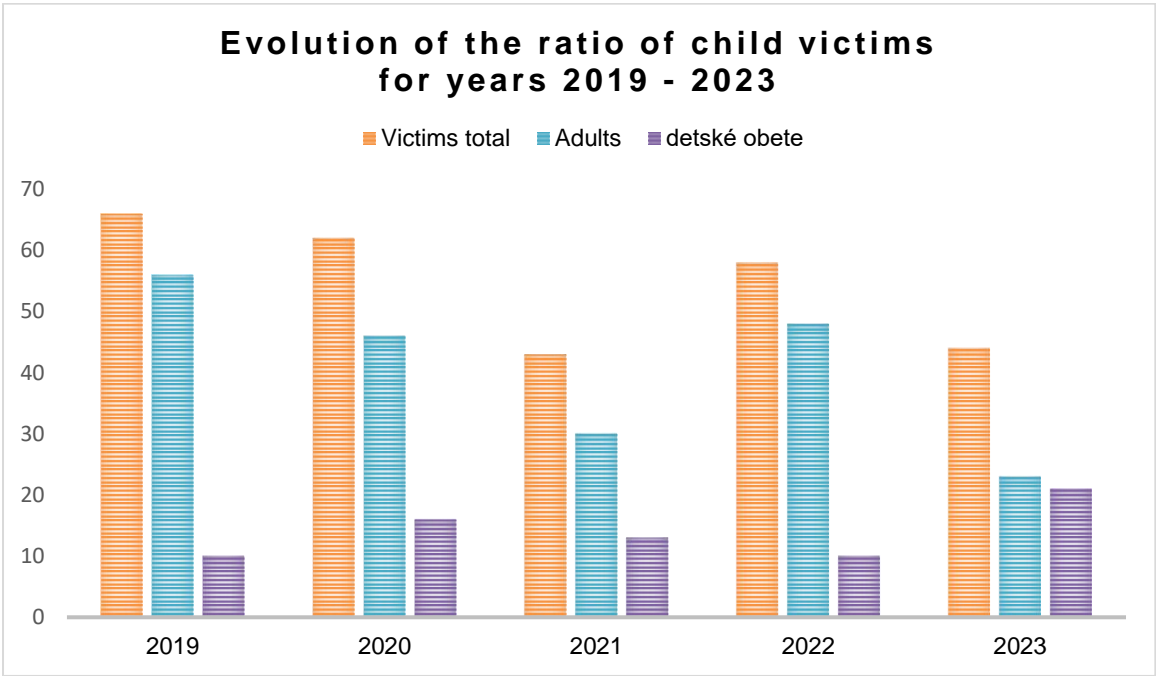
However, victims have the right to compensation from the State to the extent and under the conditions set out in Act No. 274/2017 Coll. on victims of crime and on the amendment to certain acts (hereinafter referred to as the "Act on Victims of Crime"). In addition to the right to compensation for personal injury, the victim is also entitled to compensation for moral damages under this Act. According to the information of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, **in 2023, compensation was paid to three victims of trafficking in the total amount of EUR 12,607.00 from this scheme. The individual payments were EUR 3,077.00, EUR 3,070.00 and EUR 6,460.00.**

1.3 Victims

In 2023, a total of 44 victims were identified in the Slovak Republic (of which two female victims were counted twice, as they were identified as aggrieved persons in two different cases of sexual exploitation in 2023), which represents a decrease compared to 2022, when 58 victims were identified. The number of identified victims is now at the level of 2021. The youngest victim was just 9 years old (a boy, sexually exploited) and the oldest was 64 years old (a man with suspected labour exploitation). Of the total number of identified victims, 33 were women (including 17 children) and 11 were men (including 4 children). The proportion of child victims is for the past year, with respect to previous years, relatively high and represents almost

½ of the identified victims (i.e. a total of 21 children and 23 adult victims). In 2022, children accounted for 1/6 of the total number of identified victims.

Chart No. 2



The age of the victims is recorded at the date of recruitment and not at the time of identification, i.e. **at the time of the start of the offence and not in the year when the victim enters the statistical system.** The victims who were children both at the time of recruitment and at the time of identification totalled 17 out of the original 21 victims. In the meantime, 4 victims have reached the age of majority, including 3 victims who turned 18 in 2023.

The longest time interval from recruitment to victim identification, for victims identified in 2023, was 9 years. From the available data, it can be concluded that the largest time gaps occur for victims who were sexually exploited.

Of the total number of identified victims, 39 were formally identified by the police, of whom 9 were men (including 4 children) and 30 were women (including 17 children). A total of 11 victims (including 4 men and 7 women) took up the opportunity to enter the Assistance Programme, which is half the number of last year. Of the total number of victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme, 6 victims (2 of them children) were formally identified by the police.

Victims who enter the Assistance Programme do not have to cooperate with the police and can think about cooperation. They are identified on reasonable suspicion of having been victims. This suspicion of THB is based on an identification scheme, not on the assessment of law enforcement authorities (LEAs).

Table No. 3
Overview of identified and formally identified victims

Year	Total number of identified victims		Country of origin of the identified victims	FORMALLY identified victims	
2023	44	11 men of which 4 children	Slovakia (41) Bulgaria (2) Moldova (1)	39	9 men of which 4 children
		33 women of which 17 children			30 women of which 17 children

Almost all identified victims for 2023 were Slovak citizens. Statistically, we recorded only three foreign victims coming from Moldova and Bulgaria. We also record persons who were born outside the territory of the Slovak Republic (United Kingdom and Czech Republic), but they are citizens of the Slovak Republic. For foreign victims, there is one female victim from Moldova who was abused for forced begging and was both enrolled in the Assistance Programme and formally identified by the police as a victim of THB. Two persons, a man and a woman, Bulgarian nationals, were labour exploited in Slovakia. These two persons were included in the Assistance Programme but were not formally identified by the police in 2023. Formal identification of victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme may extend from year to year. For example, one female victim was enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2022 and formally identified by the police in 2023, and thus is statistically included in 2023, but already as a formally identified victim.

In terms of the number of victims, sexual exploitation was the most common purpose of abuse in 2023, a change from 2022 when forced labour was the predominant purpose. A total of 33 victims were exploited for the purpose of providing sexual services, with a combination of sexual exploitation and forced begging (2) and sexual exploitation and forced criminal activities (1) occurring in 3 cases. Men were sexually exploited in 4 cases (including 3 children) and women were sexually exploited in 29 cases (including 17 children). Within sexual exploitation, we record two female victims who were statistically counted twice in 2023, as they were formally identified as victims of sexual exploitation in two different cases in 2023. One of these victims was a child at the time of recruitment. Both victims were Slovak nationals exploited in Slovakia.

Exploitation for the purpose of forced labour was detected in 7 cases in 2023 (5 men and 2 women), THB for the purpose of forced marriage in 1 case (1 woman), forced begging in 5 cases (2 men, including 1 child and 3 adult women). In the case of abuse of female victims for forced begging, we record a combination with the above sexual exploitation in 2 cases.

Exploitation for the purpose of forced criminal activities was recorded in combination with sexual exploitation of 1 female child victim in 2023.

In 2023, there was a **change in the trend** in terms of **domestic exploitation**, where both recruitment and exploitation take place within the SR. Over the last 5 years this has accounted for 1/3 of all identified victims who were both recruited and exploited within the Slovak Republic. In 2023, the Slovak Republic is listed as a country of exploitation in 32 cases, of which in 3 cases it is the destination country for foreign victims, which means that in 29 cases the Slovak Republic is both the country of origin and the country of exploitation, which represents almost 66% of the total number of identified victims. Of the total number of victims who reported the SR as the country of exploitation (32), in three cases there was a combination of countries of exploitation, namely in the first case a combination of the SR and Italy, where an adult woman was exploited sexually and for the purpose of forced begging. The second case involves a combination of the SR and Austria, where a female child victim was sexually exploited. The third case involved the exploitation of a female victim for the purpose of forced begging, with the country of exploitation listed as the SR and the Republic of Poland (hereinafter referred to as “Poland”).

Countries where victims identified in 2023 were exploited include, in addition to the Slovak Republic (32), also Switzerland (3), the Netherlands (3), the Czech Republic (2), Italy (2, 1 of which involved the above-mentioned combination of countries of exploitation with the Slovak Republic), Germany (1), Austria (1 case, above, involving a combination of countries of exploitation, the Slovak Republic and Austria), Ireland (1), Poland (1 case involving a combination of countries of exploitation, the Slovak Republic and Poland) and the United Kingdom (1).

The above contradicts the previous trend whereby in the majority of cases, nationals of the Slovak Republic were exploited abroad. **The data of identified victims in 2023 define the Slovak Republic primarily as a country of exploitation (32) and to a lesser extent as a source country** (14 of which in 2 cases a combination of countries has occurred and the Slovak Republic is also one of the target countries).

Table No. 4
Country of exploitation of victims

Target country/ Country of destination	Number of victims	
Slovakia	32	3 men (of which 1 child)
		29 women (of which 17 children)
Switzerland	3 men (children)	
The Netherlands	3 men	

Czech Republic	2 women	
Italy	2	1 man
		1 woman
Germany	1 woman	
Austria	1 woman (child)	
Ireland	1 woman	
Poland	1 woman	
United Kingdom	1 man	

In terms of investigating THB cases, we rate the impact of Brexit as significant, as there has been a noticeable drop (also in 2022) in new victims being exploited in this country. In 2023, there were no new THB cases investigated with a place of exploitation in the United Kingdom; we record only one adult male victim who was exploited for forced labour in the United Kingdom and expressed an interest in joining the Assistance Programme.

Interrogations of victims of THB as particularly vulnerable victims were also conducted by NUFIM investigators in 2023 using technical means of video and audio recording, with a total of 51 interrogations conducted in this way. The purpose of the interrogations conducted in this way is mainly to prevent secondary victimisation of the victims by repeated interrogations. All child victims were reported to the authorities of social and legal protection of children and social guardianship (hereinafter referred to as the “SLPCSG”) for the purpose of assessing the situation of child victims and implementing measures in accordance with the best interests of the child.

