

SOUTH AFRICA ANNUAL HOTLINE REPORT 2024

ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

The National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH), operating in South Africa since 2016, is a vital and confidential service aimed at combating human trafficking. Run by A21, it offers 24/7 support via hotline number 0800 222 777, enabling individuals to report suspected trafficking cases or seek help. The hotline plays a critical role in connecting victims with necessary services and assisting law enforcement efforts in combating trafficking.

Call specialists are highly trained to handle crisis calls with care and confidentiality. They provide support in multiple languages, including English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Sotho, and Zulu, and have access to a tele-interpretation service that covers a wide array of languages. This ensures that all individuals—whether victims, community members, or frontline professionals receive the assistance they need, regardless of their language preference.

In addition to crisis response, the hotline offers a job vetting service, where specialists verify the legitimacy of job offers to prevent individuals from falling victim to fraudulent recruitment schemes tied to trafficking. The hotline then provides valuable feedback and safety guidelines to those seeking employment, ensuring they can make informed, secure decisions.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN 2024

In 2024, the NHTH noted a chilling trend involving South Africans being lured into forced labour compounds in Southeast Asia. Traffickers promise lucrative telesales, data capturing, or call centre jobs in Thailand, but the hiring process is far from legitimate. Instead, recruiters conduct informal interviews through WhatsApp video calls and text messages, creating a false sense of security.

To further entice victims, traffickers cover the costs of passports, visas, flights, and even “accommodation.” Once victims arrive in Thailand, however, events soon take a more sombre direction. Victims are smuggled across the Moei River into Myanmar, where they are taken to compounds and stripped of their freedom.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The NHTH received a total of **3121 CONTACTS**
- **55.2%** of contacts were specifically related to Human Trafficking
- The NHTH identified and/or assisted **55 VICTIMS** of Trafficking, **27** of whom entered the A21 Aftercare Program
- The majority of victims reported to Hotline were **FEMALE (94.5%)**
- The majority of victims reported to Hotline were **SOUTH AFRICAN** nationals
- **45.4%** of all contacts originated from the **GENERAL PUBLIC**
- **78 REPORTS** were sent to Law Enforcement
- The top three cities where trafficking was reported in South Africa were **CAPE TOWN, JOHANNESBURG & DURBAN**
- **56.4%** of trafficking victims identified were recruited through **FALSE JOB OPPORTUNITIES**
- There was a **200%** increase in the identification of victims involved in scamming centres

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

‘Reports’ only include contacts to the South African National Human Trafficking Hotline relating to a potential human trafficking situation.

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

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

Once inside, traffickers confiscate passports and restrict communication, isolating victims from the outside world. Rather than working in a legitimate call centre, victims are coerced into running online scams, deceiving people into sending money to the perpetrators. Traffickers impose daily financial targets, punishing those who fail to meet them with starvation, physical beatings, and brutal torture. Those in the camps endure unimaginable suffering in these camps, trapped in harsh conditions where escape seems impossible without outside intervention. A21 in both Thailand and South Africa worked tirelessly to locate, assist and repatriate survivors in cooperation with other NGOs and government stakeholders. This laid a strong working relationship for A21 to assist multiple victims, including South Africans, identified in government-led identification efforts in early 2025.

“We appreciate your dedication to teamwork, both as an A21 Team and in collaboration with us as the Straatwerk Team as well as your readiness to receive any call at any time with friendliness and eagerness. We appreciate your willingness to come alongside us in figuring out the best next steps, both before and after the call. Your expertise in the field of Human Trafficking, in both guiding women on their exit journey and our team, is greatly appreciated. We appreciate your commitment to keep going despite the many challenges and opposition faced along the way.”