From 2019 to 2021, the most dominant region in terms of the origin of the victims was the Košice region. In 2022, there was a change and the highest number of victims came from the Prešov region (18 and of which 12 were men and 6 women). **There was also a change in 2023, when 32% of the total number of identified victims came from the Banská Bystrica region.** Of the total number of victims coming from this region, the **majority were children at the time of recruitment (out of 14 victims, 8 were children)** and all victims were abused for the purpose of sexual exploitation (of which in 1 case a combination of sexual exploitation and forced begging occurred). **This was followed by the Bratislava region and the Prešov region, which had the same number of victims.** In the case of the Bratislava region, out of 7 identified victims, 5 were children, and in the case of the Prešov region, out of 7 victims, 4 were children. The victims coming from the Bratislava region were subject to labour exploitation (1), sexual exploitation (5) and in one case a combination of sexual exploitation and forced begging occurred. Child victims (4) from the Prešov region were sexually exploited and adult victims (3) were exploited for labour. The number of victims from the **Trnava region and the Košice region** was also the same. Of the 5 victims from the Trnava region, 2 were children and of the 5 victims from the Košice region, 1 was a child. The victims originating from the Trnava region were all sexually exploited and the victims originating from the Košice region were sexually exploited in 4 cases and labour exploited in 1 case. **The smallest number of victims came from the Nitra region,** which had a higher representation in previous years. In 2023, among the identified victims, only 2 victims originating from the Nitra region were identified (one

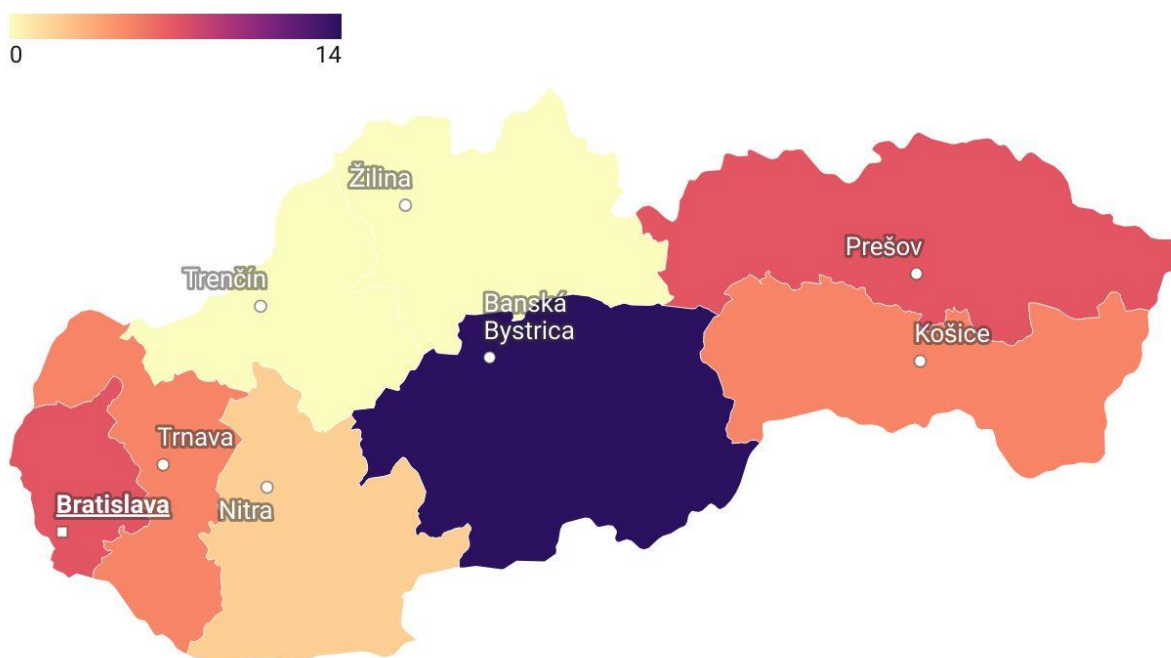
child victim sexually exploited in combination with forced criminal activities and one adult victim exploited for the purpose of forced marriage). The Trenčín region and the Žilina region were not represented in the identified victims in 2023. In 2023, **three victims of foreign origin** were also identified. One victim came from a non-EU country (Moldova) and was exploited for the purpose of forced begging, and two victims subject to labour exploitation in Slovakia came from an EU Member State (Bulgaria).

The representative offices of the Slovak Republic abroad cooperate with a service provider that provides assisted voluntary returns, which in 2023 was the Slovak Catholic Charity (hereinafter referred to as the “SCC”).

Chart No. 3

Region of origin of victims

Origin of Slovak victims identified in 2023



Source: Information Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and for Crime Prevention of the Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic • Created with Datawrapper

1.3.1 Assistance options for victims

An important institutional provision of assistance for victims is in particular the specialised Assistance Programme under the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, which is specifically targeted and the services provided are tailored for this group of victims. The entry of victims into the Assistance Programme is voluntary. The basic objectives of this programme are to stabilise the person after the trauma and to try to reintegrate them into normal life. In accordance with the stated objectives, support services are provided to the victims and the processes of reintegration/integration of the victims into society are ensured, while the victim is motivated to cooperate with the LEAs. In case the victim does not choose to cooperate with

the LEAs, the necessary crisis and emergency care is provided in accordance with the principle of non-discrimination. Each service under the Assistance Programme is patiently explained to the victim and is carried out only after the victim's consent has been given. Slovak and foreign victims who enter the Assistance Programme can be provided with healthcare coverage that other aid mechanisms in the SR do not allow. In the case of child victims entering the Assistance Programme, the procedures are adjusted in accordance with the best interest of the child. However, the legal guardian decides on the child's entry into the Assistance Programme. We provide an assessment of the assistance provided to victims who entered the Assistance Programme in 2023, as well as an overview of the enrolled victims, in detail in Chapter 2.

In the event that a victim decides to cooperate with LEAs and acts are carried out with them in criminal proceedings, before the first act, the investigator, in accordance with internal procedures, shall ensure that the victim is informed about the Assistance Programme directly by the provider of services of the Assistance Programme.

Another option for victims is to use the services of Information Offices. Based on the identified needs of each individual case, staff will refer clients to services and counselling. In 2023, 9 clients (4 men and 5 women), out of a total of 1,007 clients in 2023, approached the Information Offices for assistance related to THB, representing 1.1%. These 9 clients (including 2 persons of Ukrainian nationality) who contacted the Information Offices were potential victims or sources of information. The Information Offices provided information to the clients and directed them to professional assistance provided by relevant institutions (SCC, PF, CLSAF).

Victims can also contact accredited bodies providing assistance to victims of crime under the Act on Victims of Crime. In accordance with this Act, the LEAs (police, prosecutor) and healthcare providers inform victims about the existence of the entities providing assistance and their contact details. The accredited entities provide either general professional assistance to all victims or specialised professional assistance focusing on a specific group of victims (e.g. domestic violence, children). Victims of trafficking are considered as particularly vulnerable victims under the Act on Victims of Crime with the right to receive **specialised professional assistance**. This assistance scheme is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice of the SR. If an entity is specialised for this group of victims, specialised professional assistance may be provided to them, including, for example, the provision and explanation of all information under the Act on Victims of Crime, legal assistance, psychological assistance, psychological crisis intervention, assessment of the threat of danger to life or health, mediation of social services in an emergency housing facility and specialised social counselling.

2. PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF VICTIMS

In the event that there is a suspicion that a person may have become a victim of trafficking, they can voluntarily decide to enter the Assistance Programme, from which it is possible to provide the services that the victim needs in view of their current situation. **Cooperation with the police is not a condition for a victim to enter the Assistance Programme.** Funding is implemented from the budget of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and specific services are provided by non-governmental organisations (hereinafter referred to as “NGOs”) with which the MI SR has concluded a valid and effective contract. The IC is the coordinator of this specialised programme. The range of services provided to citizens of the SR, as well as to foreigners, or to stateless persons as victims, are set out in the Order of the MI SR on the provision of the Assistance Programme and are based on both international standards and binding EU legislation. Comprehensive care for victims is provided in accordance with the principle of equality and non-discrimination, with due regard for the individual needs of individual victims, respecting their basic human rights.

Based on the analysis of the data on victims who decided to join the programme in 2023, it can be said that victims in most cases are characterised by low or lower educational level, come from economically weak backgrounds and lack the necessary information. The main reason for the susceptibility to respond to suspicious offers is perceived to be the unfavourable economic and social situation, sometimes in conjunction with substance addictions. During 2023, **not only adults** were included in the Assistance Programme, which can be seen as a positive change in the trend, where in other years only interested adults were included in the Assistance Programme. As mentioned above, in the case of child victims entering the Assistance Programme, the procedures are adjusted in accordance with the best interest of the child and the decision to enter the Assistance Programme is made by the legal representative. The age of the victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme ranged over a relatively wide age range, from 14 years to 64 years. In 2023, not only persons who are Slovak citizens but also foreigners, namely from Moldova and Bulgaria, were included in the Assistance Programme. **The victim from Moldova as well as 5 other victims were also formally identified** by the police in 2023.

During 2023, a total of 29 persons were provided care, of which 18 victims were enrolled in the Assistance Programme in previous years and 11 victims were enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023. During 2023, a total of 17 victims were removed from the programme (including 11 victims who were enrolled in the Assistance Programme prior to 2023 and 6 victims who were enrolled in the Assistance Programme during 2023). As of 31 December 2023, a total of **12 victims** were enrolled in the Assistance Programme and **these victims continue in the programme in 2024.**

The provision of professional assistance and support to victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme is continuously contracted until 2027, as the MI SR has selected victim service providers during 2022 in accordance with the Public Procurement Act. As a result, three service contracts have been concluded for the provision of assistance and support to victims, the

operation of the National Line of Assistance to Trafficking in Human Beings Victims 0800 800 818 (hereinafter referred to as the “National Line”) and the implementation of pre-return assistance and assisted voluntary return of victims. In 2022, EUR 246,282.18 were actually spent on financing NGOs participating in the implementation of the Assistance Programme (pre-return assistance, assisted voluntary return of victims, assistance and support for victims, as well as ensuring the operation of the National Line). To ensure the implementation of the Assistance Programme and the provision of services, funds totalling EUR 195,732.27 were actually spent in 2023, and funds totalling EUR 25,649.91 were actually spent on assisted voluntary returns and pre-return assistance. Some healthcare services in the Assistance Programme are additionally covered by public health insurance funds. Similarly, the social security of victims is handled from the funds of the State or higher territorial units.

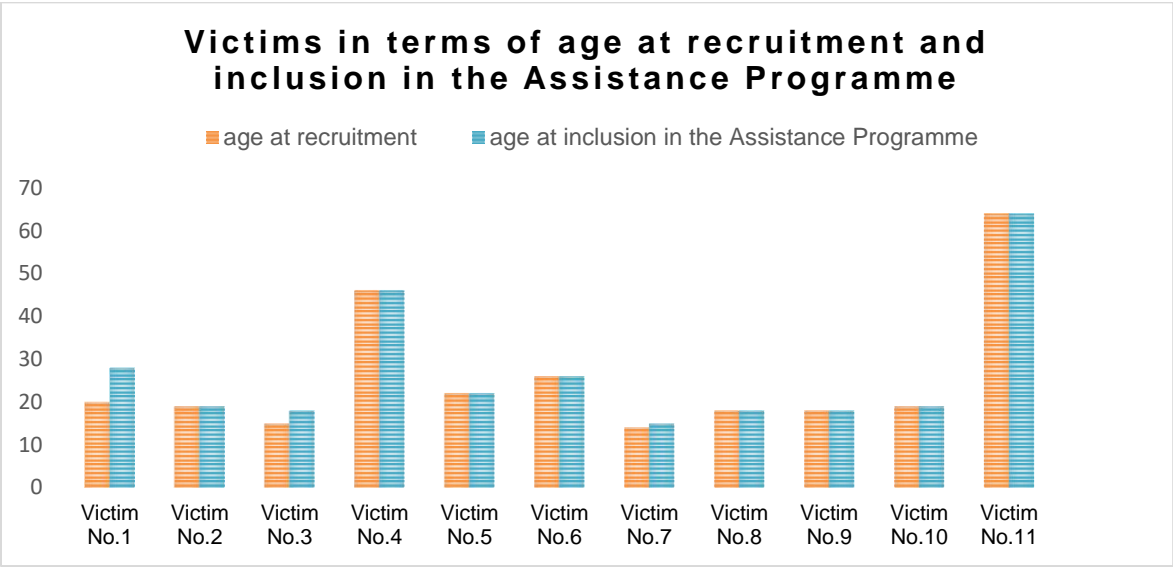
2.1 A more detailed analysis of the victims included in the Assistance Programme

In 2023, 11 persons were enrolled in the Assistance Programme, which represents a 50% decrease compared to 2022, when 22 victims entered the Assistance Programme. Of the total number of persons enrolled, 7 were women (64%) and 4 were men (36%). The trend of predominantly male victims was registered from 2015 to 2021, with the exception of 2019, when more females than males were enrolled in the Assistance Programme. In 2020, there was a balance between male and female enrolees. In 2022, there was again a change in the victim mix with a majority of female victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme, as confirmed by the victim mix for 2023.

A change in the mix of victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023 compared to previous years also occurred in the age of victims. In 2023, two individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of recruitment also entered the Assistance Programme. In one case, the victim was 15 years old at the time of recruitment and had already reached the age of majority at the time of identification and entry into the programme, however, with regard to statistical procedures, this person will be viewed and reported as a child. In the other case, a person under the age of 18 entered the Assistance Programme, namely a 15 year old who was 14 years old at the time of recruitment. There was one other change in age at the time of recruitment and at the time of identification or entry into the Assistance Programme, a victim who was 20 years old at the time of recruitment and 28 years old at the time of entry into the Assistance Programme. It should be noted that **victims often need a long time to be capable of sharing their experience with another person to help identify them as a victim**, or the process of THB may take several years. By comparing the age of entry into the Assistance Programme and the age at recruitment, it is possible to ascertain the time frame after the exploitation has ended for victims to enable their identification to aid actors or State authorities. **In almost 30% of cases there was a change in age from recruitment to entry into the Assistance Programme.** The largest time gap, 8 years, occurred for a female victim who was trafficked for sexual exploitation in Ireland. Entering the Assistance Programme is perceived as a great benefit by the victims who have opted for it, as they are provided with many services, including psychological and legal counselling.

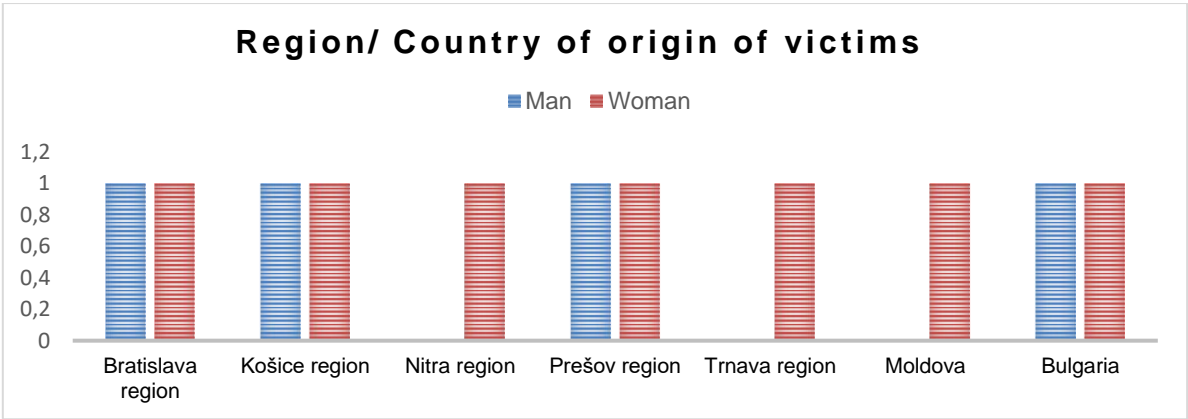
We perceived as a long-term trend that almost exclusively adults entered the Assistance Programme. A child’s entry is subject to the consent of the legal guardian and, in addition, the situation of a child victim of a crime, including THB, in terms of protection measures, is preferably dealt with by the SLPCSG authority in order to pursue the child’s best interests. In 2023, however, there was a change in this trend and two victims entered the Assistance Programme who were under the age of 18 at the time of recruitment, including one victim who was also under the age of 18 at the time of enrolment in the Assistance Programme.

Chart No. 4



In 2023, a total of 8 Slovak nationals and 3 foreigners originating from Moldova and Bulgaria were included in the Assistance Programme. In the case of Slovak nationals, the Eastern Slovakia region has dominated as the source territory within the Slovak Republic in recent years, but in 2023 there was a change, as the majority of victims are from Western Slovakia (Bratislava region, Nitra region and Trnava region).

Chart No. 5



In previous years, most of the victims included in the Assistance Programme came from villages or settlements. Towns were less well represented. This trend was not confirmed in 2023, as the number of victims coming from settlements is minimal, with only one victim. **Victims predominantly came from villages (5) or towns (5).** In terms of educational attainment, the trends of recent years are confirmed and also in 2023, victims were included in the Assistance Programme whose **predominant educational attainment was completed primary education** (primary school and special primary school), with a total of 54%. The other 36% of the victims had completed secondary education (secondary education or secondary education with school-leaving examination). As of 2017, we do not record any victim in the Assistance Programme who had completed university education. The Assistance Programme is predominantly entered by **persons who have defined their marital status as single** and this was also confirmed in 2023. This trend has persisted since 2015, with the exception of 2018, when divorced victims occurred in the same numbers as single victims. In 2023, we record only one divorced woman. In terms of the age of victims at the time of recruitment, in 2023 we recorded 2 female victims under the age of 18, 5 victims (3 female and 2 male) aged between 18 and 21. Between the ages of 22 and 30, 2 victims (1 female and 1 male) were enrolled in the Assistance Programme. One female victim was age 46 and one male victim was age 64 at the time of recruitment. From the above, it can be concluded that **the majority of victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023 were under the age of 21 (inclusive).**

2.1.1 Recruitment phase

In the long term, the recruiters are predominantly male. Those enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023 reported that in 10 cases (i.e. 91%) the recruiter was a man and in 1 case the recruiter was a woman. The situation was similar in 2022. Almost all recruiters were of Slovak nationality. Slovaks were recruited by Slovaks and in three cases for the recruiters a different nationality was reported, which, however, copies the nationality of the victims. In relation to the victim, the recruiters were predominantly persons who did not know each other or were strangers (7), in three cases the victims stated that the recruiter was a person they would classify as a friend/acquaintance, and in one case the victim was recruited by extended family. In recent years, the analysis of the data on victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme has shown that the SR has predominantly been the source country. In 2023 there has been a change and the data, taking into account the victims identified in 2023, define the **SR as primarily a country of exploitation** (32) and to a lesser extent a source country (14, of which in 2 cases a combination of countries has occurred and the SR is also one of the target countries). An analysis of the victims included in the Assistance Programme in 2023 shows that the country of exploitation is the Slovak Republic in 7 cases (of which 3 victims are foreign nationals), in two cases the Netherlands is listed as the country of exploitation, and in one case each Ireland, Poland and the United Kingdom are listed as the country of exploitation. In terms of SR citizens exploited within the SR or abroad, the situation occurred where SR citizens have been exploited in equal numbers in domestic trafficking and in exploitation abroad, which means that there has been **an increase in domestic (internal) THB within the SR.**

In the long term, **the most common way** for a recruiter **to make contact** with a victim is through **personal contact**. In 2023, there was no other method of making contact other than personal contact. The application practice and cases investigated by the NUFIM show that traffickers use the **online space predominantly to market victims and their services**, it is the way they acquire clients. Online space is minimally used to recruit victims in the cases captured and victims enrolled the Assistance Programme. Victims who were enrolled in an Assistance Programme in 2023 cited seeing a well-paying job as the most common reason they reflected on the recruiters' offer (7). This was followed by coercion by another person/abduction (3) and the social situation of the victims, which they wanted to improve (2). Disagreements within the family (1) and the possibility of studying (1) were also cited as motivating factors. Within the situations that led victims to accept the recruiters' offer, a combination of life situations occurred in most cases. Trends in the intended target country compared to previous periods, when the United Kingdom or Germany had the majority representation, no longer hold true in 2023 as the SR, as the **intended target country**, holds the lead. In two cases, the Netherlands was mentioned as the intended target country and this has been fulfilled. In one case, Germany was mentioned, but this was changed and the country of exploitation was the Slovak Republic. A similar situation occurred with Poland, which was originally mentioned as the target country and the change was made in terms of the combination of the countries of exploitation as the SR and Poland. In one case each, Ireland and the United Kingdom were mentioned by victims as intended target countries, which also became countries of exploitation, and no change occurred.

2.1.2 Transport of victims

In 2023, we only recorded legal crossings of national borders, or no crossings at all, as recruitment and exploitation were carried out in one country. A similar pattern applies to the use of travel documents. Where there was crossing of national borders, genuine travel documents were used and where there was no crossing of national borders, there was no need for the use of travel documents. Table 5 below captures the use of means of transport in transporting victims from the country of origin or country of recruitment to the country of exploitation. It should be noted that in the case of countries, a combination of the countries occurred.

Table No. 5
Methods of transporting of victims to the destination/target countries

	Aircraft	Car	Bus	On foot
Ireland	1	-	-	-
Slovakia	-	4	1	2
United Kingdom	-	-	1	-
The Netherlands	-	2	-	-
Poland	-	-	1	-
TOTAL	1	6	3	2

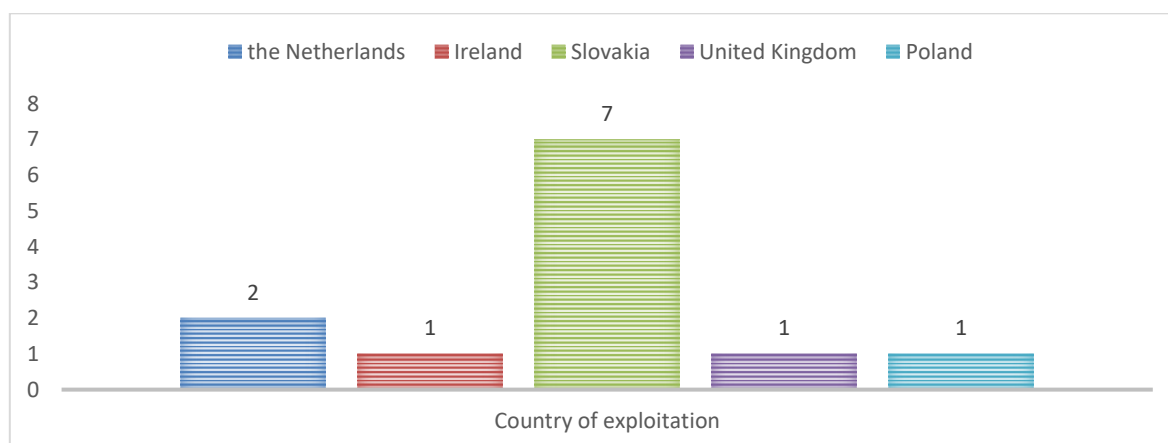
Since 2017, victims have reported bus and passenger motor vehicle as the most common form of transport to the target country of exploitation. In 2023, the situation was similar. **The**

most commonly used means of transport was car (6), followed by bus (3), plane (1) and two victims reached the place on foot, without using any means of transport. In the process of transportation to the destination, the victims travelled mostly in the company of traffickers (6) or other victims (5), or a combination of these groups. Two victims reported that they had arrived at the place of exploitation alone, unaccompanied.