—Partner, Straatwerk Team

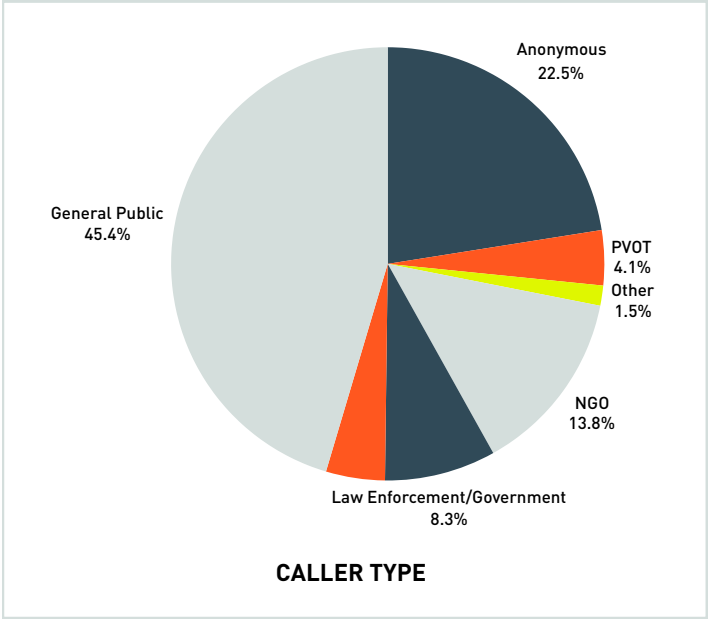
OVERVIEW OF DATA¹

In 2024, the NHTH received 3,121 contacts through its multiple communication channels, including email, phone, text messages, the hotline website (www.0800222777.org.za), and a newly launched chatbot. Collectively, the hotline averaged receiving 260 contacts per month. The hotline received 457 new unique contacts, marking a 24% increase from the 367 recorded in 2023. This rise demonstrates an increased trust and confidence in the Hotline among the populace to report suspected human trafficking cases. The rise in unique contacts is likely attributed to A21 South Africa’s enhanced awareness initiatives, including training for stakeholders and frontline professionals, alongside the launch of the chatbot. High-profile events like the Cape Epic, which drew large audiences and media coverage, as well as multiple interviews on mainstream media, also played a role in the surge in reports.

CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

The NHTH received a diverse range of reports, with the general public making up the largest caller group, contributing to 45.4% of all reports. This reflects the vital role of community awareness and underscores the need for a continued increase in education on human trafficking across different platforms and locations. The hotline serves as a crucial link connecting community members with law enforcement and frontline professionals, offering both support and guidance. Callers can opt to remain anonymous, and many reach out for advice before making a formal report, highlighting both the trust built over time and the hotline’s role in not only addressing trafficking cases but also in prevention.

Law enforcement and government officials represented 8.3% of calls in 2024, showing a 12.16% increase from the previous year. Frontline professionals made up 4.4% of calls, reflecting a significant 57.14% rise. These increases can be attributed to continued trusted partnerships, strengthened further by multiple professional training sessions conducted throughout the year.



VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

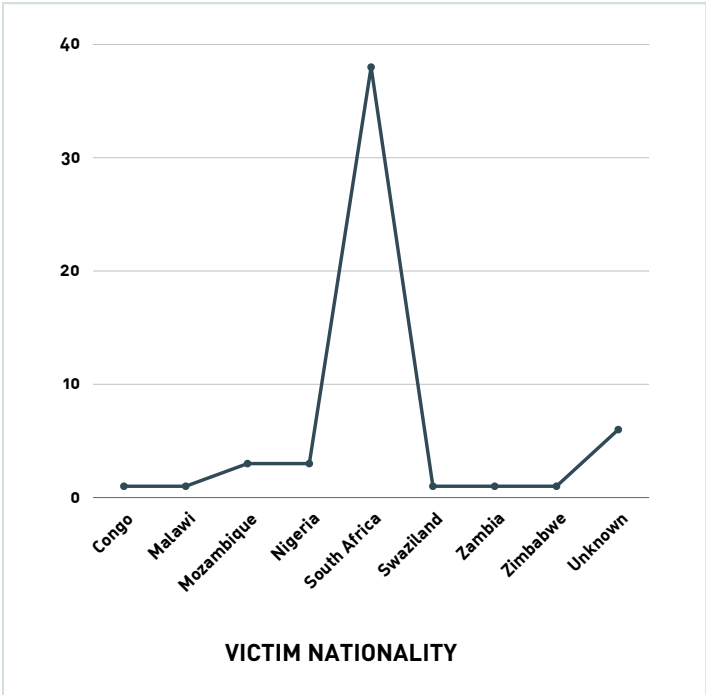
The NHTH identified and/or assisted 55 trafficking victims, representing a 30.9% increase from the previous year. Once a victim is identified through screening, the hotline promptly alerts the relevant authorities and connects them with available services. In the Western Cape, A21 Aftercare Services and other NGOs and government agencies provide vital aftercare support. In 2024, A21 played a crucial role, assisting 27 survivors by offering essential services and resources to support their restoration journey.