2.1.3 Exploitation phase

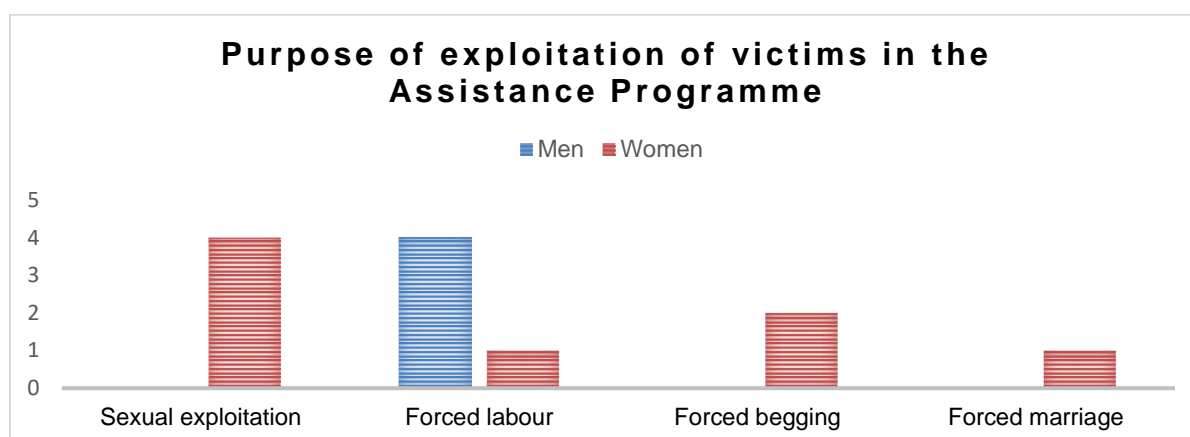
For the country of exploitation, there is also a combination of countries, which has already been described above. However, this was only one case. The chart shows only the individual countries, in the case of country combinations, each country of exploitation has been counted separately, so we report the number of countries higher than the number of victims.

Chart No. 6
Country of exploitation of victims identified in 2023



The situation has changed compared to previous years and the highest number of exploited victims is registered within the Slovak Republic (7), where women were sexually exploited (3), exploited for labour (1), forced to beg (2) as well as forced to marry someone (1). One male victim was exploited for forced labour in Slovakia. In the Netherlands, two male victims were exploited for labour. In Ireland, one female victim was sexually exploited, in Poland we record the forced begging of one female victim (in this case a combination of the countries of exploitation the SR and Poland) and in the United Kingdom one male victim was exploited for labour.

Chart No. 7



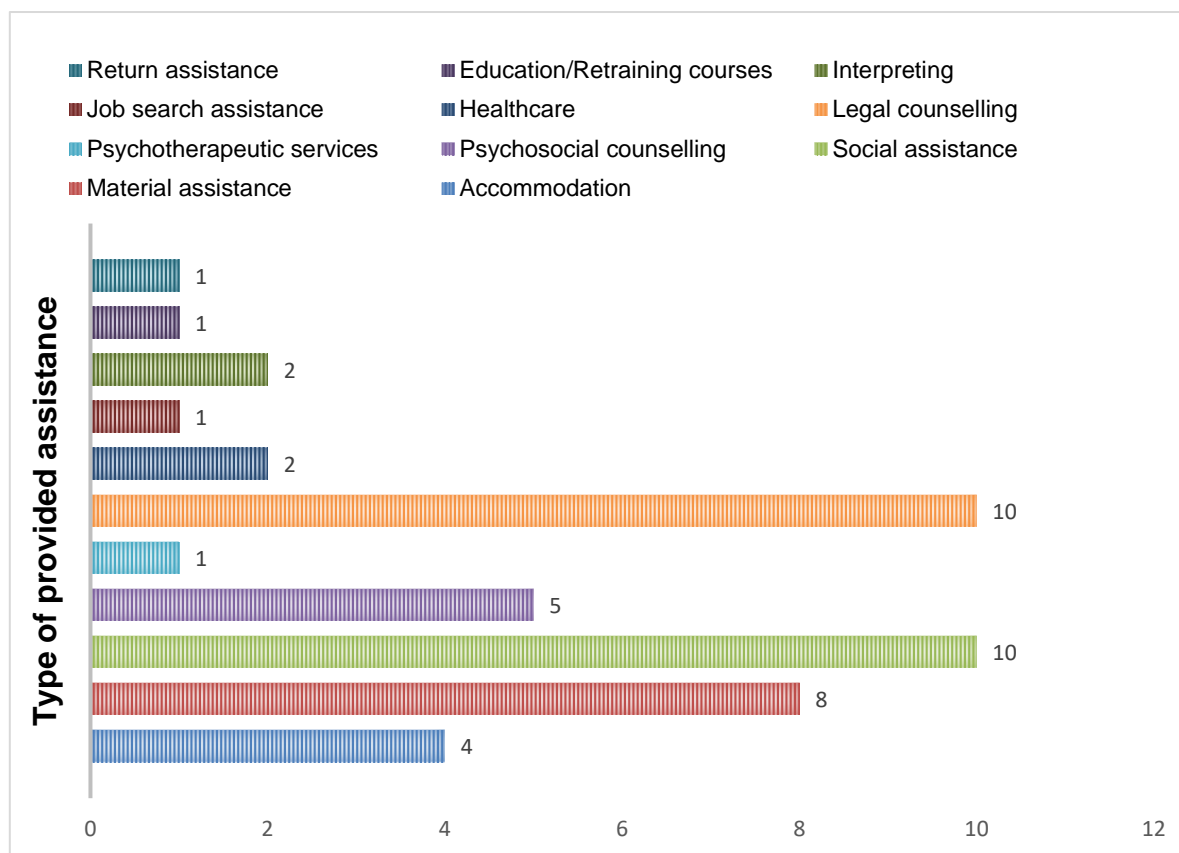
Not only the countries of exploitation, but also the purposes of exploitation were combined, in one case of a female victim exploited for sexual services and forced begging in Slovakia. From the data also presented in the chart above, it is clear that **forced labour/forced service as a form of victim exploitation** is prevalent for victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023. This trend has persisted since 2020. **Female victims included** in the Assistance Programme **were primarily exploited sexually, for forced begging, forced marriage and forced labour**. For men, only one form of exploitation occurred, namely for forced labour. From the available data, it can be concluded that **forced begging is carried out on the street**. **Sexual exploitation** was carried out in the context of private prostitution carried out in a **private apartment/house**, but we also record cases of **street prostitution** or prostitution carried out **in hotels**. **Forced labour** and services were performed in **food processing**. Forced marriage was carried out in a private apartment/house.

2.1.4 Rescue, identification and assistance phase

In the liberation from situation phase, victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023 reported that they **were liberated by their own efforts** (4), by release by the trafficker (3), by the intervention of LEAs (3), or by assistance from relatives (2) or third parties (2). For the methods of escape, there were combinations of possibilities, which were separately included in the statistical overview.

Once enrolled in an Assistance Programme, victims are provided with assistance and support on the basis of an individual assistance plan drawn up by the contracted NGO, taking into account all their current needs. In addition to the State authorities, the institutions providing assistance to victims include NGOs, international organisations and special-purpose establishments of the Church. Victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme in 2023 were provided with a wide range of services on the basis of an individual assistance plan. The most common services provided included legal counselling, social assistance, material assistance and psychosocial counselling. The chart below provides more detailed information.

Chart No. 8
Overview of assistance provided to victims included in the Assistance Programme



Victims are provided with a combination of services based on an assessment of their individual condition, current situation and needs. **Early medical intervention** in 2023 was generally provided to victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme by specialists from St. Michael Hospital in collaboration with the IC. **Legal counselling** is a very important service of the programme for victims, as in addition to legal information, victims can also be provided with representation in the field of criminal, civil, family and labour law, as well as resolution of problems concerning distraint, including the possibility of debt repayment in the form of personal bankruptcy or a repayment schedule. **In 2023, legal counselling and social assistance were the most utilised services for enrolled victims.** Legal assistance provided by NGO representatives to victims enrolled in the Assistance Programme is related to ensuring the protection and exercise of the victim's rights. It is essential that victims are able to effectively exercise their rights during criminal proceedings, including for the purpose of claiming compensation for damages if they have been caused by the crime. **The presence of a legal representative is particularly beneficial in relation to the professional and effective exercise of the rights** of the aggrieved party, the active reference to the provisions of the relevant legislation and their consistent application both in the preparatory proceedings and in the court proceedings. The representative acts within the scope of the **rights of the aggrieved party's attorney** pursuant to Article 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and at the same time supervises the respect of other rights granted to the aggrieved party - special treatment of the victim, in particular in order to prevent unnecessary repetition of interrogations, visual and

audio confrontation of the victim with the accused and asking suggestive, captious or unnecessarily intrusive questions. Last but not least, the **accompaniment and active exercise of the rights of the victim by the lawyer during the trial is also perceived positively by the judges themselves**. Sensitisation and closer acquaintance with the consequences of serious crime affecting the human dignity and integrity of particularly vulnerable persons is seen in a **better reflection of the specific situation and circumstances on the part of the victim, a change of approach and automatic adoption of appropriate measures**. In the framework of legal counselling, the NGO provided representation of victims enrolled in the programme in pre-trial proceedings, assisted them in claiming compensation for damage in criminal proceedings, provided assistance in criminal cases conducted by the LEAs abroad, communicated with interested parties (the representative office of the Slovak Republic abroad, police, assisting organisation) to the extent necessary to obtain additional information, ensured representation of clients in court proceedings, implemented civil, family and labour law filings and assisted victims with debt relief and distraint proceedings. The NGO providing legal counselling works with law firms and other professionals to provide comprehensive legal assistance. The intention of the legal counselling provider is to pass on objective information to the victim so that the victim can make an informed decision about whether to cooperate with the LEAs, as well as to make a timely and proper claim for compensation for the damage caused.

Another of the programme's services is the **provision of pre-return assistance and the possibility of conducting assisted voluntary return** of victims. The SCC provided return assistance to 4 persons, namely 2 victims originally from Bulgaria, 1 victim from Moldova and 1 Slovak citizen returning from abroad (United Kingdom) to the territory of the Slovak Republic. Cooperation with the Slovak Embassy in the United Kingdom was also used for the return of the Slovak citizen to our territory.

Victims are most often identified by the police and NGOs. Possible entities of initial identification may include social workers, teachers, as well as Slovak representative offices abroad. The operation of the National Line can also make an important contribution to the self-identification or identification of a victim by another person in the NRM.

The NGOs (currently the SCC and the Greek Catholic Charity), in accordance with the contractual relationship with the MI SR, also carry out identification of victims, both in detention facilities and in reception and residential camps, through interviews and consultations among potential victims. If a person is identified as a victim, they offer assistance through inclusion in the Assistance Programme.

On the website of the Ministry of Interior of the SR⁷ in the downloadable documents there is a freely available material which presents the basic pillars of the NRM in terms of a victim-centred value setting, human rights and institutional provision. It is intended primarily for practitioners and professionals, who may come into contact with potential victims and who,

⁷ <https://www.minv.sk/?informacne-centrum-na-boj-proti-obchodovaniu-s-ludmi-a-prevenciu-kriminality>

if necessary, will be assisted in the correct procedure and approach to the victim. The dissemination and strengthening of the NRM and the identification of as many victims as possible is one of the policy objectives in the fight against THB.

3. ACTIVITIES

Trends in the fight against THB are one of the important considerations in policy-making in this area. The necessary changes and challenges are reflected in particular in the composition of the tasks included in the National Programme. National Programmes are adopted in the SR for several years; the National Programme for 2019-2023 applies to the year 2023. This is the fifth National Programme on THB issues. It contains 4 main areas covering comprehensively the area of combating THB - partnership, prevention, victim protection and prosecution. Key trends towards a satisfactory comprehensive solution can be identified in each individual area. The activities carried out for the implementation of the above National Programme are financially covered by the state budget of the SR. The material also includes a plan of tasks in the form of an action plan, which in 21 tasks reflects the needs of practice and international standards. The evaluation of the implementation of the tasks of the Action Plan valid in 2023 is summarised in cooperation with the members of the Expert Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (hereinafter referred to as the “Expert Group”).

In view of the fact that the programming period of the current National Programme ended in 2023, the IC, in cooperation with the experts represented in the Expert Group, prepared a draft of the sixth strategic document for combating THB in the form of the National Programme of Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2024-2028, which was approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic by Resolution No. 522/2023 at the meeting on 18 October 2023.

The Slovak authorities are striving to move forward with the implementation of measures aimed at improving and streamlining the fight against THB, including through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. According to the US administration’s assessment in the form of the Trafficking in Persons Report 2023⁸ (the so-called TIP Report), the SR does not yet meet the minimum standards for the suppression of THB, but is working hard to achieve them. **The information on the issuance of the TIP Report by the United States of America was submitted to the meeting of the Government of the Slovak Republic by the Prime Minister of the SR in charge of the MI SR as an initiative material on 23 August 2023.** In 2023, the SR provided the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), which monitors the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, with the supporting documents within Round 4 of the evaluation, which is followed by a personal evaluation visit in early 2024.

3.1 Partnership

In terms of partnership building, since 2006, an expert group has been operating in the Slovak Republic, chaired by the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (hereinafter referred to as the “National Coordinator”), the entrusted State Secretary of the MI SR. This inter-ministerial group is an advisory, initiating and coordinating body of the

⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

National Coordinator and is composed of permanent and invited members. Three meetings of the Expert Group were held in 2023. In 2015, a regular working group was formed at the MI SR to address current issues in the provision of care to victims of THB, which is regularly attended by representatives from the IC, NUFIM and other ministries according to the current topic, with representatives from the NGO sector providing care to victims and assisted voluntary returns to victims. This effective platform provides a suitable space for addressing current issues in the provision of care to victims, exchanging information and planning further practices in the fight against THB. It met four times in 2023.

The Information Offices cooperate and exchange information with intervention centres, entities providing assistance to victims of crime and other anti-social activities, social service providers and public authorities for the purpose of crime prevention and to mediate professional assistance to victims. In this context, a system of “Regional Platforms for Assistance to Victims of Crime” (hereinafter referred to as “Regional Platforms”), which have been set up at the level of individual regions, is coordinated through the Information Offices. Regional representatives of the police, central government, local government, educational institutions, the non-profit sector and the private sector participate in the activities of the Regional Platforms. The objective of the Regional Platforms is to assist victims of crime, set up and strengthen cooperation between institutions and service providers in the region, identify deficiencies in the access of victims of crime to the necessary services, propose solutions, both legislative and non-legislative, for the improvement of the identified deficiencies or strengthen prevention in the individual regions depending on their needs. In 2023, meetings of the Regional Platforms were held in May and November, with specific topics such as “Prevention of labour risks”, “Prevention of THB” and “Assistance to victims from among departees from Ukraine”.

Police officers of the Border and Foreign Police Service and staff of the Migration Office of the MI SR (hereinafter referred to as the “MO MI SR”) are also important elements of cooperation in the fight against THB. Other ministries have cooperated with various institutions and relevant entities in the Slovak Republic and possibly abroad in the implementation of the tasks of the current National Programme.

3.2 Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MLSAF SR) actively fulfils its obligations arising from international treaties falling within the substantive competence of the Ministry in selected international fora also related to the field of THB, in connection with the implementation of social and legal protection of children and combating forced labour. This concerns the application of international instruments binding on the Slovak Republic, namely the United Nations (hereinafter referred to as the “UN”) Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in the field of child protection and, for the field of forced labour, the revised Council of Europe European Social Charter, ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour and ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour. The fulfilment of Slovakia’s commitments in these areas is subject to regular monitoring.

3.2.1 Social and Legal protection of children

Unaccompanied minors⁹ (hereinafter referred to as “UMs”) are among the groups of potential victims most at risk. In order to improve the identification in this specific group of children, a case conference is subsequently conducted after placement in the facility, which is interpreted into a language that the UM understands. Objectives also include the identification of risks and potential threats, with particular attention to the assessment of indicators of potential THB. In 2023, there were a total of 242 registered UMs from so-called “third countries” in the territory of the Slovak Republic who were provided with care by the Centre for Children and Families (CCF), including children from Ukraine, of whom there were 30 in the CCFs as of 31 December 2023, and 11 young adults.

If the cooperation of other entities is necessary in the implementation of measures of SLPCSG or assistance to children who are abused, sexually abused, neglected or who are reasonably suspected of having been abused, sexually abused or neglected or who have been victims of trafficking, the **authority of SLPCSG¹⁰ fulfils the role of coordinator**. It further works with CCFs, healthcare providers, municipalities, schools, LEAs, accredited entities and others. Basic conceptual plans focused on improving and expanding the specialised and individual approach to the target group of children who are at real or latent risk of THB are part of the updated “**Concept of ensuring the implementation of measures in social and legal protection and social guardianship facilities for the years 2021-2025**”, which plans to ensure the availability of specialised programmes for all target groups of children at risk in individual Centres for Children and Families. These centres will be competent to provide the child and its family (or a person taking care of the child in person) targeted professional care. Since December 2020, there has been a group in the CCF Sečovce with a specialised programme for children, who have been abused, physically abused, sexually abused or have been victims of trafficking. On 1 January 2024, a group with a specialised programme was established in the CCF Poprad with a capacity of 10 children.

In 2023 there were 12 children acting as witnesses - aggrieved parties in criminal proceedings in investigated cases of THB. The SLPCSG authorities, within their competences, assessed the situation of the minor child and their family, implemented SLPCSG measures in the interest of the minor child and provided assistance to the LEAs.

3.2.2 Labour inspection

The primary objective of the labour inspection bodies is to protect the rights of employees, which consists in particular in the control of labour law regulations, anti-discrimination legislation, ensuring occupational health and safety, compliance with the

⁹Unaccompanied minor > ÚPSVaR (gov.sk)

¹⁰When working with THB victims, the authority of SLPCSG follows Act No. 305/2005 Coll. on SLPCSG and on the amendment to certain acts, as amended. If the SLPCSG authority finds that the child, parent or person who personally cares for the child needs help because they are unable to solve problems in the family, conflicts in the family, to adapt to a new situation in the family, or if the family is a family with a specific problem, for example because they are a victim of THB, as part of the measures to be implemented, the authority shall propose or arrange for the implementation of professional methods to assist children or adult natural persons who have been victims or counselling and psychological assistance to families with a specific problem and in crisis situations.

provisions of Act No. 82/2005 Coll. on illegal work and illegal employment and on the amendment to certain acts, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the “Act on Illegal Work and Illegal Employment”), and the performance of other tasks within the meaning of Act No. 125/2006 Coll. on labour inspection and on the amendment to Act No. 82/2005 Coll. on illegal work and illegal employment and on the amendment to certain acts. **The area of combating THB is overlapping with the performance of labour inspection, in particular in the area of labour-law relations and in the area of control of illegal work and illegal employment.** The victims of illegal employment are the ones exposed to an increased risk of THB. However, due to the absence of THB cases, the National Labour Inspectorate (hereinafter referred to as the “NLI”) cannot identify the main forms or trends in THB, or can only identify them indirectly through the identification of trends in illegal employment. **Labour inspectorates also act in the field of the protection of children’s rights as a regulator of the use of child labour** in the case of ‘light work’ by authorising, at the request of the employer and in agreement with the competent public health authority, the performance of child labour consisting of performing or co-performing in cultural and artistic performances, sporting events or promotional activities. The competence to control compliance with the prohibition of illegal work and illegal employment is entrusted to the control bodies, which are exclusively labour inspectorates, since the amendment to the Act on Illegal Work and Illegal Employment, effective from 1 January 2023, excluded from the control bodies the CLSAF and the Offices of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, which had this in their competence in cooperation with the labour inspectorates.

In 2023, a total of 18,465 inspections were carried out in 16,614 inspected entities. During these inspections, 34,508 natural persons were inspected at the workplaces of the inspected entities. A total of 1,172 natural persons were found to be illegally employed, this number consisting of 1,008 illegally employed citizens of the SR and 162 illegally employed foreigners. The labour inspection authorities also focused on inspections of legal employment of foreigners. Four extraordinary tasks were carried out in 2023:

- A “Region Exchange” inspection of compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment was conducted between 24 April 2023 and 30 June 2023. Within this task, attention was also paid to the control of compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment of self-employed third-country nationals (so-called false trades), as well as to the control of working conditions of posted employees.
- Control of social legislation in road transport by employers - control of third-country nationals (in particular Ukrainians) performing driver’s work based on valid certificates for transport companies took place in the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 October 2023.
- A “Region Exchange – HORECA” inspection of compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment was conducted between 18 September 2023 and 30 November 2023. Within this task, attention was also paid to the control of compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment of self-employed third-country nationals (so-called false trades), as well as to the control of working conditions of posted employees working exclusively in the accommodation and catering sector. The purpose of the inspections was to monitor the situation primarily in the hotel and similar accommodation sector.

- An inspection of compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment in cooperation with the Financial Administration was conducted between 12 October 2023 and 29 December 2023.

The findings of the completed inspections of compliance with the ban on illegal employment completed in 2023 are already part of the overall results of the labour inspectorates' activities in the area of control of compliance with the ban on illegal employment as described above. The data used are from the Labour Protection Information System updated as of 12 January 2024. In 2023, the labour inspection authorities continued to cooperate with the relevant units of the PF and the labour inspectorates were cooperative in inspections to which they are invited by these units.

In order to strengthen cooperation and increase the possibility of early identification of victims of THB, the MI SR concluded an agreement with the NLI in 2013, under which regular joint inspections of business entities are carried out. On behalf of the MI SR, officers of the NUFIM and officers of the relevant directorates of the Border and Foreign Police of the BBFP P PF take part in the inspections. While conducting inspections of business entities, PF officers also focus on searching for and identifying victims of THB crimes. It results from the collected data¹¹ that in cooperation with labour inspectorates in 2023, officers of the Police Force carried out inspections of 77 business entities, during which they checked 437 persons, including 266 Slovak citizens and 171 foreigners. The inspections detected 2 business entities that violated the provisions of the Act on Illegal Work and Illegal Employment by illegally employing 2 citizens of the SR and 5 foreigners. Foreigners from the following countries of origin were employed illegally: Moldova (4) and Ukraine (1). **These inspections have not identified any THB victim.**

On 10 to 17 June 2023, pan-European action days were held focusing on identifying potential victims of trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation. The above-mentioned pan-European action days were simultaneously carried out under the auspices of EUROPOL in 32 countries, and both Police Force officers and labour inspectors took part in the inspections of business entities. In the Slovak Republic, inspections were carried out throughout the territory, and during the inspections, the police officers of the Bureau, together with labour inspectors, inspected 28 business entities, in places where it is assumed that there could be potential victims of labour exploitation. A total of 213 persons were checked during the

¹¹In 2023, officers of the BBFP P PF, in cooperation with labour inspectorates, checked 59 business entities. Within the framework of the above mentioned inspections, which were focused on compliance with the prohibition of illegal employment, control of the stay of foreigners and detection of victims of THB, a total of 367 persons were inspected, of which 197 were citizens of the SR and 170 were foreigners. The inspections detected 1 business entity that violated the provisions of the Act on Illegal Labour and Illegal Employment by illegally employing 5 inspected foreigners. Compared to the previous year, the BBFP P PF recorded a decrease in the number of inspections carried out (93 inspections in 2022), mainly due to a sharp increase in the number of illegal migrants transiting through the territory of the SR, which significantly burdened the BBFP P PF units. In 2023, police officers of the regional headquarters of the Police Force participated, on the basis of a request pursuant to Article 68(6) of Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services and on the amendment to certain acts, in inspections of 18 business entities, during which they checked 70 persons, 69 of whom were citizens of the SR and 1 foreigner from Ukraine. The inspections detected 1 business entity that violated the provisions of the Act on Illegal Labour and Illegal Employment by illegally employing 2 citizens of the Slovak Republic.

inspections, of whom 118 were foreigners coming from various countries, but mainly from Ukraine and Vietnam.