AGE AND GENDER

In South Africa, human trafficking affects people from all walks of life, with adults making up the majority of victims reported this year; minors accounted for just 3.6% of cases. This lower percentage may be due to differences in how cases involving children are reported, as such cases are often reported and categorised as child abuse rather than trafficking. Additionally, minors face challenges in seeking help, as they may be driven by fear or manipulation by traffickers, who may also be perceived as trusted people in their immediate circles. Women were the largest group reported, comprising 94.5% of victims. This statistic highlights the high prevalence of sexual exploitation, as traffickers frequently target women and girls using deception or force. While men are also trafficked, it is typically for forced labour or criminal activities. However, fewer of these cases were reported to the hotline in 2024, likely contributing to the smaller percentage of male victims in the data. This limited reporting of labour trafficking highlights the need for increased awareness and training within labour sectors across the country.

VICTIM NATIONALITY

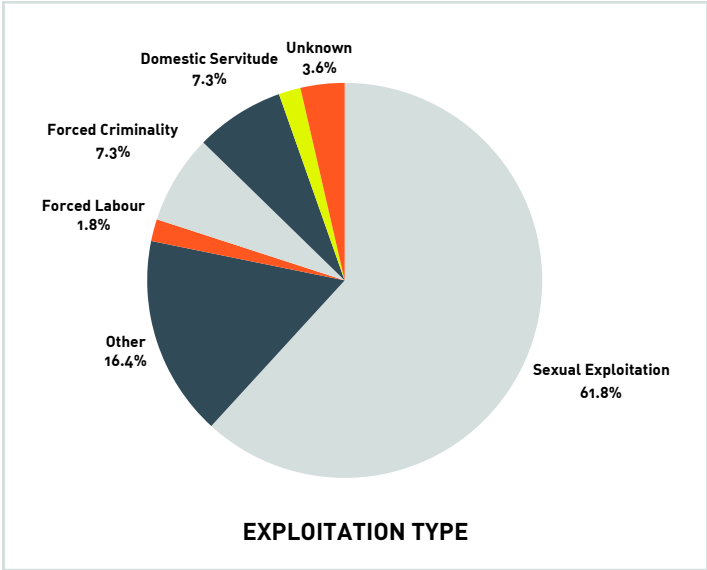
South Africans made up 69.1% of identified trafficking victims, while 20% came from other African countries, including Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This shift highlights a growing trend of trafficking involving victims from neighbouring nations, driven by economic instability, limited job opportunities, and vulnerability to exploitation. Traffickers often target individuals with promises of better prospects in South Africa, only for them to end up trapped in exploitation.



EXPLOITATION TYPE

Following a four-year trend, sexual exploitation remains the most commonly reported form of trafficking as identified by the hotline. Of the 55 victims identified in 2024, 34 were sexually exploited, accounting for 61.8% of cases—an increase from 52% in 2023. Brooklyn, a neighbourhood in Western Cape, continues to be a significant hotspot for such exploitation.