From 8 to 15 May 2023, pan-European action days were held focusing on trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced criminal activities. The pan-European action days were carried out simultaneously under the auspices of EUROPOL, INTERPOL and FRONTEX in 46 countries (26 EU Member States and 20 third countries). In the Slovak Republic, inspections were carried out throughout its territory during the pan-European action days, with Police Force officers and labour inspectors checking 24 businesses and 468 persons (49 of whom were foreigners from various countries, but mainly from Ukraine, Macedonia and Thailand). The inspections were carried out in places where it is assumed that potential victims of trafficking in human beings could be found, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation, for example in erotic and massage parlours, but also in public spaces¹².

3.3 Ministry of Education

In the School Year Guide for 2023/2024, the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (MERDY SR) has published a separate section on Prevention of THB with direct references to the most relevant legislation and strategic documents. Priorities and recommendations included:

- a) Increase awareness and education in schools on the most common manifestations of child trafficking: sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced marriage.
- b) Implement prevention activities with trained professional staff in the facility for counselling and prevention in the field.
- c) Inform pupils about the helplines for victims of THB.
- d) Ensure awareness of the risks of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, as well as the risks of child pornography and child trafficking in an age-appropriate manner.

At the same time, the MERDY SR, through its directly managed organisation, the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology, implemented activities and actions in the area of “Support for methodological and professional activities of pedagogical and professional staff for the prevention and treatment of THB”. Through the directly managed organisation, the National Institute of Education and Youth, educational activities on the prevention of THB were also implemented. Also, the National Institute of Education and Youth is conducting training in teacher education programmes during 2023 and beyond:

- Safety of children and pupils in the digital space (How to prevent manipulation and hoaxes in the online environment), 50 participants, certificate of authorisation to provide innovative education valid until 31 December 2024 link: <https://mpc-edu.sk/sk/edu/program/923>.

¹² Source: Informative report on finding and combating illegal work and illegal employment for the year 2023.

- Safety and health protection of children and pupils in the school environment, 104 participants, certificate of authorisation to provide innovative education valid until 31 December 2024, link: <https://mpc-edu.sk/sk/edu/program/872>,
- Classroom/group climate - trust, safety and acceptance of all without distinction, 121 participants, certificate of authorisation to provide innovative education valid until 31 December 2024, link: <https://mpc-edu.sk/sk/edu/program/858>.

In 2023, the MERDY SR implemented the call “Health and Safety in Schools 2023” and the area of focus is activities to support the improvement of health and safety in schools. The priority areas of support under this project are the protection of the physical and mental health of pupils, the improvement of the psychosocial climate in schools, healthy lifestyles, the elimination of harmful influences on health and the prevention of risky behaviour of pupils. <https://www.minedu.sk/vyzva-zdravie-a-bezpecnost-v-skolach-2023-vyhodnotenie/>.

Last but not least, the MERSY SR has prepared a new curriculum for primary schools, after completing which pupils should be able to use digital technologies and media responsibly and safely for education, communication and to perceive the contribution to innovation, and to be aware of the opportunities and risks they present; cooperate with other people, be in solidarity and prefer consensual solutions in conflict situations; use critical thinking based on knowledge and ethical values; act on the basis of knowledge of social and legal norms of human rights, tolerance of diversity and in accordance with a democratic culture.

The new State Educational Programme also includes educational standards - character (https://www.minedu.sk/data/files/11818_charakter.pdf), which are mainly in the components: Courage, Respect for Others and Justice, specifically related to the measure in question, since character education includes all explicit and implicit educational activities that help pupils develop positive personal strengths, also called virtues.

3.4 Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic collects statistical data from healthcare providers in relation to suspected neglect, ill-treatment, abuse of persons, and those who have been subjected to violence who have been medically treated. These data are recorded in the National Register of Persons Suspected of Being Neglected, Ill-Treated, Abused or Subjected to Violence (hereinafter referred to as the “Register”), which results from Act No. 153/2013 Coll. on the national health information system, as amended. The data from the Register are the basis for obtaining information on the effectiveness of the integrated inter-ministerial system aimed at early detection, investigation and provision of follow-up social care and healthcare for persons with suspected risky behaviour of the environment towards them. Detection of the circumstances that led to inappropriate behaviour of the environment towards registered persons are the basis for subsequent preventive measures and improvement of targeted control mechanisms at the level of the relevant ministries. The National Health Information Centre (hereinafter referred to as the “NCZI”), which is in charge of the Register, provided statistical information on persons under the age of 18 who were suspected of being neglected, ill-treated, abused or subjected to violence for the year 2023. Ex-officio, practitioners reported this

information as suspicions to LEAs or the SLPCSG authority. Of the 17 persons reported, all were minors (5 boys and 12 girls). The minors ranged in age from 1 to 17 years, with 9 children over 10 years of age. All the above data are preliminary as the collection is open (during the data provision as of March 2024) or not closed to reporting units and urgencies have not been implemented. **The Register has long been under-filled by healthcare providers** and at the same time, according to Directive 2011/93/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA (OJ L 335, 17. 12. 2011), **Member States are to ensure that providers report these facts directly to LEAs** and for this reason **the existence of such a register in the operational obligation of the NCZI is not justified**. As part of the last amendment of Act No. 153/2013 Coll. on the national health information system, as amended, which was suspended by the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic at the end of 2022, it was proposed to abolish the Register.

3.5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MFEA SR), through the representative offices of the SR around the world, is actively involved in addressing the issue of THB and cooperates with local organisations, as well as with the MI SR and the SCC, which provides pre-return assistance and assisted voluntary return services. The procedure of representative offices in case of suspicion of THB is included in the training activities of consuls preparing for posting abroad as a separate issue in the framework of pre-departure consular training. In order to improve efforts to actively identify victims of THB on the territory of the SR and abroad through the representative offices of the SR, especially among vulnerable groups, up-to-date methodological materials are provided to the representative offices of the SR. Some selected representative offices of the SR also have police attachés, with whom consular staff cooperate intensively.

3.6 Ministry of Defence

The topic of THB is an integral part of the regular cycle of training of members of the Armed Forces deployed on missions abroad and operating on the territory of the Slovak Republic in the form of prophylactic lectures with the aim of early identification of victims and targeted dissemination of information about the establishment of contact points that provide their services to victims. In 2023, the Military Police carried out a total of 6 preventive activities for the benefit of the Martin Training and Mobilisation Replenishment Base, where the waiting staff were familiarised with the current security situation within the Ministry, including the issue of THB. In addition to the above, on 5 September 2023, the Military Police organised a professional assembly of personnel in charge of crime prevention in the conditions of the Ministry of Defence, where one of the topics of employment was this issue. In 2023, an online training seminar in the field of combating THB was carried out for members of the Armed Forces of the SR and the Ministry of Defence of the SR.

3.7 Addressing the demand side

The establishment of systemic state policies aimed at reducing the demand for goods and services in which victims may have been exploited is still absent in the SR. This area undoubtedly deserves the attention of the state authorities, and cooperation with trade unions and the production, trade and service sectors is also essential. This is a cross-cutting area which, in its complexity, goes beyond the competence of a single ministry. Measures¹³ to address the demand side were incorporated during 2023 in the draft of the sixth strategic document for combating trafficking in human beings for 2024-2028, which was approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic by Resolution No.522/2023. The issue of demand reduction is also being addressed by international organisations, and during 2023 there was a legislative process at EU level on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market¹⁴.

In accordance with Government Resolution of the SR No. 380/2021 on the responsibility of individual state bodies to implement the recommendations of the 3rd round of the evaluation of the SR by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings of the Council of Europe (GRETA) on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against THB, the MI SR and the NLI are obliged to deal with two tasks related to addressing the demand side. These are the tasks of proactively working with the private sector to raise awareness of the important role and responsibility of businesses in preventing THB in supply chains and to strengthen legislative, administrative, educational, social, cultural or other measures to discourage the demand for the services of victims of THB for all forms of abuse, in partnership with civil society, trade unions and the media. A final report on the implementation of these recommendations will be sent to the Council of Europe in mid-2024.

Efforts to reduce demand in the field of THB were implemented in 2023 through controls on the conditions for the performance of employment intermediation for remuneration and the conditions for the performance of activities of temporary employment agencies, which are regulated by the Act on Employment Services. Information on active temporary employment agencies¹⁵, supported employment agencies¹⁶ and employment intermediaries for remuneration¹⁷ is available to the public on the CLSAF website; they have a legal obligation to provide the CLSAF with an annual report on their activities for the previous calendar year by 31 March. The current number of persons involved in detecting risks and proving elements of

¹³ E.g. Measure 7 of the Action Plan of Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2024-2028, which in order to address the demand side of victim services through legislative measures, will prepare legislative measures to reduce the demand for the services of victims of all forms of exploitation in their conscious use, with a deadline for implementation by 2028. At the same time, Measure 17 of the Action Plan of Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2024-2028 speaks of the implementation of non-legislative measures to reduce the demand for victim services and the timeliness of victim identification through targeted educational events for the professional public and the helping professions.

¹⁴ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/vyhľadavanie-navrhov-aktov-eu/-/detail/COO-2145-1000-3-5182827>

¹⁵ https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/sluzby-zamestnanosti/nestatne-sluzby-zamestnanosti/agentury-docasneho-zamestnavania.html?page_id=13034

¹⁶ https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/sluzby-zamestnanosti/nestatne-sluzby-zamestnanosti/agentury-podporovaneho-zamestnavania.html?page_id=13042

¹⁷ https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/sluzby-zamestnanosti/nestatne-sluzby-zamestnanosti/sprostredkovanie-zamestnania-za-uhradu.html?page_id=13025

THB (e.g. coercion to work without an employment contract, documented minimum wage and the rest in the form of “envelope wages”, provision of a commission for preferential hiring, covert or overt threats of consequences for disclosing coercion) is disproportionate to the number of existing covert and overt THB risks.

In the case of third-country nationals - sole traders, the CLSAF proposed a possible solution to the situation, namely the modification of the conditions for granting temporary residence for the purpose of business on the basis of a trade licence, in a more precise definition of dependent work and in the establishment of stricter conditions in business relations. With reference to the recommendation, a legislative change was elaborated in the draft Act on the Residence of Foreigners (LP/2024/26), in which, among other things, the conditions for changes in the purpose of a foreigner’s residence - employment - business should be tightened. The above will be submitted in 2024 to the inter-ministerial comment procedure.

3.8 Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising on THB mainly includes lecturing and training activities for both the professional and the general public, which were carried out by state and non-state actors for different target groups in 2023, and the promotion of the topic through different types of media.

In 2023, the MI SR implemented more than 160 educational preventive activities on the topic of THB. Among the target groups were employees of the Centre for Legal Aid, social services units of self-governing regions, social services institutions, labour inspectors, consular and diplomatic mission staff, hotel staff, members of the PF belonging to the BBFP P PF, and inmates of a re-education facility. In cooperation with the SCC, online training on “THB with an emphasis on forced ‘child’ marriages” was provided for representatives of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities (OPGRC), and one in-person multidisciplinary meeting (06/2023) took place with representatives involved in the fight against THB and illegal employment, with the aim of finding the boundary between THB for forced labour and violations of the Labour Code.

At the same time, two workshops with international participation were held in cooperation with the OSCE. One (02/2023) focused on the recommendations of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating THB on the need to strengthen the prevention of THB in the context of mass migration flows, with the aim of the meeting to contribute to the efforts of OSCE participating States to prevent and address the issue of THB in the context of the humanitarian crisis related to the war in Ukraine. The second workshop (11/2023) focused on unconditional access to services for victims of THB.

On the part of the MO MI SR, the primary focus in 2023 was on the prevention of THB among asylum seekers, as well as education on THB. At the turn of 2023/2024, all decision-makers are trained for the “THB” module of the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA), which is specialised in the issue of THB among applicants for international protection. Completion of the module and retraining of all decision-makers is planned for March 2024.

Preventive activities are carried out by police officers on duty in the field of prevention within the competence of the Prevention Unit of the Communication and Prevention Department of the P PF, the units of communication and prevention of regional headquarters of the PF and prevention groups of internal units of district headquarters of the PF (hereinafter referred to as “prevention officers”). With a focus on the issue of THB, the prevention officers also carried out preventive activities in 2023, namely 3 lectures and discussions, which were addressed to 58 pupils from grades 1 to 7 of primary schools and 83 prevention activities in the form of lectures and discussions for 2,701 primary school pupils in grades 8 to 9. 156 prevention activities were carried out by prevention officers for 4,241 secondary school students and a further 11 prevention activities for “other participants”, reaching 221 persons.

In 2023, educational activities on the issue of THB were carried out by the NUFIM staff:

- training of officers of the Directorates of Border and Foreign Police (DBFP) Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Sobrance (46 officers of the PF trained in total),
- training for cadets at the Academy of the PF Bratislava (92 students),
- online training for representatives of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities on “THB with emphasis on forced marriages” (21 June 2023),
- training for staff of the MO MI SR (6 employees),
- lectures on the issue of THB at the Grammar School Humenné and the Secondary Medical School in Prešov (158 students),
- training for officers from different countries within the framework of MEPA on the issue of THB and smuggling, who attended a German course at the Police Secondary Vocational School in Holešov (22 members of the PF).

In 2023, the DBFP Sobrance conducted three trainings focused on THB, where two trainings were carried out in cooperation with international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and one on the basis of the order of the Director of the DBFP Sobrance on further training of police officers of the DBFP Sobrance:

- training in cooperation with IOM with a focus on obtaining basic information on THB and its mechanism for members of the PF DBFP Sobrance (83 members of the PF) within the scope of the DBFP Sobrance;
- training took place in the month of September 2023, based on the Order of the Director of DBFP Sobrance at monthly meetings, where a total of 290 PF officers were trained;
- training in cooperation with the UNHCR (20 PF officers).

Through the Information Offices, 142 educational preventive activities were implemented on the topic “Prevention of THB”, which in 2023 were attended by 3,082 participants (117 participants were from the ranks of the departees from Ukraine). Participants were mainly people from vulnerable groups - children and youth (126 activities for a total of 2,782 participants, of which 48 were departees from Ukraine), people of working age (7 activities for 131 participants, of which 38 were departees from Ukraine). Participants were from the clients of asylum centres, community centres, Slovak Red Cross and vulnerable groups

(associated by non-governmental organisations) and seniors (total of 4 activities for 78 participants, 31 of the participants were departees from Ukraine). Other activities were addressed to first contact persons, mainly from the ranks of pedagogical and professional staff of schools and educational institutions (5 activities for 91 participants).

In 2023, the IOM developed a website, “Safe Travel & Work Abroad¹⁸”, focused on safe work and prevention of THB, available in Slovak, English and Ukrainian, as well as an update of the SAFE app¹⁹ available in 7 languages, which focuses on the prevention of THB, and specifically targets youth. The IOM has also prepared and distributed information materials, brochures and leaflets on the prevention of THB. In 2023, the IOM trained 430 representatives of state institutions and non-governmental organisations on THB during 30 training sessions, including representatives of the labour inspectorate, border and foreign police, fire corps, and organisations that are/were involved in assisting people fleeing war in Ukraine. A further total of 147 institutional representatives participated in 5 awareness-raising events on this topic. In addition to training for institutions, the IOM organised a total of 39 information events for a total of 823 people from Ukraine in 2023. These events covered the topics of safe employment, recognition of potentially risky job offers and prevention of THB.

In 2023, the SCC implemented 14 trainings from the subsidy of the Ministry of Justice of the SR for the promotion of human rights and freedoms for social workers, field social workers, social work assistants and volunteers of non-governmental organisations (VAGUS, DePaul, Proti prúdu (Against the Current), Malteser Aid Slovakia, Smile as a Gift, Slovak Red Cross, Family Help Centre in Trnava) and regional charities (Spiš Catholic Charity, Trnava Archdiocesan Charity, Bratislava Archdiocesan Charity). At the same time, the SCC implemented in 2023 preventive discussions at schools and grammar schools, for clients of the Diagnostic Centre in Záhorská Bystrica, for the disabled clients of GAUDEAMUS - a community rehabilitation facility in Bratislava and for clients with mental illnesses of the Rehabilitation Centre SAMÁRIA of the Bratislava Archdiocesan Charity with a total number of 293 participants.

3.8.1 Campaigns

Raising the awareness of the general public by the MI SR on the issue of THB was ongoing throughout the year 2023. Information on the topic included independent communication with media representatives in an effort to raise the visibility of the issue, updating news on the website of the MI SR (www.minv.sk), crime prevention website (<https://prevenciakriminality.sk>), Facebook Fight against Human Trafficking and also Facebook Crime Prevention, Instagram crime_prevention or YouTube channel Crime Prevention, and publishing press releases through the Press Department of the Office of the

¹⁸IOM – Bezpečné cestovanie a práca v zahraničí

¹⁹<https://safe.iom.sk/#/landing>

Minister of Interior of the SR in the total number of 4. The CPD also reported on THB issues through the national media in a total of 12 outputs.

With a link to 18 October, which is the European Anti-Trafficking Day, the MI SR launched a press conference in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (hereinafter referred to as the “UNODC”) to announce the involvement of the SR in the BLUE HEART campaign, which was created by the UNODC and made available to UN member states for sharing. Among the participants of the press conference was also a representative of the SCC, as a provider of services for victims of THB. The press conference was followed by the illumination of the Grassalkovich (Presidential) Palace during the evening hours, as a landmark building within the SR, in the colours of the campaign. The leitmotif of the campaign was to raise awareness and sensitise the general public to THB so that every victim is visible, so that the public pays attention to this phenomenon and is more sensitive to indicators that may signal the existence of THB (campaign idea: “Be attentive, every THB victim needs help”). The MI SR in cooperation with the UNODC created visuals for social networks and print formats with a figure of a person of any age, offering his/her heart for the victims of THB with the slogan “My heart for the victims of THB”. The campaign was also supported by commercial cinema network across Slovakia. During the month of October, over 35 posts were published on the “Fight against THB” Facebook page with a reach of 4,547 and a view count of 5,572. The campaign was also presented on the main website of the MI SR (www.minv.sk) and on the social networks of the MI SR, as well as on the social networks of the UNODC and the main website <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/news/2023/October/slovakia-joins-blue-heart-campaign-against-human-trafficking.html>.

At the same time, on the occasion of the EU Anti-Trafficking Day, the MI SR focused on the topic of THB in the online space, where during 3 consecutive days a total of 16 posts were shared on the social networks Instagram and Facebook of crime prevention, along with 31 real stories of victims of THB, with a reach of 21,839 users of both social networks and a total number of interactions of 2,365.

As part of raising awareness about THB, in cooperation with the Košice District Office, an exhibition of the MI SR entitled “Do you know what your child is doing now?” was installed. focused on alcohol and drug addiction, which are risk factors that promote vulnerability to THB. A permanent installation of artworks on this theme is open to the public from October 2023 in the gallery of the Košice District Office.

Spokespersons of the Presidium of the PF prepared answers to questions from journalists and editors related to the issue of THB, which were translated into a number of media outputs. As part of the media coverage of the issue, 23 press releases were published, 19 (interviews, discussions, reports), 47 posts were published on the Facebook page of the Police of the Slovak Republic and 23 (articles, posts, information in print media) were published.

In the month of March 2023, promotional materials were provided from the IC in the number of: 70 flying saucers, 100 lanyards for keys, 16 posters, 100 leaflets "Don't turn a blind eye to this", 482 pieces of brochures “Don’t close your eyes to it!”, 119 comics “Nobody is for

sale” and 44 pieces of multi-language leaflets, which were subsequently distributed to the units of communication and prevention of regional headquarters of the PF.

In the months of May - June 2023, the Information Offices carried out open days and the topic of the open day in the Nitra region was entitled “A thousand reasons to help victims of THB”. The campaign was organised with the aim of raising public awareness of the assistance available from the Information Offices and the field offices.

In April and May 2023, a social media campaign on the information material²⁰ was run on the websites of the MI SR, Crime Prevention and the Government Plenipotentiary of the SR for Roma Communities. The information material was distributed in the number of 30 pieces in each language to each of the 9 regional offices of the OGPRC (following the employee training on 21 June 2023). The information material is published on the website of the MI SR: <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=nutene-sobase-stale-nie-su-u-nas-minulostou-obetami-su-aj-12-rocne-deti>

3.8.2 Projects

In 2019, the NUFIM submitted an application for a grant for the project “Fight against THB and application of prevention tools”. Based on the above, an instruction was issued on 16 August 2019 by the Service Office of the MI SR to provide the BBFP P PF with a grant for the implementation of the national project under the Internal Security Fund and subsequently new instructions were issued in 2021 and 2022 to extend the project up to 2023. The total amount allocated to the project was **EUR 287,580. The funds were used to build two special interrogation rooms** at the NUFIM units in Bratislava and Humenné, as well as to purchase equipment for operational activities (photo-traps, mini-cameras for cars, cameras, binoculars for covert observation, thermal imaging, laptops), for language courses for NUFIM officers and for the implementation of two working-coordination meetings with partner police forces in Serbia and Germany. The project was implemented from 2019; its objective is to improve the efficiency of fight against organised, in particular cross-border criminal activities such as THB, and also to enforce and promote cooperation between states in the interest of fight against THB. The project was completed in December 2023.

Due to the change of the security situation in Europe caused by the war conflict in Ukraine, which led to a more massive presence of a group of the population of another state on the territory of the SR, during 2022 the MI SR applied for an amendment of the decision on the provision of a non-repayable financial contribution, the application was approved, on the basis of which selected activities of the national project²¹ were extended with the end of

²⁰In 2022, the OGPRC actively cooperated with the MI SR (including the NUFIM) in the preparation of a bilingual information material (leaflet) focusing on forced marriages, the victims of which are primarily minors. Within the framework of this activity, cooperation with the National Coordination Centre for Addressing Violence against Children also took place. The OGPRC assisted in the translation of the information material into the Roma language.