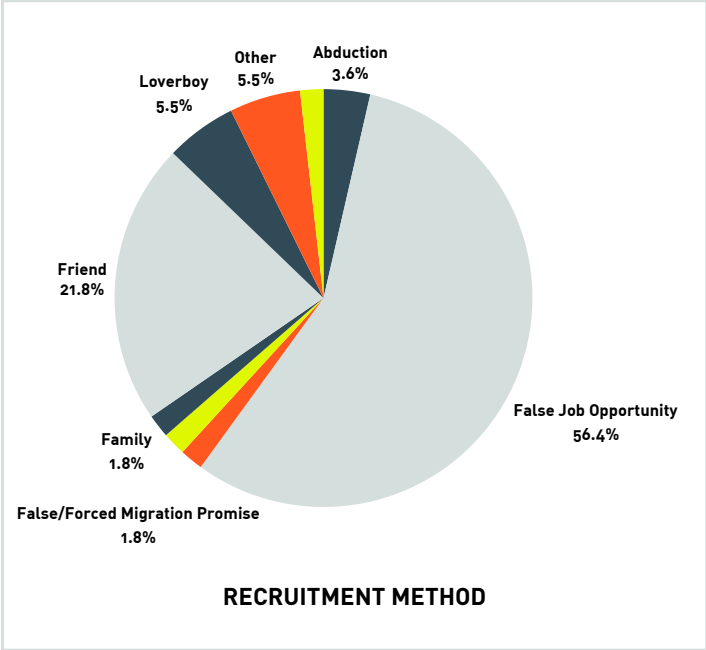
Domestic servitude accounted for 7.3% of cases in 2024. Victims of domestic servitude are often coerced or misled into performing household duties under forced labour conditions. They are promised employment as domestic helpers but are instead confined to abusive, isolating environments where they work long hours without rest or pay. These victims are frequently cut off from the outside world, with their personal documents confiscated and subjected to both physical and emotional abuse. Many victims feel too fearful or isolated to escape, often dreading retaliation or deportation. It’s important to note that identifying domestic servitude presents unique challenges, as exploitation is behind the closed doors of a private residence. While sexual exploitation remains the most widespread reported form of trafficking, the issue of domestic servitude requires ongoing vigilance and intervention.



RECRUITMENT METHODS

Reports submitted to the hotline in 2024 reveal that false job opportunities remain the most prevalent recruitment method (56.4%), showing the continued use of deceptive job offers to lure individuals into exploitative situations. The second most common method, accounting for 21.8%, involves traffickers exploiting trusted relationships—often through friends—to facilitate recruitment into exploitation.

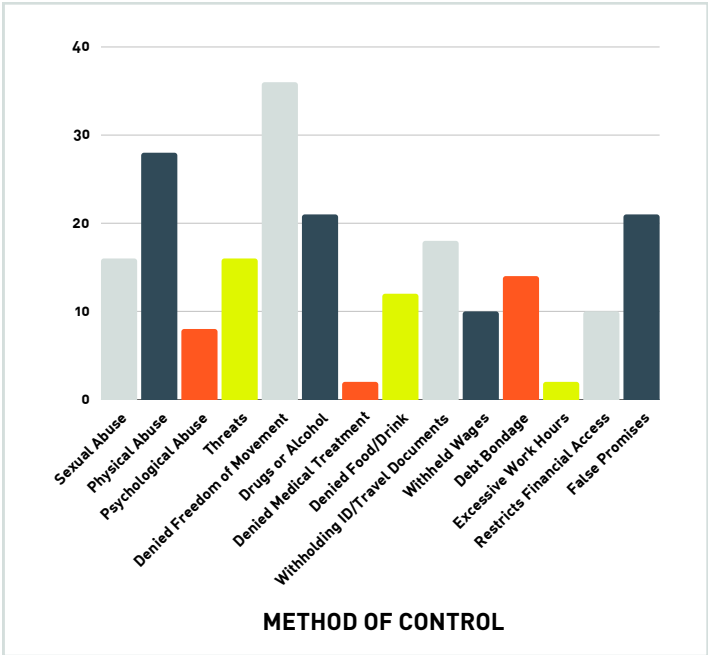
The Loverboy method accounts for 5.5% of cases and abduction for 3.6%. The Loverboy method relies on emotional manipulation through romantic relationships, while abduction involves the use of physical force to capture victims. Despite their differences, both methods highlight traffickers' varied tactics in exerting control. False/forced marriage and false/forced migration promises, each accounting for 1.8%, are less frequently reported but still contribute to the persistent risk of trafficking.



METHODS OF CONTROL

In 2024, traffickers used various methods to maintain control over victims making escape nearly impossible for many. According to NHTH data, the most common method utilised was the denial of freedom of movement, which was seen in 69.1% of cases. This shows how victims are isolated from accessing help. Physical abuse (52.7%) and sexual abuse (32.7%) were also significant methods, highlighting the extreme violence and manipulation victims often endure.

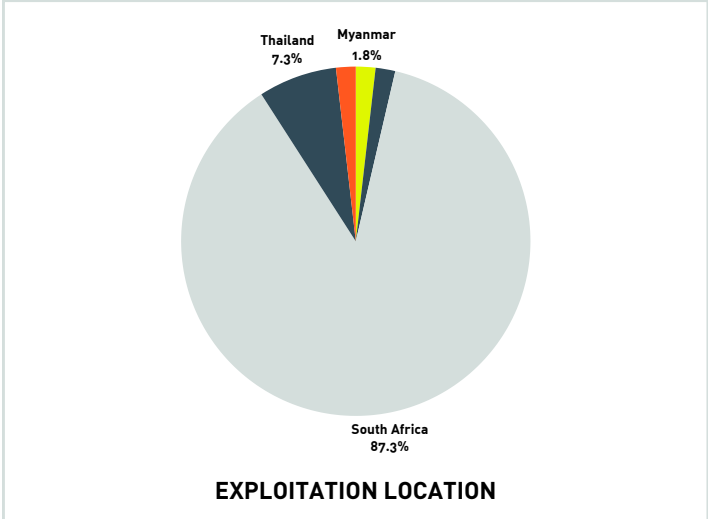
Other tactics included psychological abuse, threats, and the use of drugs or alcohol. Traffickers also withheld ID/travel documents in over 30% of cases and made false promises to maintain control in over 40% of cases. Debt bondage and withheld wages further trapped victims in financial dependency. These methods demonstrate that escaping exploitation isn't easy and underscore the ongoing need for efforts to break the cycle of victimisation.



EXPLOITATION LOCATION

The NHTH tracked trafficking cases across several countries with the overwhelming source and destination of reported cases being South Africa. Of the 55 victims identified, exploitation occurred within South Africa in 87.3% of cases, highlighting that the majority of trafficking incidents reported to the hotline take place within the country.

Exploitation was also reported in other countries, with Myanmar and Thailand accounting for 9.1% of cases, highlighting the troubling trend of South Africans being trafficked abroad into forced criminality in Southeast Asia. Additional countries of reported exploitation included Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates, further illustrating the global reach of trafficking networks. While South Africa continues to be the hotspot for trafficking, the rise in international cases, particularly scamming centres in Myanmar and Thailand, emphasises the urgent need for strengthened global cooperation to combat trafficking and provide cross-border victim support.



CASE STUDY: HIGHLIGHT

In 2024, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) received a call from a local clinic where a doctor suspected that a patient was a victim of sex trafficking. The victim had sustained serious injuries inflicted by a trafficker and required immediate medical attention. After a telephonic screening, the hotline confirmed that the patient was indeed a victim of sex trafficking.

The screening revealed that the victim had been befriended by another woman, a relationship orchestrated by the trafficker. This woman gained the victim's trust, and they spent time together, socialising. One evening, after a night out, the victim woke up in an unfamiliar house, finding herself with her "friend" and a Nigerian man. The man informed her that a job opportunity awaited them in Cape Town. Upon arriving in the city, the victim realised she had been trafficked.

In Cape Town, the victim was forced to use drugs and was required to hand over all the money she earned to her trafficker, creating financial dependency. During a work-related incident, when the victim refused to engage with certain clients, she was assaulted. This led to her being taken to the clinic, where the attending doctor recognised the signs of trafficking and immediately reported the case to the hotline.

At the clinic, the doctor noticed three other women in the waiting room, likely part of the trafficking ring, ensuring the victim did not attempt to escape. The trafficker was reportedly parked outside the clinic, keeping watch.

Understanding the urgency, the hotline quickly coordinated with partners and stakeholders to arrange transportation and support for the victim. She was safely transferred from the clinic to a hospital for further care. After receiving medical treatment and being assessed by healthcare professionals, the victim was moved to a temporary shelter for safety.

DPCI officers visited the shelter, conducted a formal assessment, and took the victim's statement to initiate an investigation into the trafficking case. The hotline then placed the victim in a safe house and enrolled her in an aftercare program, ensuring she received long-term support. This swift and coordinated response ensured the victim received the care, protection, and support needed, highlighting the crucial role of collaboration in addressing human trafficking effectively.

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



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

ENDNOTES

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

2 The Absa Cape Epic or the Cape Epic, is an annual mountain bike stage race held in the Western Cape, South Africa covering more than 680 kilometers with 16,900m of climbing. It attracts mountain bikers from all over the world with large scale exposure at the internationally televised event.