²¹Note: a national project from the European Social Fund under the Operational Programme Effective Public Administration entitled “Improving access to services for victims of crime and creating contact points for victims”.

implementation in December 2023. As part of the extension of the national project, from August 2022, due to the war conflict in Ukraine, the activities of the Information Offices are also specialised for victims from other countries on the territory of the SR, including victims of THB. For the implementation period, the budget of the national project for the period August 2022 to December 2023 was increased by EUR 1,308,800.92.

3.9 International co-operation

In 2023, representatives of various institutions very intensively strengthened international cooperation to meet the goals and priorities in the provision of assistance to victims, by participating in international forums and working groups, especially through communication platforms and online tools. The National Rapporteur cooperates on a regular basis with the National Rapporteurs of other EU Member States on the basis of a formalised electronic platform set up by the European Commission and two National Rapporteurs' meetings were held in 2023. The IC acts as a contact point for communication and cooperation with the Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against THB (adopted in 2005 in Warsaw) and the monitoring mechanism of the Group of Experts on Action against THB (GRETA). At the same time, the IC is also in close contact with the OSCE as a contact point and two workshops were conducted in 2023 in cooperation with the OSCE. One focused on the recommendations of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating THB on the need to strengthen the prevention of THB in the context of mass migration flows, with the aim of the meeting to contribute to the efforts of OSCE participating States to prevent and address the issue of THB in the context of the humanitarian crisis related to the war in Ukraine. The second workshop focused on unconditional access to services for victims of THB.

Representatives of the CPD also regularly participated in the working meetings of the Working Group on Combating THB, organised by the IOM in cooperation with UNHCR within the framework of the Slovak Refugee Coordination Forum (TF TiP). The aim of the Working Group was to improve the response to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, including the exchange of information, and to improve communication on THB trends and data with representatives of the government, state institutions, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders. During the reporting period, representatives of the CPD also participated in meetings of the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) where the theme of the Spanish Presidency was "Prevention of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation and other kinds of exploitation". Every year, the EUCPN launches an international competition - the European Crime Prevention Award and Best Practice Conference (ECPA and BPC). The international round is always preceded by a national round, which is open to anyone who is carrying out or has carried out a project on a given theme. Participation in the ECPA was open to any project, initiative or package of measures, but aimed at reducing crime and the fear of crime within the defined theme. The national round of the ECPA was won by SCC with the project "Don't get enslaved", which was also presented at the international competition.

NUFIM officers participate annually in specialised trainings, conferences and workshops on THB issues organised by police organisations such as CEPOL, ILEA, through which they increase their specialisation and which enable them to exchange experiences and practices with LEAs as well as with experts and specialists in the field of combating THB from other Member States and third countries. At the same time, NUFIM officers have also participated in workshops and conferences organised by the OSCE and IOM on THB issues. In the context of operational vetting in THB cases, cooperation between NUFIM officers and in particular German, Czech, Austrian and British police forces was ongoing in 2023. The institution of legal assistance in the framework of legal contacts with foreign countries is frequently used in THB cases under investigation, and in 2023 NUFIM investigators sent a total of 8 requests for legal assistance in connection with THB crimes abroad to a total of 4 EU States, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. In 2023, no new joint investigation team agreement was signed by the NUFIM in THB cases. However, cooperation continued under the already completed joint investigation team with the United Kingdom called Tenycap. The agreement was still terminated in 2021, but the ongoing judicial proceedings in the United Kingdom also required the assistance and participation of the NUFIM, in particular in providing witnesses and victims for the judicial proceedings in question. Two meetings were also held in 2023 with German police partners at EUROPOL's headquarters in The Hague in 2023, with the aim of establishing joint investigation teams in two cases of THB in which the exploitation of Slovak citizens took place in the territory of Germany. The two meetings were held in February 2023 and concluded with an agreement on preparing a draft agreement on the establishment of a joint investigation team. After intensive consultations both internally within the Public Prosecutor's Office and with the Ministry of Justice in Germany, the relevant institutions came to the conclusion that participation in joint investigation teams would not be possible. The German side plans to proceed with the criminal case by issuing a European Investigation Order. In the course of 2023, both of the above-mentioned THB investigated cases were transferred to Germany for prosecution.

In 2023, the MO MI SR participated in the activities of the expert groups dealing with vulnerable persons, which include victims of THB, established by the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA).

The MLSAF SR is actively fulfilling its obligations under international treaties falling under the material competence of the Ministry in selected international fora also related to the area of THB, in the context of performance of social and legal protection of children and social guardianship.

Employees of the MFEA SR regularly participated in cooperation at bilateral and multilateral level on the issue of respect for fundamental human rights, with an emphasis on the issue of THB. The protection of human rights is one of the main priorities of the MFEA SR in its relations with all partners. Representatives of the MFEA SR, through their active participation in international forums and working groups, contributed significantly to strengthening international cooperation in order to meet the objectives and priorities in providing assistance to victims of THB.

In 2023, the SR participated in extensive pan-European action days (hereinafter referred to as the “ADs”) conducted by LEAs focusing on organised criminal groups that traffic in human beings. The ADs were carried out under the auspices of EUROPOL in 32 countries and focused on the detection of THB crime and its victims.

In 2023, the most intensive international cooperation took place, mainly through EUROPOL National Units and Slovak police attachés in Germany and the United Kingdom. In 2023, cooperation also continued in the working group set up by EUROPOL within the EMPACT THB entitled “South-East Partnerships with a focus on Ukraine”, with EUROPOL representatives and representatives from countries such as Austria (activity leader), Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Slovakia participating in this activity. The bi-monthly meetings were conducted online and provided a useful platform for the exchange of information on suspected cases of THB and recommendations on best practices to help in the early identification of potential victims.

3.10 Helplines

For a more comprehensive coverage, in addition to the evaluation of the National Line, we also provide information on other helplines that can be contacted by anyone dealing with a current problem potentially related to THB.

3.10.1 National helpline of Assistance to Trafficking in Human Beings Victims 0800 800 818

The operation of the National Line, which has existed since 2008, is also an important tool for the prevention and functioning of NRM. For potential victims, the National Line may be the most convenient anonymous way to talk to professionals about their problem, to think about their situation and, if they wish, to discuss their options for help. The National Line is operated by experts in THB from NGOs under a contract with the MI SR for the provision of services for victims. These services are financially covered by the budget of the MI SR. The operation of the National Line is technically supported by Slovak Telekom, a.s. The National line is a toll-free telephone line within the Slovak Republic, which operates on weekdays for twelve hours, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Outside working hours, there is continuous monitoring of incoming calls via an answering machine. Any call recorded on the National Line is returned by the provider’s staff. The National Line is also available from abroad, if the local operator allows it, as +421 800 800 818. However, the call is charged at the tariff of the relevant telecommunications operator. The caller can leave his/her telephone number or query outside the operation of the National Line and the operators of the telephone line will contact him/her back.

The main task of the National Line is to provide assistance and information primarily to persons who may have been placed in a situation of risk in relation to THB. In identifying and assisting in such cases, the National Line mediates contact with the organisations providing assistance to victims. The services of the National Line are further aimed at preventing and

eliminating the risks associated with working abroad, by alerting callers to the dangers of THB. Thus, the National Line also serves as a tool to prevent the risks associated with labour migration and unprotected work of vulnerable population groups. Promotion of the National Line is carried out at all prevention and training activities of the MI SR, as well as activities of cooperating entities, including printed material and preventive items.

During 2023, a total of 578 calls were made to the National Line, which represents an increase compared to 2022. In the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023, a suspected potential victim was reported, which was not confirmed.

3.10.2 Human Trafficking and Safe Travel Helpline 0907 787 374

The IOM continued to operate its information line on THB and safe travel in 2023. Its staff responded to telephone and e-mail inquiries about THB, to requests for employment agency background checks, and to requests for information on THB prevention training. The information line's communication languages are Slovak, English, and Ukrainian, during the hours of operation from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

3.10.3 National Helpline for Women Experiencing Violence 0800 212 212

The National Line for Women Experiencing Violence 0800 212 212 is a toll-free 24-hour helpline for women experiencing or at risk of violence, as well as anyone who needs advice on how to help victims of domestic violence. The services of the helpline have been expanded to include the possibility to communicate with counsellors via e-mail. The introduction of this helpline significantly increased the availability of information on violence against women, crisis intervention and the effectiveness of redistribution of women at risk to social service providers and other assistance. The expert counsellors on the helpline provide adequate and timely information to the calling women experiencing or at risk of violence about the assistance system as well as about the possibility of professional crisis intervention services.

3.10.4 Toll-Free Helpline of the Centre for Labour, Social Affairs and Family 0800 191 222

Suspected violations of children's rights and threats to their all-round development (including suspected THB) and cases of child neglect can also be reported to the toll-free line of the CLSAF 0800 191 222, either anonymously or with contact details, where the reporting person can be informed about how his/her complaint will be dealt with if he/she so requests. The helpline is also used to report suspected abuses of the social system, such as illegal work (undeclared work).

3.10.5 Child Safety Helpline 116 111

Any child who needs help or wants to help someone can call the Child Safety Line, which operates 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays. It is free, anonymous and professionally guaranteed. Its main aim is to enable a child or young person to get in touch

immediately by telephone if they need communication or specific help in a crisis or stressful situation. Adults - parents, relatives, teachers, health professionals and all those who are not indifferent to the fate of children - can also contact the Child Safety Line.

3.10.6 More than a NI(c)k Helpline

The line is set up as a separate unit of the CLSAF. It provides crisis intervention, counselling and prevention online in a remote form for children at risk of violence. The line provides assistance free of charge by chat and email 24/7 via the website www.viacakonick.sk and mobile app. Its content and visual design is tailored to the target group.

3.10.7 Child Helpline 0907 401 749

The helpline is operated by the civic association Society of Friends of Children - Li(e)nka, whose basic mission is to help children at risk of violence or other forms of social pathology. Children and adults can contact the helpline by phone on weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., by email, via chat or by writing their problem to the peer counselling centre. More detailed information on the website www.linkadeti.sk.

3.10.8 Helpline Nezábudka 0800 800 566

The toll-free anonymous 24-hour hotline is operated by the civic association Mental Health League of the Slovak Republic (Liga za duševné zdravie SR, o.z.) and can be contacted by anyone who finds themselves in a psychologically challenging life situation, experiences a crisis or long-term pressure. In addition to the phone line, an email counselling service is also available. Qualified counselling is provided by trained professionals in psychology, psychiatry and social work. More information on the website www.linkanezabudka.sk.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Action Plan - Action Plan of Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2019 – 2023
EMN – European Migration Network
EUROPOL - European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
Expert Group – Expert Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
IC – Information Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and for Crime Prevention of the Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic
INTERPOL - International Criminal Police Organisation
IOM – International Organisation for Migration Slovakia
UM – Unaccompanied Minor
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
National Coordinator – National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
National Line – National Line of Assistance to Trafficking in Human Beings Victims
National Programme – National Programme of Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2019 - 2023
NRM – National Referral Mechanism
National Rapporteur - National Rapporteur or Equivalent Mechanisms
Assistance Programme – Programme of Support and Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings
PF – Police Force
NUFIM – National Unit of Fight against Illegal Migration of the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the Police Force
Victim – Victim of Trafficking in Human Beings
OSCE - Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
LEA – Law Enforcement Authority
THB – Trafficking in Human Beings
UN - United Nations
Register - National Register of Persons Suspected of Being Neglected, Ill-Treated, Abused or Subjected to Violence
SCC - Slovak Catholic Charity
United Kingdom - United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
SR – Slovak Republic
UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
BBFP P PF – Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the Police Force
UNHCR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees