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THIRD REPORT OF THE PROTECTOR OF CITIZENS - NATIONAL RAPPORTEUR ON TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS FOR 2025

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1. Foreword by the Protector of Citizens, National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings

The Third Report of the Protector of Citizens, National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, marks a turning point in the development of Serbia's national system for combating trafficking in human beings. Following many years of advocacy by the Protector of Citizens for the adoption of a comprehensive framework law, the Republic of Serbia has enacted the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims. Throughout the legislative process, the Protector of Citizens, in the capacity of National Rapporteur, played an active role in shaping the regulatory framework by initiating the adoption of this framework legislation and contributing to the drafting of its provisions, guided by the conviction that victim protection, clearly defined institutional competences, effective inter-institutional cooperation and independent monitoring of the implementation of legislation must constitute the foundation of the national system for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings.

Now that the Law has been enacted, success can no longer be measured by the adoption of legislation alone, but solely by its consistent and effective implementation. The period prior to the Law becoming fully operational must be used to adopt the necessary secondary legislation, establish clear procedures, strengthen institutional and human resource capacities, and clearly define the responsibilities of each stakeholder within the National Mechanism. Legislation alone will not protect victims unless the competent authorities ensure its consistent and uniform implementation throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

This Report demonstrates that progress was made during the reporting period. The implementation of the National Rapporteur's recommendations continued, certain aspects of institutional cooperation were further improved, and the number of identified victims reached its highest level in recent years. At the same time, the decline in the number of detected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings, the insufficient proactive detection of cases and the inconsistent involvement of certain sectors in identifying victims indicate that the institutional response has yet to reach the level required to effectively address this criminal offence.

At the same time, it is essential to ensure that protection mechanisms are directed towards those who genuinely need them, on the basis of clear and predictable standards of practice that prevent any misuse of the system while ensuring legal certainty for victims.

Equally important is the role of the judicial authorities in implementing the new legislative framework. The protection of victims of trafficking in human beings must not be viewed solely through the prism of prosecuting perpetrators¹, but also through the consistent safeguarding of the procedural guarantees and rights of victims in their capacity as injured parties in criminal proceedings. Whether victims receive full protection within the justice system and develop confidence in public institutions, or instead become exposed to secondary victimisation, largely depends on the manner in which courts and public prosecutor's offices discharge their responsibilities.

¹ For the purposes of this Report, terms expressed in the grammatical masculine gender shall be understood to refer equally to persons of all genders.

By adopting the new Law, the Republic of Serbia has established a solid normative foundation. The institutions now face a far more demanding task: to demonstrate that the rule of law is stronger than any form of exploitation. Combating trafficking in human beings is not merely a matter of criminal justice policy; it is a matter of protecting human dignity, upholding the rule of law and maintaining public trust in institutions.

For that very reason, the Protector of Citizens, in the capacity of National Rapporteur, will continue to independently monitor the implementation of the new Law, identify systemic shortcomings and consistently insist on the accountability of all public authorities. The objective is not only to ensure the more effective prosecution of perpetrators, but also to build a system in which every victim is identified, protected and supported without delay, and every case of trafficking in human beings is promptly detected and effectively sanctioned.

THE PROTECTOR OF CITIZENS

Mr Zoran Pašalić, MSc

2. Introduction

During 2025, the Republic of Serbia continued implementing the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2029 Period and the accompanying Action Plan for the 2024–2026 Period, while further strengthening the capacities of the competent authorities and enhancing cooperation in the field of preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims. At the same time, efforts continued to establish a comprehensive legislative framework through the drafting of a law providing for the establishment of a national institutional mechanism and regulating in greater detail the rights of victims, the victim identification procedure, the competences of the relevant stakeholders and their mutual cooperation.

Following the end of the reporting period, on 23 April 2026, the National Assembly adopted the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims², which will apply from 1 January 2027. For the first time, the Law establishes a comprehensive legal framework governing the national institutional mechanism, preventive measures, victims' rights, procedures for preliminary and formal identification, data collection, and the competences of the National Rapporteur. The period preceding the full application of the Law requires the timely adoption of secondary legislation, the alignment of existing procedures, and the provision of the organisational, human, technical and financial resources necessary for its consistent implementation.

The Third Report of the Protector of Citizens – National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings³ presents an overview of the situation and activities in the field of trafficking in human beings during 2025, an analysis of the available statistical data, and an assessment of the implementation by the competent authorities of the recommendations contained in previous reports. According to the National Rapporteur's assessment, 65% of the recommendations have either been implemented or implementation has commenced, which is consistent with the objectives set out in the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and its accompanying Action Plan.

According to data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, 19 criminal offences of trafficking in human beings were detected during 2025, and 18 criminal complaints were filed against 25 individuals. A total of 26 injured parties were recorded in connection with these criminal offences. Compared with 2024, the number of detected criminal offences, the number of persons against whom criminal complaints were filed, and the number of recorded perpetrators all declined.

During the reporting year, criminal complaints were submitted to the competent public prosecutor's offices against 23 individuals. Indictments were filed against 32 individuals.

Convictions were handed down against 33 individuals, of whom 31 received custodial sentences, while six individuals were acquitted. These figures should be interpreted with reference to the respective stages of the criminal justice process to which they relate, since criminal complaints, investigations, indictments and judgments do not necessarily arise from the same cases or the same reporting period.

²“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 35/26”.

³ Hereinafter referred to as "the National Rapporteur".

During the reporting period, activities continued to strengthen the capacities of the police, public prosecutor's offices and courts, particularly in the areas of conducting digital and financial investigations, applying special investigative measures, handling cases involving labour exploitation, and protecting victims during criminal proceedings. Additional equipment and software were procured, and numerous specialised training programmes were delivered. However, data concerning the number and outcomes of proactive investigations, the use of special investigative measures, and the initiation of parallel financial investigations indicate that proactive investigative work was applied to a considerably more limited extent. Furthermore, consistent practices have still not been fully established for feedback mechanisms, the timely notification of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings of decisions that may affect victims' safety, risk assessments upon the release of accused or convicted persons, and the systematic use of video links and other measures designed to prevent direct contact between victims and defendants.

In 2025, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings received 242 new referrals concerning suspected trafficking in human beings, representing an increase of 31% compared with the previous year. A total of 75 victims were formally identified, the highest number recorded during the seven-year observation period. Labour exploitation was the most prevalent form of exploitation, identified in 27 cases (36%), followed by sexual exploitation, identified in 26 cases (34.7%). Cases involving forced marriage, multiple forms of exploitation, forced begging and forced criminality were also recorded. Children accounted for 41% of all the formally identified victims, highlighting the continuing need for the system to focus specifically on the early identification, safety and protection of child victims.

The distribution of referral sources indicates that the largest number of referrals to the Centre originated from associations and the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time, certain sectors whose professionals may have direct contact with persons exposed to exploitation submitted very few referrals. The healthcare system submitted no referrals whatsoever, while the education system and the Labour Inspectorate each submitted only one. Despite conducting a large number of inspections, the Labour Inspectorate identified no indicators of trafficking in human beings, although labour exploitation was the most common form of exploitation among the formally identified victims. While this data does not in itself indicate shortcomings in individual cases, it does point to the need for further examination of the application of trafficking indicators, the planning of inspections in high-risk sectors, and the distinction between trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation and other violations of labour rights.

In the area of victim protection, the practice of conducting joint interviews involving police officers and professional staff of the Centre continued to expand, alongside the provision of accommodation, psychosocial, healthcare, legal and material support services. Nevertheless, the availability and scope of such support continue to depend on the victim's place of residence, the capacities of the competent authorities, and the significant contribution of associations. Particular challenges remain with regard to ensuring long-term support and reintegration, accommodation for male victims, assistance to foreign nationals, free legal aid, compensation for damages, and protection against secondary victimisation during criminal proceedings.

In the areas of prevention, partnership and cooperation, numerous training activities, professional conferences, awareness-raising campaigns and educational initiatives have been implemented with the participation of international organisations and associations. However, the number of activities undertaken is not, in itself, an indicator of their effectiveness. Guidelines for

communication with the media in cases involving trafficking in human beings have not yet been developed; dedicated and sustainable funding has not been secured for preventive activities or the specialised services provided by associations; and the functioning of local multidisciplinary teams continues to lack consistency.

The National Rapporteur considers that progress was achieved during 2025, primarily through the preparation of the new legislative framework, the increase in the number of referrals and formally identified victims, the expansion of certain forms of cooperation, and the strengthening of professional and technical capacities.

Nevertheless, declining indicators in the areas of detection and criminal prosecution, the uneven involvement of relevant sectors in the identification of victims, insufficiently developed protection mechanisms, and limited data concerning the impact of implemented activities demonstrate that the institutional response has not yet become fully systemic, consistent or oriented towards measurable results.

The findings and recommendations set out in this Report are aimed at improving the overall situation, addressing the shortcomings identified, ensuring timely preparations for the implementation of the new Law, and building a system in which victims are proactively identified, protected and supported, while criminal offences of trafficking in human beings are effectively detected, investigated and prosecuted.

3. Institutional Framework in the Area of Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia

On 23 April 2026, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims, which, for the first time in the Republic of Serbia, comprehensively regulates the national institutional mechanism for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings and the protection of victims. As the Law was adopted after the end of the reporting period and will become applicable on 1 January 2027, this chapter presents the institutional framework that was in force during 2025. The new Law defines the entities comprising the National Mechanism, their competences and forms of cooperation, which will require the alignment of the existing organisational structure, procedures and data-sharing arrangements prior to the commencement of its application.

The Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, as an expert advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, was established to coordinate national and international activities aimed at combating trafficking in human beings; to consider reports issued by relevant international bodies on trafficking in human beings; to adopt positions and propose measures for the implementation of recommendations made by international bodies in this field; to monitor and assess progress in the implementation of national strategic documents on combating trafficking in human beings; to harmonise the actions of the competent state authorities relevant to combating trafficking in human beings; and to propose measures for addressing identified challenges and mobilising the necessary resources.

Pursuant to the Decision on the Establishment of the Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings⁴, the Council is composed of the Minister of the Interior, serving as Chair, and the ministers responsible for finance, labour, employment, veterans' affairs and social affairs, health, justice, European integration and education, serving as members.

The Chair of the Council directs its work and convenes and presides over its meetings. The Council meets as necessary, but at least twice a year. Meetings are attended by the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, while representatives of academic and other institutions, as well as associations whose activities relate to the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings and the protection of victims, may participate in the Council's work where appropriate. The Council submits a report on its work to the Government at least once a year, while professional, administrative and technical support is provided by the Ministry of the Interior.

The Protector of Citizens performs the duties of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings⁵ in accordance with the Law on the Protector of Citizens⁶. Pursuant to Article 29(4) of the Law Ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings⁷, each Party shall consider appointing National Rapporteurs or establishing other mechanisms to monitor the activities of state institutions in the field of combating trafficking in human beings and the implementation of the requirements laid down by the national legislation.

⁴"Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 66/25.

⁵ Hereinafter referred to as "the National Rapporteur".

⁶"Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 105/21.

⁷"Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 19/09.

The National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings is appointed by a decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and simultaneously serves as the Head of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings within the Ministry of the Interior. The Office performs professional and expert tasks relating to combating trafficking in human beings on behalf of the Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

Following amendments to the Rulebook on the Internal Organisation and Job Classification of the Ministry of the Interior, adopted in September 2025, organisational changes were introduced in certain organisational units, as a result of which the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings became an integral part of the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior.

Until September 2025, the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings operated within the Police Directorate with the mandate to participate directly in, implement and monitor activities envisaged under strategic documents relating to combating trafficking in human beings; to monitor, coordinate, supervise and direct the implementation of measures and actions aimed at combating trafficking in human beings; to monitor the implementation of international treaties, legislation and other regulations, initiate their amendment or supplementation and participate in their drafting in the field of combating trafficking in human beings; to coordinate the work of organisational units of the Police Directorate with state authorities, associations, partners and international organisations in monitoring trends and combating trafficking in human beings; to monitor, direct and, where necessary, directly participate in the collection of data in this field and analyse the data collected; to coordinate the processing and analysis of materials submitted by all relevant state authorities and organisations; and to prepare national responses to international reporting obligations concerning trafficking in human beings in the Republic of Serbia.

In 2019, the Ministry of the Interior transferred responsibility for investigations relating to trafficking in human beings from the Border Police Directorate to the Criminal Police Directorate. Within the Ministry of the Interior, the Police Directorate's Criminal Police Directorate established the Department for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants, responsible for preventing, detecting and suppressing all forms of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings committed by organised criminal groups, criminal groups and individuals, as well as for coordinating, analysing and preventing trafficking in human beings. The Department comprises the Division for the Coordination, Analysis and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Division for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, and the Division for the Suppression of the Smuggling of Migrants.

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings carries out its activities through two organisational units: the Service for the Coordination of the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. The Centre's professional staff conduct the formal identification of victims independently of criminal proceedings. At the same time, they prepare individual service provision and protection plans for victims, monitor their implementation and outcomes, and coordinate the provision of social welfare services to victims of trafficking in human beings. In the Republic of Serbia, the Centre coordinates victim protection from the moment the identification procedure has been completed and for as long as such protection remains necessary. During the identification procedure, presumed victims of trafficking in human beings enjoy the same rights as formally identified victims. The Centre prepares an individual protection plan involving social welfare institutions,

relevant associations, healthcare institutions, educational institutions and the police. In accordance with the Centre's operational procedures, each beneficiary is informed of their rights and of the institutions and organisations capable of providing different forms of assistance, and is provided with relevant contact information, recommendations and guidance. Adult beneficiaries decide independently which forms of support they wish to receive and from which relevant service providers.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices prosecute perpetrators of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code and are responsible for conducting investigations, filing indictments and representing the prosecution before the Higher Courts. The Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime is a specialised prosecution office responsible for the most complex forms of organised crime, including trafficking in human beings. Pursuant to the General Mandatory Instruction issued by the Republic Public Prosecutor (now the Supreme Public Prosecutor) on 23 June 2021, contact prosecutors for criminal offences of trafficking in human beings and trafficking in minors for adoption were designated in all Appellate and Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices. The contact public prosecutor is responsible for handling criminal cases involving the criminal offences of trafficking in human beings and trafficking in minors for adoption, monitoring the work of other public prosecutor's offices with a view to ensuring consistent practice, maintaining contact with victims in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures, liaising with the competent police officers, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and relevant associations providing support to victims of trafficking in human beings, attending specialised training, and carrying out other activities aimed at improving the effectiveness of criminal prosecution and the protection of victims of these criminal offences, in accordance with the international standards.

During 2025, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office increased the number of contact prosecutors responsible for trafficking in human beings and trafficking in minors for the purpose of adoption cases to 38, thereby fully achieving the target established by the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2026 Period.

3.1 Strengthening the Capacities and Activities of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings

During 2025, the organisational, staffing and professional capacities of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings continued to be strengthened, alongside the further expansion of cooperation with the competent state authorities, judicial authorities, institutions, relevant associations and international organisations. The activities undertaken were aimed at enhancing the capacity for the independent monitoring of developments, the collection and analysis of data, the monitoring of the implementation of legislation and of action taken in response to the recommendations of the National Rapporteur, as well as further strengthening the recognition and visibility of the role of the National Rapporteur within the national and international institutional framework.

The staffing capacities of the National Rapporteur's Department were strengthened through a competitive recruitment procedure, resulting in the filling of two executive posts at the grade of Senior Adviser. At the end of the reporting period, the recruitment procedure for filling a third executive post was still ongoing.

A questionnaire for collecting data and information from relevant stakeholders in the field of trafficking in human beings was prepared and circulated. On the basis of the information collected, the Second Report of the Protector of Citizens – National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings was prepared and published, and a conference was organised at which its findings, assessments and recommendations were presented. In addition to presenting the National Rapporteur's specific findings, the conference provided an opportunity for direct discussion with the competent authorities and other relevant stakeholders on the identified shortcomings and the measures required to address them.

In order to monitor the action taken in response to the recommendations contained in the Second Report, a working meeting was organised with the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Market Inspectorate, the Labour Inspectorate, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Republic Institute for Social Protection, the National Employment Service and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce. The meeting focused on the substance of the recommendations, the competences of the respective stakeholders and the activities required for their implementation. Such meetings represent an important mechanism for monitoring implementation, but they do not replace the obligation of the competent authorities to provide specific information on the measures taken.

The National Rapporteur participated in legislative and strategic processes of relevance to the system for combating trafficking in human beings. Representatives of the National Rapporteur took part in the work of the Working Group responsible for drafting the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims and submitted comments on the draft text, guided by the independent status of the National Rapporteur, the rights of victims and the obligations of the competent stakeholders. Their participation in this process was aimed at ensuring that the new legislative framework more clearly regulates the status and competences of the National Rapporteur, cooperation among the competent stakeholders, the provision of data and the consideration of the National Rapporteur's recommendations.

Representatives of the National Rapporteur also participated in a meeting of the Special Working Group for the implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia.

Continuous cooperation was maintained through regular meetings with the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Meetings were also held with the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, representatives of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, as well as the management of the Border Police Directorate. These meetings addressed issues falling within the competences of these authorities that are relevant to the implementation of the National Rapporteur's recommendations, the detection and identification of victims, the provision of assistance and protection, the prevention of labour exploitation, responses concerning children and persons in migration, and the enhancement of inter-institutional cooperation.

Representatives of the National Rapporteur visited the Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Asylum Centre in Sjenica. A meeting was also held with the Local Team for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the City of Kragujevac, while representatives of the National Rapporteur participated as panellists at the annual meeting of local teams for

combating trafficking in human beings. These activities provided first-hand insight into the functioning of specific mechanisms at the local level and an opportunity to discuss the challenges encountered by stakeholders in practice.

Cooperation with relevant associations continued through the organisation of a dedicated meeting between the National Rapporteur and representatives of associations active in the field of trafficking in human beings, during which issues relating to the identification of victims, the provision of assistance and support, access to rights, the financing of specialised services and the involvement of associations in the multidisciplinary response were discussed. A meeting was also held with representatives of the Centre for International Legal Cooperation, as well as meetings with representatives of international organisations in the Republic of Serbia.

The National Rapporteur contributed to the preparation of a number of national and international reports and submissions. Contributions were prepared for the Migration Profile of the Republic of Serbia for 2024 and the Report on the State of Migration Management for 2024. Data was collected and a contribution was prepared for the OSCE questionnaire on combating trafficking in human beings in the Republic of Serbia, as well as for the European Commission's Report on Serbia. A contribution on action taken in response to the recommendations contained in the Third Evaluation Report was submitted to the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). The National Rapporteur also submitted a contribution to the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

Representatives of the National Rapporteur participated in a round table dedicated to the implementation of the recommendations contained in GRETA's Third Evaluation Report, as well as in a meeting with GRETA representatives as part of the Fourth Evaluation Round. Participation in these processes provided an opportunity to present independent findings on the progress achieved and the remaining shortcomings in the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Representatives of the National Rapporteur also took part in a Council of Europe round table dedicated to the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings.

The international visibility and professional capacities of the National Rapporteur were further strengthened through participation in the 25th Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference in Vienna. The Protector of Citizens' Adviser for Trafficking in Human Beings participated in the panel entitled "From Vulnerability to Innovation: Addressing Risks in Child Trafficking", where she delivered a presentation on innovative responses to the risks of child trafficking and the preparedness of the institutional system to respond to contemporary forms of recruitment and exploitation. Representatives of the National Rapporteur also participated in the annual meeting of National Rapporteurs and Coordinators in Strasbourg, which provided an opportunity to exchange experience on models of independent monitoring, data collection and the assessment of the effectiveness of national systems.

Particular attention was devoted to issues relating to migration, border management, returns and the status of foreign nationals. The National Rapporteur participated in the regional project "Inclusion of Foreigners in the Western Balkans – Access to the Rights of Foreigners", the conference "Strengthening Return Systems in the Western Balkans" held in Brussels, and the regional meeting on alternatives to immigration detention in the Western Balkans. Representatives of the National Rapporteur also participated in a regional conference in Sarajevo dedicated to the risks associated with the use of advanced technology in cases of migrant

smuggling. Although trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling are distinct phenomena, consideration of technology-enabled forms of abuse and the situation of persons in migration is important for the timely identification of risks of exploitation and trafficking in human beings.

The National Rapporteur participated in a thematic meeting dedicated to the establishment of an independent border monitoring mechanism and in the preparation of the initial feasibility analysis for the establishment of such a mechanism in the Republic of Serbia. These activities focused on the independence of the mechanism, its mandate, access to locations where border procedures are carried out, monitoring respect for fundamental rights, identifying vulnerabilities and referring persons in need of protection.

In the area of professional development and knowledge transfer, representatives of the National Rapporteur delivered training for staff of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration on the role and mandate of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings. They also contributed to the development of the curriculum for the training programme "Prevention of Torture, Protection of the Rights of Migrants and the Early Identification of Cases of Torture among Migrants". These activities were aimed at improving understanding of the competences of independent mechanisms, strengthening the identification of vulnerabilities and promoting a human rights-based approach.

With a view to monitoring emerging risks associated with the use of modern technologies, a representative of the National Rapporteur participated in a meeting of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) Working Group on Artificial Intelligence, dedicated to the protection of human rights in the development and deployment of artificial intelligence systems. This field is of increasing importance for monitoring technology-enabled recruitment, control and exploitation, as well as for assessing the risks that the use of technology may pose to privacy and other human rights.

The National Rapporteur participated in the Steering Committees of the project "Strengthening Anti-Trafficking Action in Serbia" implemented within the joint European Union and Council of Europe programme Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye (2023–2026). Proposals for project activities under the fourth phase of the Council of Europe project "Strengthening Anti-Trafficking Action in Serbia" were also prepared. Participation in the governance structures of these projects was used to highlight priority systemic needs and to ensure that project activities were aligned with the established findings and recommendations, while preserving the independence of the National Rapporteur in monitoring and assessing the situation.

4. Methodology

On 30 July 2024, the National Rapporteur published the First Report of the Protector of Citizens – National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings for 2023, which contained 28 systemic and general recommendations.

The Second Report, covering 2024, was published on 30 July 2025 and contained 30 specific recommendations addressed to the competent stakeholders. The recommendations contained in the Second Report also incorporated those recommendations from the First Report on which no action had been taken.

Following the publication of the Second Report, the National Rapporteur continued the practice of holding direct meetings with representatives of the competent state authorities, institutions and relevant associations. These meetings were aimed at presenting the findings and recommendations, clarifying their content and the respective competences of individual stakeholders, and encouraging the adoption of concrete measures.

For the preparation of the Third Report, revised questionnaires were developed, drawing on the experience gained during the previous two reporting cycles. The questions were refined in order to collect more comparable statistical data, identify specific activities and results, and monitor the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Second Report, as well as those recommendations from the First Report whose implementation continues to be monitored.

The questionnaires were used to collect information and data on the activities of relevant stakeholders in the field of trafficking in human beings during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025. Data on measures taken in response to previously issued recommendations were collected for the period from 1 January 2025 to 1 April 2026.

A total of 107 questionnaires were prepared, covering three thematic areas:

- Investigation, criminal prosecution and judicial proceedings;
- Identification and protection of victims;
- Prevention, partnership and cooperation.

The questionnaires were sent to 107 state authorities, institutions, organisations, associations and other relevant stakeholders. Requests addressed to authorities whose work falls within the oversight mandate of the Protector of Citizens were submitted pursuant to Article 2(3) and Article 24(1) of the Law on the Protector of Citizens. Questionnaires sent to all other stakeholders were submitted pursuant to Article 2(3) of the same Law, which provides that the Protector of Citizens performs the duties of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings.

Responses were received from 83 of the 107 stakeholders to whom the questionnaires had been addressed. All authorities subject to the oversight of the Protector of Citizens in accordance with the Law on the Protector of Citizens complied with the requests and submitted the requested information.

The assessment of action taken in response to the recommendations was carried out using the Protector of Citizens' internal mechanism for monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

A total of 40 recommendations from the First and Second Reports were subject to monitoring. On the basis of the information received and the application of the established assessment criteria, it

was determined that 65% of the recommendations monitored had either been implemented or that implementation had commenced.

The methodological approach made it possible to analyse the activities and results of the competent stakeholders, assess action taken in response to previously issued recommendations, identify the remaining institutional shortcomings and formulate recommendations for the forthcoming reporting period⁸.

⁸ The Protector of Citizens, in the capacity of National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of the data contained in this Report that was provided by the stakeholders to whom the National Rapporteur's questionnaires were addressed for the purpose of collecting information for the preparation of the Report. Furthermore, the views of the stakeholders presented in this Report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Protector of Citizens in the capacity of National Rapporteur.

5. Investigation, Criminal Prosecution and Judicial Proceedings

Police and public prosecution records show a decline in certain indicators relating to detected criminal offences, perpetrators and persons against whom criminal complaints were filed, while at the same time, the number of persons covered by convictions and custodial sentences increased.

During the reporting period, activities were undertaken to strengthen the professional, technical and organisational capacities, including training, increasing the number of public prosecutors designated as contact prosecutors, and procuring equipment for the collection of digital evidence.

Shortcomings were also identified with regard to the timely notification of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the assessment of risks to victims' safety, the availability of video-link facilities, and the prevention of contact between victims and defendants.

This chapter provides an overview of action taken in response to the recommendations previously issued by the National Rapporteur, together with an analysis of the activities and results of the police, public prosecutor's offices and courts in the detection, investigation, criminal prosecution and judicial processing of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings during 2025. Particular attention is devoted to the proactive detection of criminal offences, the collection of digital and financial evidence, the training of competent stakeholders, international and inter-agency cooperation, and the protection of the rights and safety of injured parties during criminal proceedings.

5.1 Overview of action taken in response to the recommendations of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings

- **The Ministry of the Interior should establish dedicated departments for combating trafficking in human beings within all regional police directorates, with clearly defined competences and adequate staffing capacities for handling cases involving trafficking in human beings.**

Within the headquarters of the Criminal Police Directorate, under the Service for Combating Organised Crime, the Department for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings⁹ and the Smuggling of Migrants has been established and is responsible for handling cases of trafficking in human beings committed by organised criminal groups.

Within the regional police directorates, police officers assigned to combating trafficking in human beings operate within the criminal police departments and, according to information provided by the Ministry, have specialised in handling such cases through various training programmes and courses.

⁹ The Ministry of the Interior stated that the Rulebook on the Internal Organisation and Job Classification, which entered into force on 1 January 2019, transferred responsibility for handling cases involving trafficking in human beings from the Border Police Directorate to the Criminal Police Directorate.

As the information provided does not indicate that dedicated departments have been established within all the regional police directorates, the National Rapporteur considers that this recommendation has not been implemented.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of the Interior should establish permanent specialised teams for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings within all police directorates.

- **The Ministry of the Interior should increase the number of proactive investigations involving the use of special investigative measures and parallel financial investigations, while strengthening the capacities for the collection and processing of digital evidence (equipment, software and staff training).**

According to the Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan for the 2024–2026 Period for 2025, a year-on-year increase of 10% in the proportion of criminal complaints relating to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings resulting from proactive investigations involving the use of special investigative measures had been envisaged.

However, only the total numbers of criminal complaints filed were presented as achieved results. In 2024, 20 criminal complaints were filed, while in 2025 the number was 18. No data was provided on the number of complaints that resulted directly from proactive investigations, their proportion within the total number of complaints, or the number of cases in which special investigative measures had been applied.¹⁰

The Ministry of the Interior informed the National Rapporteur that particular challenges include the collection of evidence in the digital environment, monitoring activities on social media platforms and communication applications, staff shortages, and the limited availability of specialised software tools.

Through the EU4FAST – EU Support to Strengthening the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans project, the Department for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants within the Service for Combating Organised Crime of the Criminal Police Directorate procured appropriate software and technical equipment for the collection of digital evidence. By the end of 2026, at the initiative of the Criminal Police Directorate, a substantial quantity of additional technical equipment intended for work in the digital environment is expected to be procured through donor funding.

Although proactive investigative work was carried out, it was applied to a considerably more limited extent. Proactive methods, including the use of special investigative measures, were primarily focused on reactive operational action rather than on the systematic collection of information concerning individuals, criminal groups and organised criminal groups, the methods of commission of criminal offences, and other relevant circumstances.

Special investigative measures were applied in a very limited number of cases, and the evidence obtained through such measures did not constitute the predominant evidentiary basis in criminal proceedings. The most frequently used proactive method was reported to be obtaining telephone communications data.

¹⁰ As the indicator relates to the proportion of criminal complaints resulting from proactive investigations, the absolute figures provided are not sufficient to verify the extent to which the target has been achieved.

In order to strengthen capacities for conducting digital investigations, a national training course on the use of advanced technologies and conducting digital investigations in cases of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling was held in Niš in March 2025¹¹.

In cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)¹², a round table and a workshop dedicated to conducting financial investigations were organised within the framework of the EU4FAST project¹³.

One of the key conclusions reached during these activities was that criminal intelligence work should precede the initiation of investigations in order to ensure a proactive approach and the timely identification of victims. It was also emphasised that parallel financial investigations should be initiated already during the pre-investigation phase, with a view to tracing financial flows and identifying unlawfully acquired assets.

In June 2025, the Ministry of the Interior also organised a round table dedicated to the criminal liability of legal persons, attended by 25 representatives of public prosecutor's offices, the police, employers, trade unions and other relevant institutions. It was concluded that judicial practice in this area remains limited and that further efforts are needed to strengthen the capacities for the detection and prosecution of legal persons for criminal offences related to trafficking in human beings.

As part of the Action Plan activity relating to the continuous preparation of an annual analysis of the operational capacities of the police and public prosecutor's offices for investigating the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, in line with emerging trends and European good practice, the Criminal Police Directorate organised workshops at which the existing capacities were reviewed and recommendations for further improvements were formulated.

It was noted that the capacities for conducting investigations in the digital environment should be significantly strengthened through the use of available and specialised OSINT tools, while police officers should be trained to monitor criminal activities on social media platforms, internet advertisements and communication applications.

It was recommended that the Criminal Police Directorate, through the Service for Combating High-Tech Crime, organise basic OSINT training for police officers handling cases involving trafficking in human beings. It was also recommended that each regional police directorate designate at least one criminal investigator responsible for monitoring and investigating the online environment in the field of trafficking in human beings.

Recommendations also included the broader and more consistent use of special investigative measures, strengthening capacities to establish the intent to exploit, and the more consistent determination of facts indicating labour exploitation. In more complex cases, financial flows should be traced and information relating to suspects' bank accounts, payments made through payment service providers, and assets that may be connected with the commission of the criminal offence should be analysed.

¹¹The training was attended by 23 police officers and public prosecutors.

¹² Hereinafter referred to as GIZ.

¹³ The round table was attended by 25 representatives of the police and public prosecutor's offices, while the two-day workshop held in Arandelovac in January 2025 was attended by 13 public prosecutors and 14 police officers.

The need to ensure appropriate premises, uninterrupted internet access, and adequate information technology and technical equipment for covert recording, photography and documentation was also identified as a prerequisite for proactive operational work.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during 2025, the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with international partners, undertook a number of activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of police officers and public prosecutors to conduct digital and financial investigations. Thematically relevant training courses and workshops were organised, an analysis of operational capacities was carried out, and software and technical equipment for the collection of digital evidence were procured for the competent department. These measures constitute concrete initial steps towards the implementation of the recommendation.

It is particularly significant that the analysis of operational capacities identified the need for a wider use of OSINT tools, training police officers to operate in the online environment, the more consistent application of special investigative measures, the tracing of financial flows, the initiation of parallel financial investigations, and the provision of appropriate staffing, premises and technical resources.

In view of the procurement of part of the required equipment, the training activities carried out, and the analysis of operational capacities, and notwithstanding the absence of indicators concerning the number of proactive investigations and their results, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

The National Rapporteur emphasises that the Ministry of the Interior should increase the use of proactive methods in the detection and documentation of criminal offences of trafficking in human beings.

- **The Ministry of the Interior should establish a mandatory feedback mechanism between police directorates in cases involving the transmission of operational reports and information concerning potential criminal offences of trafficking in human beings, in order to ensure continuity of action.**

The Ministry of the Interior informed the National Rapporteur that feedback between police directorates in cases involving the transmission of operational reports and information is regulated by the internal procedures of the Criminal Police Directorate.

Given that the mechanism has been established through internal regulations, but that no information has been provided to confirm its content or practical implementation, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of the Interior should ensure the consistent application of the feedback mechanism between police directorates concerning the action taken and the outcome of transmitted reports and information relating to suspected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings.

- **The Ministry of the Interior and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should establish the practice of conducting joint interviews with presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia, while regularly monitoring the implementation of this model.**

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings reported that, during 2025, the practice of conducting joint interviews involving the Centre's professional staff and police officers of the Ministry of the Interior with presumed victims of trafficking in human beings continued to expand. In addition to the Belgrade Police Directorate, joint interviews were conducted during the reporting period in the police directorates of Zrenjanin, Novi Sad, Niš, Pančevo, Bor, Požarevac, Sombor and Kragujevac.

According to the Centre, this practice continued throughout 2026. In certain cases, interviews with children were conducted exclusively by the Centre's professional staff, without the presence of police officers, after which reports on the interviews conducted were submitted to the Ministry of the Interior. This approach was applied in cooperation with the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Zrenjanin and the Zrenjanin Police Directorate.

The Ministry of the Interior stated that, in accordance with the available capacities of the Ministry and the Centre, efforts would continue to expand this practice to other organisational units of the Ministry.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the expansion of the practice of conducting joint interviews by the professional staff of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and police officers.

The adaptation of interview methods to the needs of the child is also viewed positively, including the possibility for interviews to be conducted exclusively by a professional member of the Centre's staff, when this is in the child's best interests, with the subsequent transmission of the relevant information to the competent authorities.

Given that the practice of joint interviews is expanding and has been implemented in several locations, but has not yet been established in all police directorates, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of the Interior and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should ensure that joint interviews with presumed and formally identified victims are conducted in all police directorates.

- **The mandatory practice of the regular and timely notification of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings regarding all stages of criminal proceedings should be established, including decisions on pre-trial detention, release from detention and restraining orders, in order to facilitate the effective planning of victim protection measures.**

According to the Criminal Police Directorate, cooperation with the Centre has thus far included the mutual exchange of information, while information is also exchanged through the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings within the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior. This practice is based on the principles set out in the Instruction on the Procedures to be Followed by Employees of the Ministry of the Interior in Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings.

According to the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the exchange of information between the courts, public prosecutor's offices and the Centre regarding the progress and outcomes of criminal proceedings involving victims of trafficking in human beings has not yet been systematically regulated. Although public prosecutor's offices respond to

individual requests submitted by the Centre, no mechanism for regular and timely notification exists, with the result that the Centre obtains such information by submitting individual requests.

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office informed the National Rapporteur that the competent public prosecutor's offices cooperate directly with the Centre in accordance with the cooperation agreements concluded between them, as well as through direct contacts aimed at providing assistance and support to victims. According to the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, public prosecutors maintain regular contact with the Centre in order to plan and implement victim protection measures.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade stated that, during the reporting period, it undertook activities to ensure the regular exchange of information with the Centre and its timely notification regarding action taken in cases involving trafficking in human beings. According to the Office, cooperation takes place throughout the proceedings, from the pre-investigation stage and investigation to the court proceedings.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad reported that the exchange of information with the Centre proceeded without interruption. The Centre was informed of criminal proceedings initiated in relation to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and of the dates scheduled for the examination of particularly vulnerable witnesses, while information on the progress and outcome of proceedings was provided upon the Centre's request. In turn, the Centre informed the Public Prosecutor's Office in writing of identification procedures initiated in respect of presumed victims within its territorial jurisdiction.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the existence of direct communication between the public prosecutor's offices, the Ministry of the Interior and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the examples of good practice demonstrated by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Such cooperation can contribute to the timely planning of protection measures and to coordinated action by the competent authorities.

The Centre noted, however, that the exchange of information continues to depend on direct contacts, individual requests and the practice of the particular authority concerned. It also stated that information on the progress and outcomes of criminal proceedings is obtained by submitting individual requests. No information was provided to indicate that the Centre is systematically and promptly informed about decisions ordering, extending or revoking pre-trial detention, the release of defendants or convicted persons, restraining and non-contact orders, amendments to such measures, or other decisions that may alter the level of risk to the victim.

In view of the examples of good practice, but also the fact that the regular notification of the Centre has not yet been established, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, the regular and timely notification of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should be ensured regarding the progress and outcome of criminal proceedings, as well as all decisions that may affect the safety of the victim.

- **The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice should develop a risk assessment mechanism to be applied prior to the release of persons from pre-trial detention or imprisonment, as well as prior to the commencement of the execution of a**

sentence imposed for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, with the mandatory involvement of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and associations providing support to victims, where applicable.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, during the reporting period, there were no cases in which the Ministry carried out an assessment of risks to the safety of a victim of trafficking in human beings in connection with the release of a defendant or convicted person from pre-trial detention or prison, nor was there any identified need to undertake special protection measures.

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings stated that it had no knowledge of any such risk assessments having been carried out. The Centre was not informed about the release of defendants or convicted persons from pre-trial detention or prison, nor was it involved in risk assessments or the planning of victim protection measures in connection with such decisions. Furthermore, the Centre had no information indicating that any activities had been undertaken during the reporting period to develop a specific risk assessment mechanism for such situations.

The Ministry of Justice did not provide information on activities undertaken to develop this mechanism. In view of the competences of the judicial authorities and the authorities responsible for the execution of criminal sanctions, the involvement of the Ministry of Justice is essential for regulating the timely notification of the release of persons from pre-trial detention or prison and for establishing coordinated action by the competent authorities.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during the reporting period, no procedure was established for assessing risks to the safety of victims of trafficking in human beings in connection with the release of defendants or convicted persons from pre-trial detention or prison.

Although the Centre prepares an individual protection plan for each victim, it cannot adapt that plan in a timely manner to newly emerging risks unless it is informed of the release of a person who may pose a threat to the victim. Furthermore, no provision has been made for the involvement of associations providing direct and long-term support to victims, although such organisations may possess important information concerning the victim's circumstances, fears and protection needs.

Given that no procedure has been established, that the Centre was neither informed nor involved in risk assessments, that no information was provided on risk assessments conducted, and that the Ministry of Justice did not report on any measures undertaken, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice should ensure that a timely assessment of risks to the safety of victims is carried out before the release of defendants or convicted persons from pre-trial detention or prison, with the involvement of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and other providers of victim support.

- **Comprehensive and effective victim protection programmes should be established and implemented in order to ensure the safety of victims of trafficking in human beings and encourage their active participation in criminal proceedings.**

The Ministry of the Interior stated that, through its competent organisational units, it implements measures including the early identification of potential victims, the application of a victim-centred approach, the prevention of secondary victimisation, and the timely referral of victims to the

support system. These activities are carried out in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, public prosecutor's offices and social welfare centres¹⁴.

According to data provided by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, 27 persons were identified as injured parties in relation to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings in cases for which criminal complaints were filed during 2025. The status of a particularly vulnerable witness was granted to 21 injured parties, representing approximately 78% of all cases¹⁵.

Of the 21 injured parties granted this status, 17 were represented by legal counsel, 13 were examined during the investigation using audio-visual transmission equipment, and 10 were examined in the presence of a psychologist, social worker or another qualified professional. No particularly vulnerable witness was confronted with the defendant during proceedings before the public prosecutor's office, representing an important safeguard against secondary victimisation.

In cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office prepared the Handbook for Public Prosecutors: "Questioning the Defendant and Examining Witnesses during the Investigation". The handbook contains theoretical guidance, practical recommendations and specific interviewing techniques for conducting evidentiary procedures, with a dedicated chapter addressing the examination of victims of trafficking in human beings and their protection during criminal proceedings.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade reported that, during the reporting period, four persons were identified as injured parties in cases involving trafficking in human beings under its jurisdiction, and that all of them were granted the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses. Protection measures were implemented through the Victim and Witness Support Service for Gender-Based Violence and by referring victims to relevant associations to ensure additional assistance and support.

The Office cooperated with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Atina and ASTRA associations, and the Belgrade City Centre for Social Work. According to the Office, such cooperation contributed in several cases to empowering victims, enabling them to provide legally valid testimony and supporting their participation until the conclusion of the proceedings. At the same time, working with victims, gathering evidence and the proper understanding of the constituent elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings were identified as significant challenges.

In addition to granting the status of particularly vulnerable witness, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad requested, following the filing of indictments, that the court exclude the public from the main hearing in order to protect victims' privacy. During the investigation, the Office cooperated with the Centre in obtaining expert reports on victim identification and arranging interviews with victims, which were attended by the Centre's

¹⁴ According to the Ministry, protection measures are implemented in accordance with the Law on Police, the Law on the Programme for the Protection of Participants in Criminal Proceedings, the Instruction on the Procedures to be Followed by Employees of the Ministry of the Interior in Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings, and the Mandatory Instruction on the Treatment of Injured Parties in the Context of Information Provision and the Assessment of Risks, Vulnerabilities and Protection and Support Needs.

¹⁵ The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office stated that the competent public prosecutor's offices apply procedural protection measures in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Code and that, where the statutory conditions are met, victims are granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness.

professional staff. Where the victims were children, cooperation was also established with the competent social welfare centres.

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings stated that victim safety is ensured through cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, the notification and alerting of the competent authorities, counselling provided to beneficiaries, and the development of individual safety strategies based on risk assessments.

In order to facilitate access to justice and encourage the active participation of victims in criminal proceedings, the Centre engages lawyers, prepares victims for giving evidence, initiates requests for the granting of the particularly vulnerable witness status, submits its findings and expert opinions to public prosecutor's offices and courts, and organises transport and accompaniment for victims attending public prosecutor's offices and courts.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the fact that the competent authorities apply a range of measures aimed at the early identification of victims, the assessment of their needs, the prevention of secondary victimisation, and the provision of procedural, legal and professional support.

Given that various protection measures are being implemented and that examples of well-developed intersectoral cooperation exist, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, guidelines should be developed for working with presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings during criminal proceedings.

- **It is necessary to ensure that all Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices are equipped with modern videoconferencing technology enabling victims of trafficking in human beings and particularly vulnerable witnesses to give evidence from specially adapted premises, and that this method of examination is applied consistently in practice.**

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office provided an overview of the available infrastructure for the examination of injured parties and witnesses in cases involving trafficking in human beings. Three Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices – those in Belgrade, Smederevo and Sombor – have their own specially equipped interview rooms for examining injured parties and witnesses.

Ten Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices – those in Valjevo, Niš, Sremska Mitrovica, Vranje, Novi Sad, Šabac, Novi Pazar, Čačak, Kraljevo and Subotica – use specially equipped facilities of the competent courts. Some public prosecutor's offices also make use of the facilities of other institutions. For example, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Leskovac uses specially equipped premises of the Leskovac Centre for Social Work for the examination of injured parties and witnesses.

The Ministry of Justice informed the National Rapporteur that it had continued activities aimed at equipping courts and public prosecutor's offices with videoconferencing systems, and that the system is being continuously upgraded and expanded to additional organisational units, subject to the availability of financial resources.

According to the information provided, video-link systems have been installed in the Higher Courts in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Niš, Kragujevac, Užice, Zrenjanin, Požarevac, Sombor, Vranje, Subotica, Čačak, Kraljevo, Zaječar and Šabac. The system has also been installed at the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Vranje and at the Judicial Academy of the Republic of Serbia, where it is used to train judges and public prosecutors in conducting procedural acts by means of a video link.

The information provided indicates that conditions for examining victims and particularly vulnerable witnesses have improved through the provision of equipment to certain authorities and the use of the available facilities of courts and other institutions. Nevertheless, only a limited number of Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices have their own specialised premises, while the majority continue to rely on the infrastructure of other authorities.

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office stated that equipping public prosecutor's offices with the necessary technical infrastructure is an ongoing activity envisaged by the relevant strategic and action documents and falling within the competence of the Ministry of Justice. It further noted that, since 2012, in cooperation with international partners and domestic institutions, it has been implementing activities aimed at strengthening the technical capacities of public prosecutor's offices, including the procurement of audio-visual equipment for the examination of injured parties and witnesses.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the continued equipping of judicial authorities with video-link systems, as well as the use of the available facilities of courts, social welfare centres and other institutions to protect victims and particularly vulnerable witnesses during their examination.

Given that the equipping of judicial authorities has continued and that an increasing number of public prosecutor's offices have access to specialised interview facilities, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of Justice should undertake further activities to ensure that every judicial authority dealing with cases involving trafficking in human beings has permanent and timely access to audio-visual equipment and specially adapted premises for the examination of victims and particularly vulnerable witnesses, either within its own premises or through the use of facilities of another authority or institution under arrangements established in advance.

- **Continuous training and specialised professional development should be provided for police officers working with presumed victims of trafficking in human beings, including regular training on children's rights and the criminal-law protection of minors, in order to ensure more effective victim identification and the collection of evidence for the successful conduct of criminal proceedings.**

The Police Training Directorate of the Logistics Sector developed the 2025 Professional Development Programme for Police Officers of the Ministry of the Interior¹⁶.

As part of the compulsory theoretical training intended for all police officers, the module "The Concept of Trafficking in Human Beings, Its Identification and the Police Response to the Criminal Offence of Trafficking in Human Beings" was delivered. During 2025, 24,733 police officers completed this training.

Seminars entitled "Identification of Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings among the Migrant Population", attended by four police officers, and "Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings", attended by eight police officers, were also delivered.

To improve the handling of cases involving children and minors, the Police Training Directorate, in cooperation with the Judicial Academy and the Criminal Police Directorate, delivered seminars

¹⁶ Programme adopted on 31 March 2025.

entitled "Juvenile Offenders and the Protection of Minors in Pre-Investigation and Criminal Proceedings". During the reporting period, 36 training sessions were organised, attended by a total of 1,098 participants, including 299 police officers, 56 judges, 40 judicial assistants, 16 public prosecutors, 46 assistant public prosecutors, 554 lawyers, and 87 representatives of other institutions and professions.

The training covered the substantive and procedural aspects of the criminal-law protection of minors, relevant case law, the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the concept of child-friendly justice.

In cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings within the Office of the Minister, the Police Training Directorate also developed the Course Programme on the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings¹⁷. The course included the modules "Conducting Interviews with Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings" and "The Status, Protection and Support of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings". During 2025, the course was attended by 14 police officers.

With the support of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the GIZ, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings¹⁸ organised 25 regional training sessions entitled "Identification of Cases Involving Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims" between March and December 2025.

The training was attended by 1,463 professionals from 399 institutions, establishments and organisations across all 25 administrative districts and 110 cities and municipalities. Among the participants were 34 police officers from 12 police directorates, primarily investigators responsible for handling cases involving trafficking in human beings.¹⁹

Representatives of the Centre also participated as trainers in the Ministry of the Interior's course for investigators responsible for cases involving trafficking in human beings.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the inclusion of the topic of identifying and responding to cases involving trafficking in human beings in the compulsory theoretical training for police officers and the fact that a large number of police officers completed this training during 2025. It is also significant that 299 police officers received training on children's rights and the criminal-law protection of minors, and that a dedicated course programme on the detection, prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings was adopted.

Given the broad coverage of the basic training, the implementation of training programmes on children's rights, and the establishment of a specialised course, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of the Interior should continue to provide compulsory, regular and practice-oriented specialised training for police officers dealing with cases involving trafficking in human beings, including training on children's rights and the criminal-law

¹⁷ Programme adopted on 16 June 2025.

¹⁸ Hereinafter: IOM.

¹⁹ The regional training programme covered the concept and forms of trafficking in human beings, particularly vulnerable categories of persons, the victim protection system, the identification and reporting of suspected trafficking cases, the provision of emergency assistance, communication with victims, and the use of the application for the preliminary identification of victims.

protection of minors, ensuring the participation of all police directorates, assessing the knowledge acquired, and monitoring the impact of the training on operational practice.

- **It is necessary to continue providing specialised training for judges, public prosecutors and police officers in order to improve their understanding of the constituent elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and to ensure its proper distinction from other criminal offences with similar characteristics.**

During October 2025, the Police Training Directorate of the Logistics Sector and the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings within the Office of the Minister organised a Course on the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings at the Avala Training Centre in Belgrade²⁰.

The programme was designed to provide participants with the knowledge and practical skills necessary for the effective performance of police duties in this field. As part of the course, a training module entitled "The Normative Framework for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Its Essential Elements" was delivered.

In addition, at workshops organised by the Criminal Police Directorate with the support of the EU4FAST project in Sokobanja and Arandelovac, participants were introduced to the distinguishing features between the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants. This topic was also covered as a separate training module within the compulsory course "The Concept of Trafficking in Human Beings, Its Identification and the Police Response to the Criminal Offence of Trafficking in Human Beings", delivered during 2025.

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office indicated that, during 2025, the most significant challenges in the correct interpretation of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings concerned the interpretation of the concept of abuse of a position of vulnerability, the means of commission of the offence, deception or maintaining a person in deception, as well as differing interpretations of the concept of recruitment in the practice of public prosecutor's offices and courts.

At the same time, insufficient understanding was identified regarding the relevance of the victim's consent to exploitation within the meaning of Article 388(10) of the Criminal Code, when any of the legally prescribed means of committing the offence has been used. According to the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, the incorrect interpretation of these concepts may result in trafficking in human beings not being recognised or in the reclassification of the offence as another criminal offence, most commonly procuring for prostitution or neglect and abuse of a minor.

These issues were addressed during specialised training for public prosecutors serving as contact persons for cases involving trafficking in human beings, as well as through activities of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office aimed at monitoring and guiding the work of public prosecutor's offices in order to promote consistent practice and the proper application of substantive criminal law.

Of particular significance is the fact that, during the reporting period, the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was reclassified in relation to 14 persons as other criminal offences.

In January 2025, the Atina association organised a round table entitled "Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Trafficking in Human Beings and Prostitution in the Republic of Serbia", with the

²⁰ The course was attended by 14 police officers of the Ministry of the Interior who perform, or are expected to perform, duties related to the detection, prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings.

support of the Permanent Mission of the French Republic to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Vienna. The event was attended by 35 representatives of the police, the judiciary, the social welfare system and relevant associations.

The event presented an analysis of the reclassification of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, with particular emphasis on the relationship between prostitution and trafficking in human beings. Discussions focused on the reasons leading to reclassification, the situation of women in prostitution, different models for the legal regulation of prostitution, and measures to improve the identification and prosecution of cases of sexual exploitation.

The publication "The Illusion of Choice: Who (Really) Chooses and Who Pays the Price? – An Analysis of Gender Inequality, Sexual Exploitation and Legal Challenges in Contemporary Society" was also presented²¹.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during 2025, activities were undertaken to improve the understanding of the statutory elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and its distinction from related criminal offences. It is particularly significant that specialised training and expert events addressed specific issues arising in practice, including the concepts of recruitment, abuse of a position of vulnerability, deception and maintaining a person in deception, as well as the significance of the victim's consent to exploitation.

Given that relevant training and professional activities have been carried out, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, regular and mandatory specialised training should be provided for police officers, public prosecutors and judges, based on specific cases and analyses of judicial and prosecutorial practice. In addition, uniform practical guidelines should be developed on the interpretation of the statutory elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and its distinction from related criminal offences, accompanied by monitoring of the reasons for and outcomes of every reclassification.

- **Mandatory continuous training programmes should be introduced to incorporate new methods and techniques for the identification and investigation of cases involving trafficking in human beings.**

The Ministry of the Interior stated that the Course Programme on the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings includes new methods and techniques for the identification and investigation of cases involving trafficking in human beings. Police officers were also introduced to new methods and practices during workshops organised by the Criminal Police Directorate as part of Activity 1.2.2 of the Action Plan, relating to the continuous preparation of the annual analysis of the operational capacities of the police and public prosecutor's offices for investigating the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, in accordance with new trends and European best practice.

The 2025 Professional Development Programme for Police Officers of the Ministry of the Interior included compulsory theoretical training entitled "The Concept of Trafficking in Human Beings, Its Identification and the Police Response to the Criminal Offence of Trafficking in Human Beings", as well as seminars entitled "Identification of Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human

²¹Analysis prepared within the framework of the project "Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Trafficking in Human Beings and Prostitution in Serbia".

Beings among the Migrant Population" and "Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings".

In order to ensure the continuation of training, the 2026 Professional Development Programme for Police Officers was adopted²², again providing for compulsory theoretical training on the identification of and police response to cases involving trafficking in human beings, together with a seminar on the identification of potential victims among the migrant population.

In the first quarter of 2026, the Criminal Police Directorate, the Service for Combating Organised Crime and the Department for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants organised the workshop "Improving Criminal Investigation Practice Based on the Analysis of Pre-Investigation Proceedings in Cases involving trafficking in human beings, with Particular reference to Developments in Digital Investigations and Financial Investigations"²³.

In accordance with the programme of the Judicial Academy, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office participated during 2025 in the organisation of four one-day seminars devoted to the application of the principle of the non-punishment of victims of trafficking in human beings and one two-day workshop on strengthening the response to trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

In addition to these training activities, numerous expert events were organised in cooperation with international organisations, projects and associations, covering special investigative measures, financial and digital investigations, the dismantling of criminal networks, the position of victims in criminal proceedings, communication with potential victims, the criminal liability of legal persons, child trafficking, and international and regional cooperation.

Within the framework of the EU4FAST project, a two-day workshop on the application of special investigative measures and financial investigations in trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling cases was held in Arandelovac in January 2025. In March 2025, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) organised a two-day training course in Niš on conducting digital investigations, while the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) organised a regional training course on advanced digital investigation techniques in cases involving trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.

The ASTRA association organised a discussion forum on the status and rights of victims of trafficking in human beings in criminal proceedings, while the Atina association organised the seminar "Neuroscience in the Service of Investigation and Interviewing – Communication with Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings".

In cooperation with the GIZ, the Ministry of the Interior organised a round table in June 2025 dedicated to the criminal liability of legal persons²⁴.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the fact that, during 2025, numerous training activities and expert events were organised covering contemporary methods and techniques for the identification and investigation of cases involving trafficking in human beings, particularly in the

²² Programme adopted on 11 February 2026.

²³ The workshop was organised with the support of the GIZ within the framework of the EU4FAST project and was attended by 32 representatives of the Criminal Police and Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices.

²⁴ The round table was attended by 25 representatives of public prosecutor's offices, the police, the Serbian Association of Employers, the Public Procurement Office, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, and the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia.

areas of digital and financial investigations, special investigative measures, communication with victims and the criminal liability of legal persons.

It is also welcome that trafficking in human beings has been included in the professional development programmes for police officers for 2025 and 2026, demonstrating a degree of continuity in training.

In view of the number and thematic relevance of the activities implemented, as well as the inclusion of these topics in the professional development programmes, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has been implemented.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of the Interior and the Judicial Academy should continue to deliver mandatory and periodic professional development programmes for police officers, public prosecutors and judges on new methods and techniques for identifying and investigating cases involving trafficking in human beings, including digital and financial investigations and special investigative measures, while also assessing the knowledge acquired and monitoring its application in specific cases.

- **The number of public prosecutors dealing with the investigation and prosecution of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings should be increased.**

In accordance with the activity envisaged under the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2026 Period, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office increased the number of public prosecutors designated as contact persons for trafficking in human beings and trafficking in minors for the purpose of adoption cases. During 2025, 38 public prosecutors were designated as contact persons, thereby achieving the target set out in the Action Plan.

The National Rapporteur welcomes the increase in the number of public prosecutors designated as contact persons and the achievement of the target value. A network of 38 contact persons has the potential to improve territorial coverage, facilitate faster information exchange, promote greater consistency in practice and enhance the effectiveness of criminal prosecution in cases involving trafficking in human beings.

In addition to maintaining the current number of contact persons, it is necessary to ensure their continuous specialisation, the regular exchange of experience and the systematic monitoring of the results of their work.

Given that the number of contact persons has been increased and that the target established by the Action Plan has been achieved, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has been implemented.

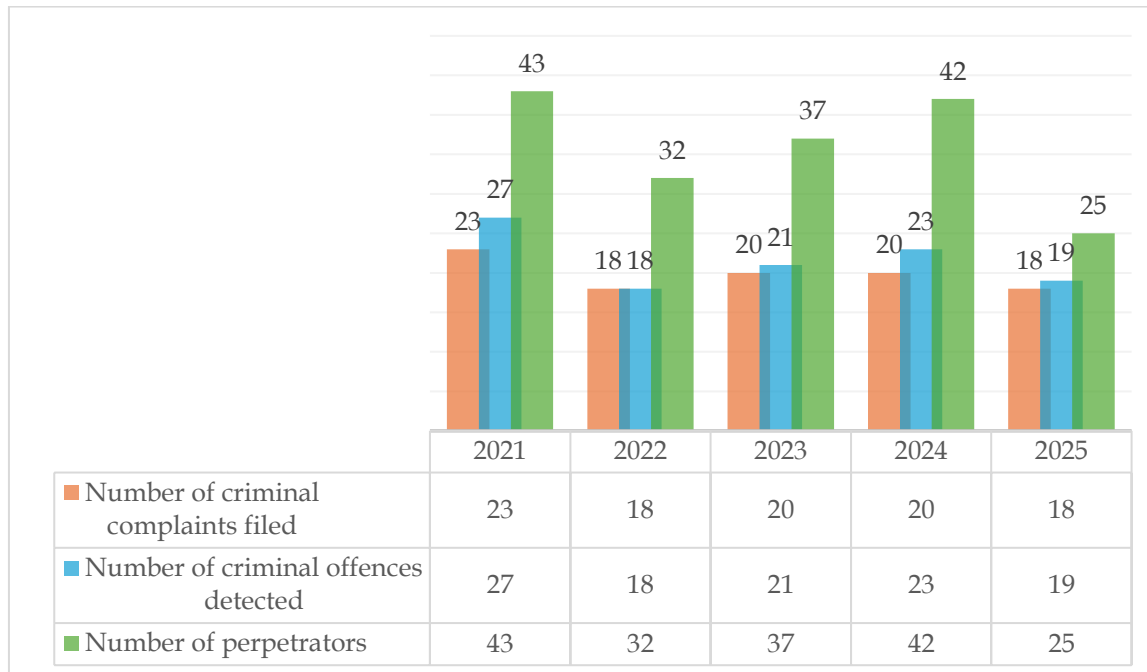
In the forthcoming period, data should be collected on the number of public prosecutors directly handling these cases, the number of cases assigned to each prosecutor, territorial coverage, the continuity of their engagement, and the impact of the network of contact persons on the quality and effectiveness of criminal prosecution.

5.2 Investigation and Prosecution

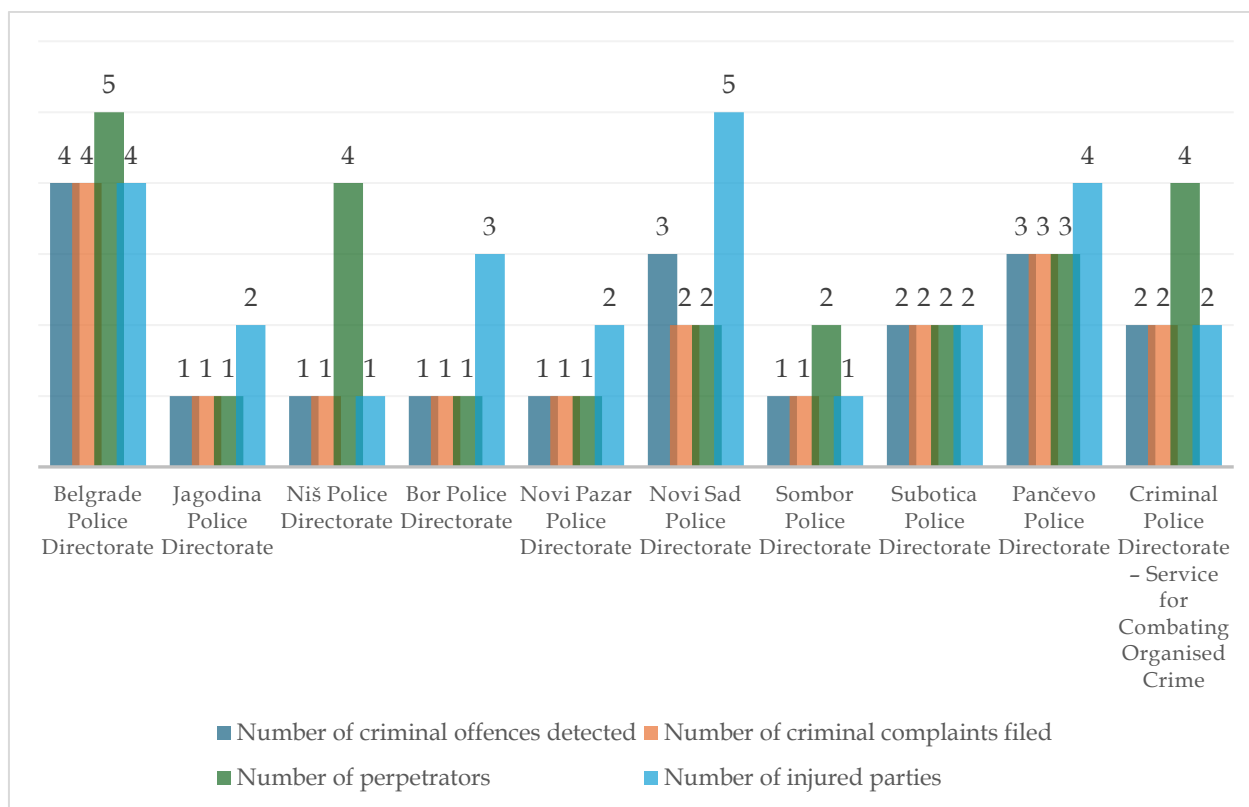
5.2.1 Ministry of the Interior

During the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025, police officers of the Criminal Police Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia detected a total of 19 criminal offences of trafficking in human beings and filed 18 criminal complaints against 25 persons for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code. A total of 26 injured parties were identified in connection with the criminal offences covered by the criminal complaints filed.

During the reporting period, the Department for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants within the Service for Combating Organised Crime of the Criminal Police Directorate filed two criminal complaints against four persons. Of these, one criminal complaint was submitted to the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime against three persons acting as an organised criminal group.



Number of criminal complaints filed, detected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings and perpetrators over the past five years, according to the records of the Ministry of the Interior



Number of detected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings, criminal complaints filed, perpetrators and injured parties during 2025, by the Police Directorate and the Service for Combating Organised Crime

The highest number of criminal offences was detected within the jurisdiction of the Belgrade Police Directorate, where four criminal offences were detected and four criminal complaints were filed against five persons, while four persons had the status of injured parties.

Within the jurisdiction of the Pančevo Police Directorate, three criminal offences were detected and three criminal complaints were filed against three persons, with four injured parties recorded. The Novi Sad Police Directorate detected three criminal offences and filed two criminal complaints against two persons, while five injured parties were recorded in those cases. Within the jurisdiction of the Subotica Police Directorate, two criminal offences were detected and two criminal complaints were filed against two persons, with two injured parties.

One criminal offence was detected within the jurisdictions of the Jagodina, Niš, Bor, Novi Pazar and Sombor Police Directorates. The Jagodina Police Directorate filed one criminal complaint against one person, while two persons were identified as injured parties. The Niš Police Directorate filed one criminal complaint against four persons, with one injured party. Within the jurisdiction of the Bor Police Directorate, one criminal complaint covered one person, while three persons were identified as injured parties. The Novi Pazar Police Directorate filed one criminal complaint against one person, with two injured parties. The Sombor Police Directorate filed one criminal complaint against two persons, while one person had the status of an injured party.

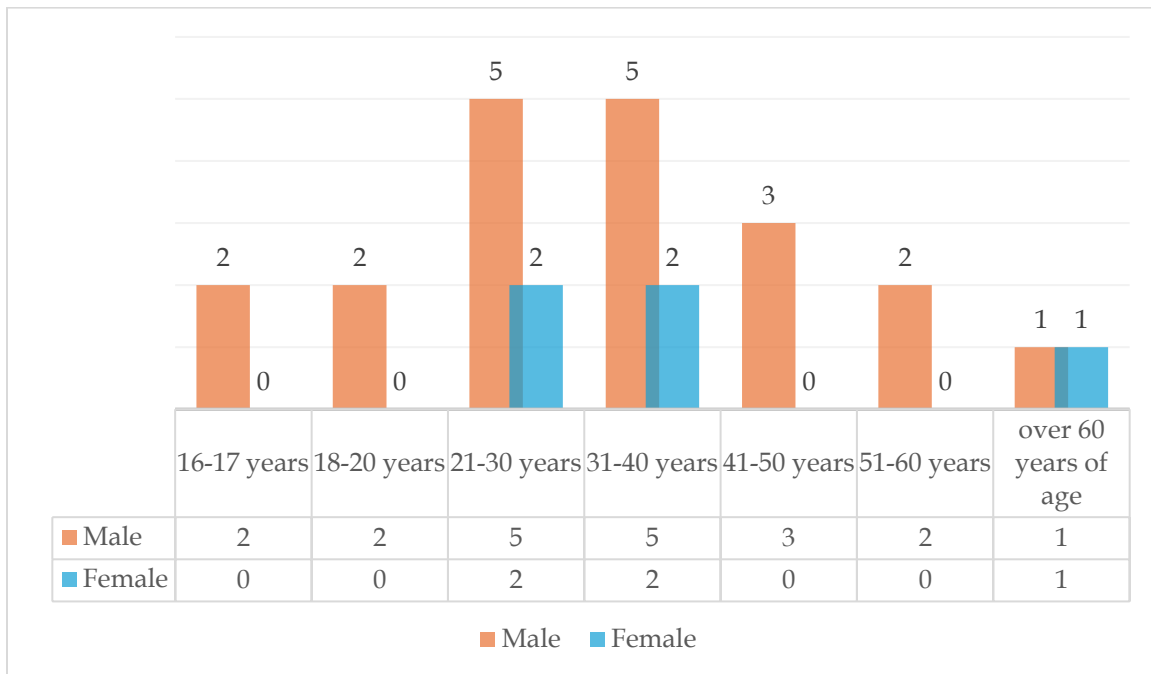
Analysed in terms of the forms of the criminal offence under Article 388 of the Criminal Code, the criminal complaints comprised nine offences under paragraph 1, five offences under paragraph 3, four offences under paragraph 6, and one offence under paragraph 7 of that Article.

5.2.1.1 Data on Reported Perpetrators

All 25 persons reported during 2025 for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings were nationals of the Republic of Serbia. Of the reported perpetrators, 20 were male and five were female.

Perpetrators			
Citizenship	Male	Female	Total
Republic of Serbia	20	5	25

Perpetrators during 2025, disaggregated by nationality and sex, according to the records of the Ministry of the Interior



Age and sex distribution of perpetrators of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings during 2025, according to the records of the Ministry of the Interior

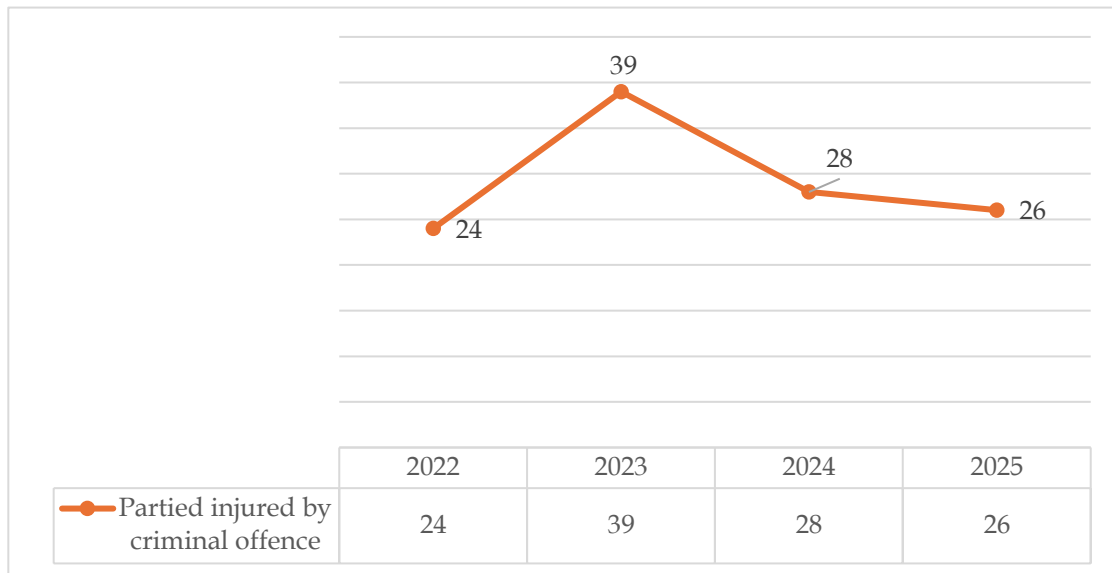
Analysed by age, the reported perpetrators included two juveniles aged 16–17, two persons aged 18–20, seven persons aged 21–30, seven persons aged 31–40, three persons aged 41–50, two persons aged 51–60, and two persons over the age of 60.

Of the 20 reported male perpetrators, two were aged 16–17, two were aged 18–20, five were aged 21–30, five were aged 31–40, three were aged 41–50, two were aged 51–60, and one was over 60 years of age.

Of the five reported female perpetrators, two were aged 21–30, two were aged 31–40, and one was over 60 years of age.

5.2.1.2 Data on Injured Parties

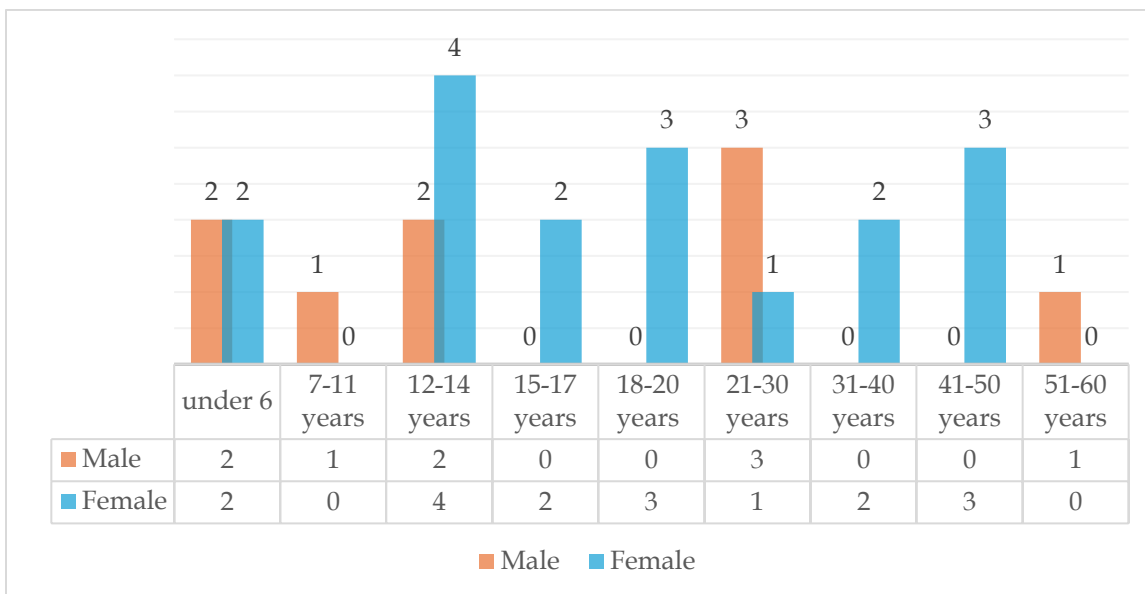
A total of 26 persons were identified as injured parties in connection with the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings during 2025. Of these, 24 were nationals of the Republic of Serbia, one was a national of the Republic of India, and one was a national of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Among the injured parties, nine were male and 17 were female.



Number of injured parties in the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings covered by criminal complaints filed by the Ministry of the Interior during the last four years

Citizenship	Total
Republic of Serbia	24
India	1
Uzbekistan	1
Total	26

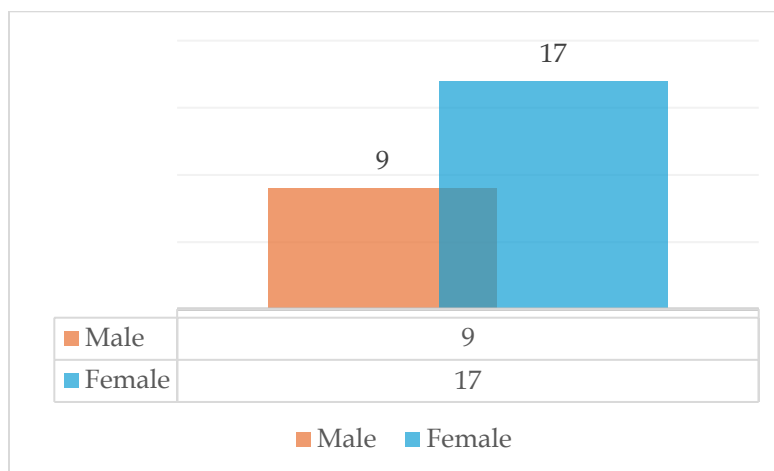
Nationality of injured parties in the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings covered by criminal complaints filed by the Ministry of the Interior during 2025



Age and sex distribution of injured parties covered by criminal complaints filed by the Ministry of the Interior during 2025

Analysed in terms of age, the injured parties included four children aged up to six years, one child aged 7–11 years, six children aged 12–14 years, two minors aged 15–17 years, three persons aged 18–20 years, four persons aged 21–30 years, two persons aged 31–40 years, three persons aged 41–50 years, and one person aged 51–60 years.

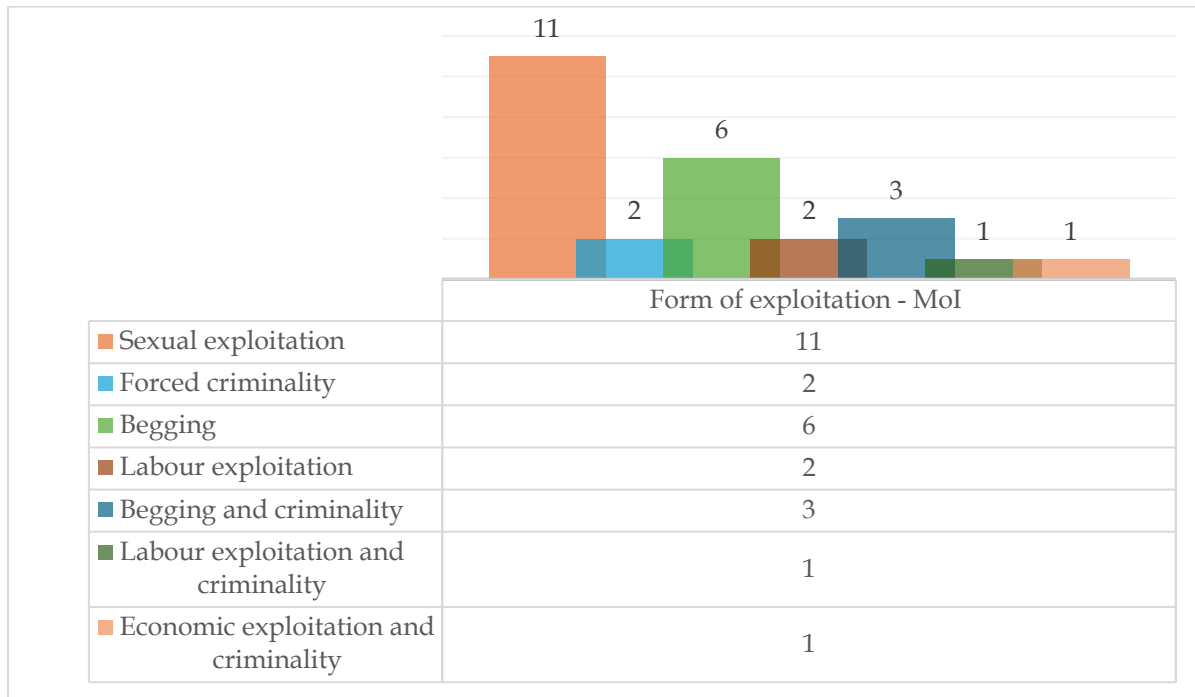
Of the total of 26 injured parties, 13 were minors and 13 were adults. Among the male injured parties, five were minors and four were adults, while among the female injured parties, eight were minors and nine were adults.



Sex of injured parties in the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings covered by criminal complaints filed by the Ministry of the Interior during 2025

5.2.1.3 Forms of Exploitation

The most prevalent form of exploitation in the criminal offences detected by the police was sexual exploitation, to which 11 female victims were subjected, comprising five minors aged 14–18 years and six adult women.



Forms of exploitation in detected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings during 2025, according to the records of the Ministry of the Interior

Six persons were exploited through forced begging, namely three boys under the age of 14, one adult man, and two girls under the age of 14.

Two boys under the age of 14 were exploited for the purpose of criminal activities, while two adult men were subjected to labour exploitation.

Three female victims were subjected to multiple forms of exploitation, involving forced begging and exploitation for criminal activities. These comprised one female minor aged 14–18 years and two adult women. One adult man was simultaneously subjected to labour exploitation and exploitation for criminal activities, while one adult woman was subjected to economic exploitation and exploitation for criminal activities.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, no analysis of the geographical distribution of the exploitation of victims of trafficking in human beings was carried out during the reporting period. The Criminal Police Directorate has initiated the preparation of such an analysis, which is scheduled for completion by the end of July 2026.

During 2025, no victims in the recorded cases involving trafficking in human beings were exploited abroad.

During the reporting period, no criminal offences of trafficking in minors for the purpose of adoption under Article 389 of the Criminal Code were recorded.

5.2.1.4 Protection of Victims during Investigations and Criminal Proceedings

The Ministry of the Interior reported that, during the reporting period, it undertook measures and activities aimed at protecting victims and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings.

Cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings was based on joint action in the detection of injured parties and their identification as victims of trafficking in human beings. Such action was carried out in accordance with the Instruction on the Conduct of Employees of the Ministry of the Interior in Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings.

During the reporting period, no victim of trafficking in human beings was granted the status of a protected witness, which would have required the involvement of the Ministry of the Interior in accordance with the law governing the protection of participants in criminal proceedings.

5.2.1.5 Analysis of the Effectiveness of Investigations and Operational Capacities

The Criminal Police Directorate, namely the Department for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants, carried out an analysis of the operational capacities of the Criminal Police.²⁵

The analysis established that a reactive model of policing predominated during the reporting period. The substantiation of the criminal offence relied to a significant extent on material and technical evidence, while prior operational case development and the independent collection of initial intelligence were considerably less prevalent. The success of the investigations largely depended on the quality and availability of material evidence.

Criminal investigations were fragmented and predominantly based on traditional operational and procedural measures, with limited use of modern investigative techniques. Only a small number of investigations were initiated without initial information obtained directly from the victim, while criminal intelligence work aimed at independently detecting criminal activities related to trafficking in human beings was only conducted in a limited number of cases.

Although proactive policing was present, it was applied to a significantly lesser extent and was primarily focused on immediate operational intervention rather than on the systematic collection of information on perpetrators, criminal and organised criminal groups, methods of committing the offence, and other relevant circumstances.

Special investigative measures were used in a very limited number of cases, and the evidence obtained through their use did not play a predominant role. The most frequently used proactive method was reported to be obtaining telephone communications data.

Digital investigations and financial investigations were insufficiently represented. According to the Ministry's assessment, the lack of human resources and appropriate technical conditions significantly limited both proactive and reactive investigations.

²⁵Within Activity 1.2.2 of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2026 Period, relating to the continuous preparation of the annual analysis of the operational capacities of the police and public prosecution service for investigating the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, in line with new trends and European best practices.

5.2.1.6 Key Challenges in Investigations and Documentation of Criminal Offences

The Ministry of the Interior identified the most common challenges in detecting and documenting criminal offences of trafficking in human beings as the use of encrypted communications by perpetrators and difficulties in monitoring online activities and digital platforms. It also pointed to difficulties in proving the intent to exploit.

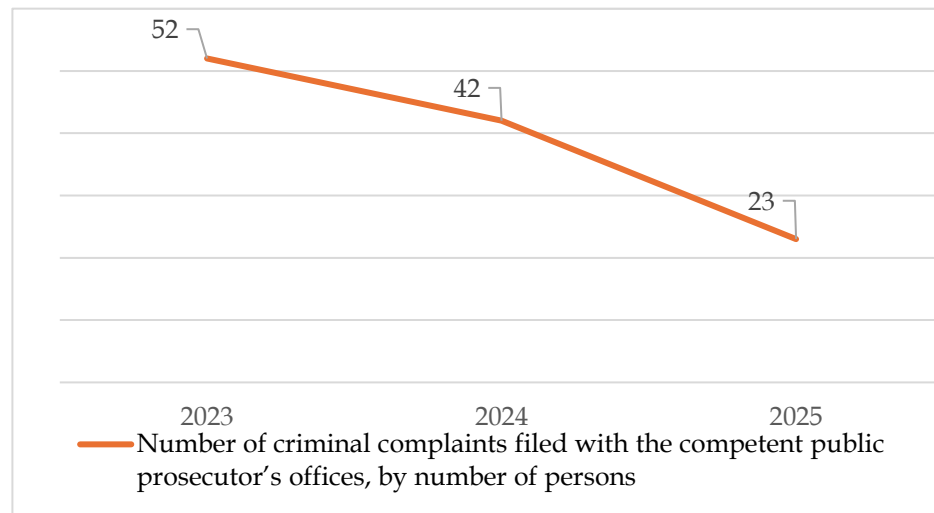
The Ministry stated that additional human and technical resources are needed to ensure more effective investigations, criminal prosecution, and adjudication of cases involving trafficking in human beings.

There is also a need for additional resources, specialised equipment, and training for police officers across different regions, with the need to strengthen capacities being particularly pronounced in regional police directorates outside the capital.

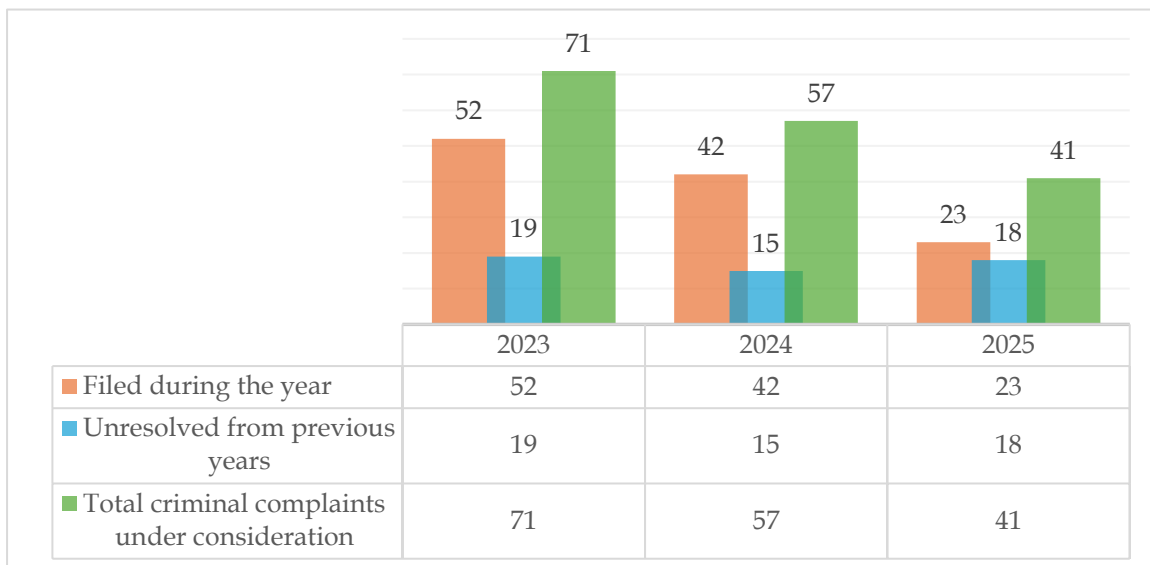
According to the Ministry, the development of new methodologies and strategic measures for more effective detection and prevention of trafficking in human beings is planned in accordance with the provisions of the new law.

5.2.2 Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office informed the National Rapporteur that, during 2025, criminal complaints were filed with public prosecutor's offices against 23 persons, which, compared with 2024, when criminal complaints were filed against 42 persons, represents a decrease of 45.24%.



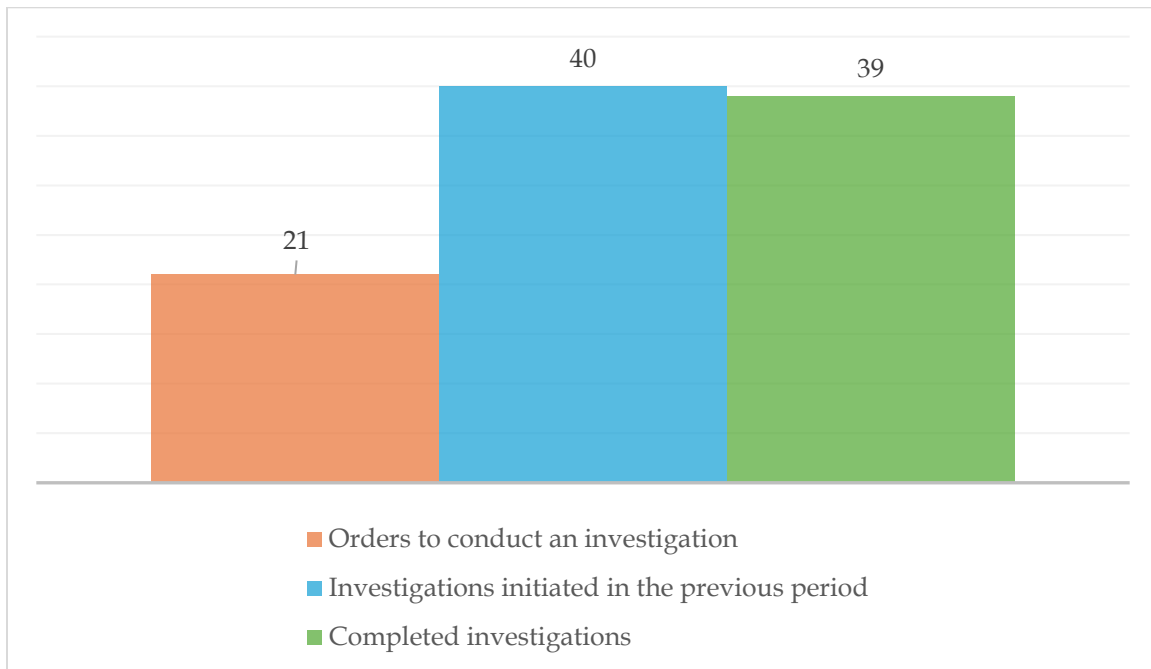
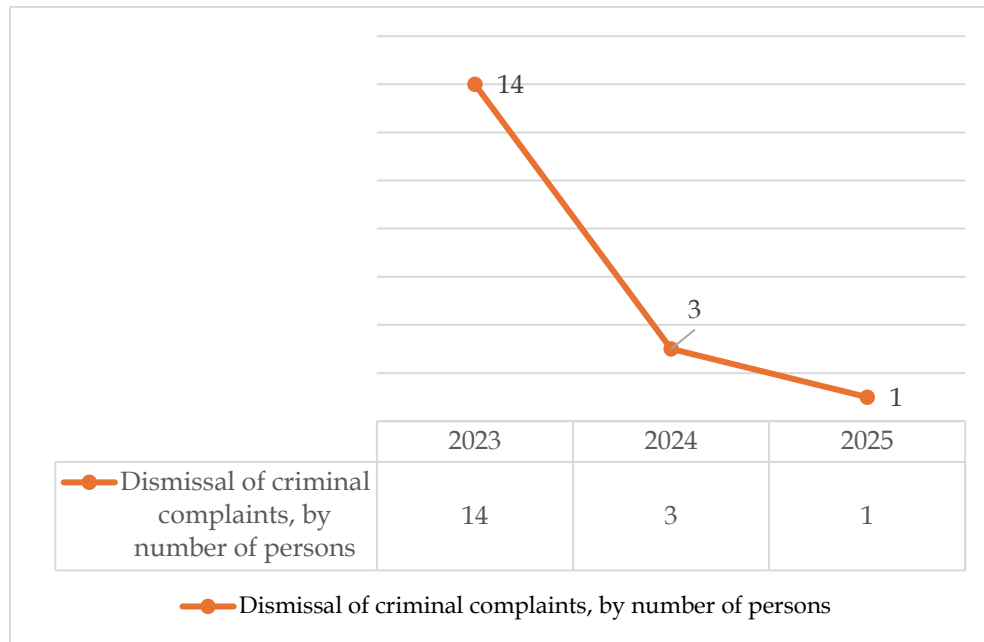
During the reporting period, public prosecutor's offices also dealt with criminal complaints filed in the previous period against 18 persons, bringing the total number of persons against whom criminal complaints were being processed to 41.



Criminal complaints being processed, by number of reported persons, in 2023, 2024 and 2025

A decision dismissing the criminal complaint was issued in respect of one reported person. During the reporting period, orders to conduct an investigation were issued against 21 persons.

In addition, proceedings continued in investigations initiated in the previous period against 40 suspects.



Number of orders to conduct an investigation issued during 2025, number of investigations initiated in the previous period, and number of investigations concluded during 2025, by number of persons

Orders concluding the investigation were issued against 29 suspects, while investigations against 10 suspects were discontinued. Investigations against 21 persons are still ongoing.

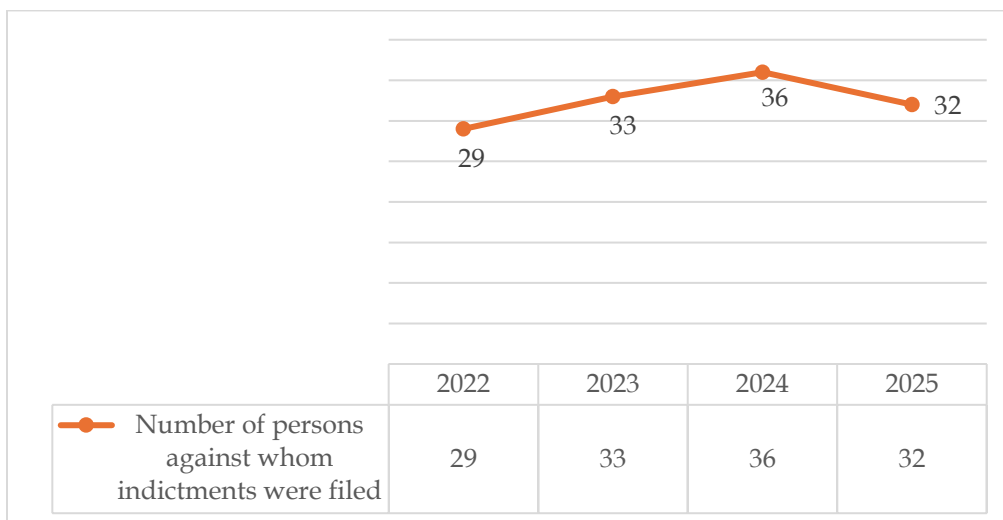
During the reporting period, criminal complaints were filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime against three persons for this criminal offence.

As regards the regions of the Republic of Serbia in which a higher incidence of criminal offences of trafficking in human beings was recorded, an analysis of statistical data showed that criminal complaints against nine persons were filed with higher public prosecutor's offices within the territorial jurisdiction of the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, against five persons with higher public prosecutor's offices within the territorial jurisdiction of the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, against four persons with higher public prosecutor's offices within the territorial jurisdiction of the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš, and against two persons with higher public prosecutor's offices within the territorial jurisdiction of the Appellate Public Prosecutor's Office in Kragujevac.

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office informed the National Rapporteur that no new forms of exploitation were identified in cases involving trafficking in human beings during the reporting period. It was also indicated that, according to the available statistical data, sexual exploitation remains the most prevalent form of exploitation, while the trend of an increasing number of criminal offences of trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation continues.

According to information provided by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, no changes in the profiles of perpetrators and victims were observed during the reporting period compared with the data collected by the public prosecution service.

During the reporting period, indictments were filed against 32 suspects.



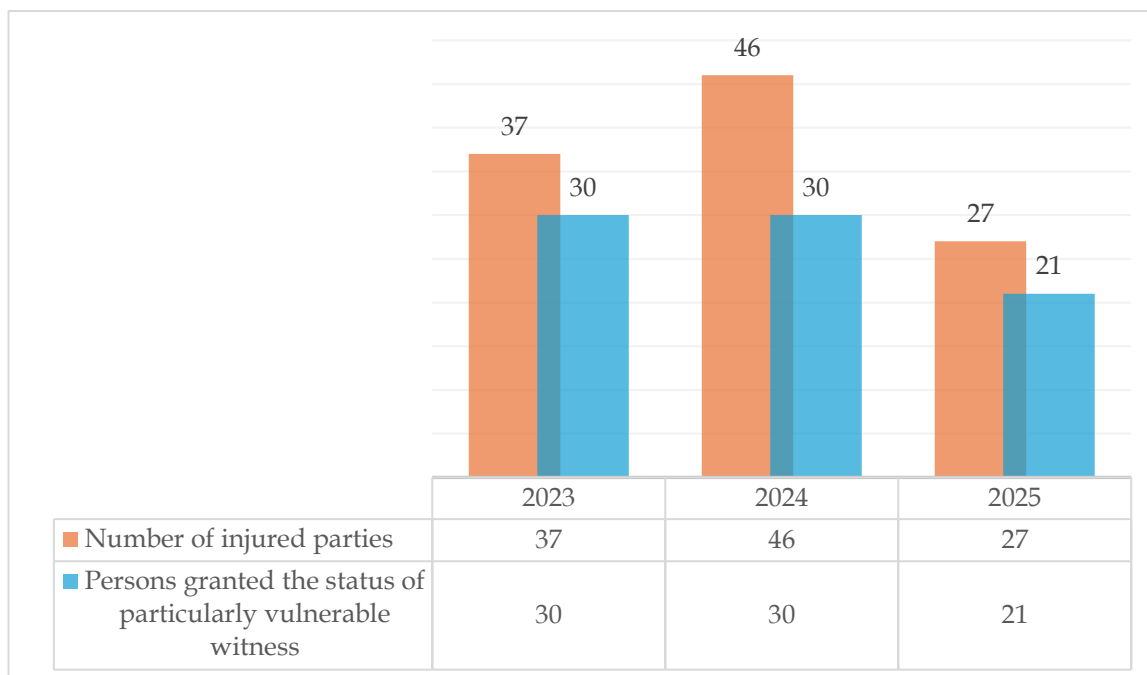
Number of persons against whom indictments were filed during the last four years

By the end of 2025, no first-instance judgments had been rendered in respect of 25 persons indicted during the reporting period and 75 persons indicted in previous periods.

Plea agreements were concluded with three defendants. The plea agreements concluded did not include compensation for victims.

During the reporting period, the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was reclassified as another criminal offence in respect of 14 persons.

According to data provided by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, 27 persons were identified as injured parties in relation to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings in cases for which criminal complaints were filed during 2025. The status of a particularly vulnerable witness was granted to 21 injured parties, or in approximately 78% of cases.



Number of persons granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness in relation to the number of injured parties, over the last three years

The effectiveness of investigations and criminal prosecution for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings is monitored through reports submitted by public prosecutor's offices on cases in this area. In addition to the data contained in these reports, trends of increases or decreases in the number of criminal complaints filed by the police, injured parties, other competent authorities and institutions are also monitored, as are the procedural actions undertaken by public prosecutor's offices and the outcomes of those actions.

However, as the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office informed the National Rapporteur, no specific evaluation of the impact of investigations and criminal prosecution in the field of trafficking in human beings was conducted during 2025.

5.2.3 Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade stated that, during the reporting period, according to data as at 1 April 2026, five criminal complaints were filed. The criminal complaints concerned nine reported persons.

During the reporting period, five orders to conduct an investigation were issued, while six investigations remained pending. Three investigations were concluded during the reporting

period, following which three indictments were filed against five persons for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code. During the reporting period, a total of five persons were indicted for the aforementioned criminal offence.

As the National Rapporteur was informed, during the reporting period, convictions were handed down against four persons. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade additionally stated that, on 8 April 2026, convictions were handed down against two additional persons, bringing the total number of persons convicted to six. All six persons were sentenced to imprisonment, namely to five years and three months, five years and eight months, five years and two months, six years and three months, and two sentences of five years and six months each.

During the reporting period, no plea agreement was concluded in respect of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code. Victims did not exercise their right to compensation within criminal proceedings but were instead referred to civil proceedings in order to exercise that right.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade has a specially equipped room for interviewing particularly vulnerable witnesses, in which victims of trafficking in human beings also give their statements. This room, the so-called "screen room", is regularly used by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, as well as by the basic public prosecutor's offices within its territorial jurisdiction.

With regard to activities and measures undertaken to protect victims and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings during investigations, criminal prosecution and adjudication, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade stated that it cooperated with a number of competent authorities and organisations, primarily the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as with associations, depending on the circumstances of the individual case.

During the reporting period, there were no cases in which the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was reclassified as another criminal offence.

As the National Rapporteur was informed, no specific activities were undertaken during the reporting period to increase the number of public prosecutors dealing with this area. Until September 2025, three public prosecutors at the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade had been designated as contact points and actively monitored this area, handled cases and cooperated with the competent authorities. Since September 2025, two public prosecutors have been assigned to handle cases involving trafficking in human beings.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade identified as a key challenge the need to empower victims and gain their trust so that they actively participate in the proceedings, provide as much information as possible that may serve as leads in clarifying the specific case, and support the prosecution through their testimony. An additional challenge identified was the need to satisfy the court that the specific circumstances constitute the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings rather than another, less serious criminal offence, particularly in cases where the evidence relies to a significant extent on the statement of the injured party as opposed to that of the defendant. It is particularly important to ensure the consistency and stability of the victim's statement throughout the proceedings, which was recognised as one of the greatest challenges in handling cases involving trafficking in human beings.

During 2025, two criminal complaints of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings were filed with the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia, Novi Sad Police Directorate.

One criminal complaint was filed against a male person for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 6, in conjunction with paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code, for the exploitation of his non-marital partner for the purpose of prostitution. The second criminal complaint was filed against a female person for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 6, in conjunction with paragraphs 3 and 1, of the Criminal Code, for the exploitation of her four minor children for the purpose of begging.

At the beginning of 2025, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad had no unresolved criminal complaints carried over from the previous reporting period; therefore, a total of two criminal complaints were being processed during the year. Neither of these criminal complaints was dismissed.

During the reporting period, orders to conduct an investigation were issued against two persons, while investigations against five persons remained pending from the previous reporting period. Investigations against a total of four persons were concluded. The investigation against one person was discontinued due to insufficient evidence to bring charges, while indictments were filed against three persons.

Indictments were filed against two male persons for the exploitation of two minors, both aged 17, for the purpose of committing criminal offences, as well as against one female person for the exploitation of her four minor children, aged six, eight, 11 and 13, for the purpose of begging.

During the reporting period, no new forms of exploitation were identified in cases involving trafficking in human beings, nor were any changes observed in the profiles of perpetrators or victims compared with previous years.

During 2025, the Higher Court in Novi Sad handed down two convictions against a total of eight perpetrators of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings. In one judgment, seven persons, three female and four male, were convicted of exploiting one adult male for the purpose of begging. They were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of three years and four months, three years and six months, one year, three years, two years and six months, two years, and ten months. Of the aforementioned perpetrators, six persons were convicted of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code, while one person was convicted of aiding and abetting the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 1, in conjunction with Article 35 of the Criminal Code.

In the second conviction, one male person was convicted of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 6, in conjunction with paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code, for the labour exploitation of five male victims. The convicted person was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and, as an ancillary penalty, a fine of RSD 200,000. A security measure prohibiting him from approaching and communicating with the injured parties for a period of three years was also imposed, and the proceeds obtained through the criminal offence were confiscated.

The two criminal complaints concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code involved a total of five injured parties, who were granted the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses ex officio. They were interviewed in a special room at the Higher Court in Novi Sad using technical equipment for the transmission of image and sound,

without the other participants in the proceedings being present in the room in which the victims were located during the interview. In this way, the victims were afforded protection under criminal procedure.

Unlike the Higher Court in Novi Sad, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad still does not have dedicated premises and technical equipment for interviewing particularly vulnerable witnesses. In addition to granting victims of trafficking in human beings the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses, following the filing of an indictment, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad also proposed that the court exclude the public from the main hearing in order to protect the privacy of victims of trafficking in human beings.

During the reporting period, no challenges were identified in the proper understanding of the constituent elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings or in distinguishing it from other criminal offences. Furthermore, there were no cases in which the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad reclassified the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings as another criminal offence.

For the purpose of detecting criminal offences and collecting evidence, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, in accordance with its statutory role as the authority in charge of pre-investigation proceedings, cooperated with the Novi Sad Police Directorate. The Police Directorate informed the public prosecutor designated as the contact point for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings of the actions and measures undertaken.

During investigations, cooperation was maintained with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings for the purpose of obtaining the Centre's expert report on the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as in scheduling and organising interviews with victims, which were attended by professionals from the Centre. In cases where the victims were minors, cooperation was also maintained with the competent social welfare centres, both with regard to obtaining the Centre's expert report and with regard to scheduling and organising interviews with victims, which were attended by professionals from the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad assessed the quality of cooperation with the aforementioned authorities and institutions as being at a high level and stated that mutual expectations had been met. During the reporting period, there was no international cooperation in cases involving trafficking in human beings.

At the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad, two public prosecutors have been designated to handle cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

The exchange of information with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings proceeded without difficulties. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad informed the Centre about all the proceedings initiated in connection with the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and of the dates scheduled for interviewing particularly vulnerable witnesses. At the Centre's request, all necessary information on the course and outcome of the proceedings was provided. For its part, the Centre informed the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad in writing of the initiated procedures for the identification of potential victims of trafficking in human beings within the territorial jurisdiction of that prosecutor's office.

During investigations and criminal prosecution for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings in 2025, there were no particular challenges, nor was there any shortage of resources affecting the efficiency of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad.

During the reporting period, four criminal complaints concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code were filed with the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo, involving five persons. At the beginning of the reporting period, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo had no unresolved criminal complaints from the previous year. Following the evidentiary actions undertaken, none of the criminal complaints were dismissed.

During the reporting period, four orders to conduct an investigation were issued, while at the beginning of the reporting period, there was one pending investigation from the previous year. One investigation was concluded during the reporting period and, following the issuance of the order concluding the investigation, an indictment was filed against one person. One person was indicted for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code. During the reporting period, no plea agreements were concluded.

During the reporting period, six persons were injured parties in the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings. Three victims were granted the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses, of whom two were granted this status by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo and one by the Higher Court in Pančevo. Measures were undertaken to prevent secondary victimisation, enable the victim's active participation in the proceedings and ensure that the victim was interviewed without the perpetrator being present. Victims were also provided with legal assistance in the form of court-appointed legal representatives.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo does not have a dedicated room or technology enabling victims of trafficking in human beings to testify via video link, and no activities aimed at equipping such a room were undertaken during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, there were no cases in which the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was reclassified as another criminal offence. At the same time, increased specialisation of the authorities involved in prosecuting the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was observed, as was the more frequent granting of particularly vulnerable witness status to victims by the public prosecution service.

In addition to improvements in the detection and prosecution of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo pointed out that victims still frequently do not report the criminal offence due to fear of or dependence on the perpetrators. Another significant challenge identified was that the victim's statement is often the principal evidence in the proceedings, while victims may change their statements during the proceedings due to fear. The need to improve forensic procedures and cooperation with certain stakeholders was also highlighted.

The key challenges in prosecuting the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings arise from the very nature of this criminal offence. Victims are often not recognised as victims, but rather as migrants, perpetrators of criminal offences or persons engaged in prostitution. Cultural and language barriers, fear of retaliation, psychological trauma and distrust of institutions pose additional difficulties.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pančevo stated that the establishment of multidisciplinary teams would be of great importance for the more effective prosecution of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of the Interior filed two criminal complaints with the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Subotica against two adults for the criminal offence of

trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code. Compared with the previous reporting period, the same number of criminal complaints was filed, although the criminal complaints concerned one fewer person.

During the reporting period, no criminal complaints were dismissed concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code. Following the criminal complaints filed, two cases were opened at the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Subotica, in which orders to conduct investigations were issued against two adults. In addition, two investigations dating from 2024 were being processed during the reporting period.

A total of four investigations were concluded. Of the two investigations initiated during the reporting period, in one case, an indictment was filed against the defendant for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code, while in the other case, a plea agreement was concluded with the defendant for the criminal offence of a violation of employment rights under Article 163 of the Criminal Code. During the plea negotiations, the defendant compensated the injured party for the amount of unpaid wages.

With regard to the two investigations initiated in the previous period and concluded during the reporting period, plea agreements were concluded with the defendants. Plea agreements were concluded with two defendants for the criminal offence of neglect and abuse of a minor, committed as co-perpetrators, under Article 193, paragraph 1, in conjunction with Article 33 of the Criminal Code, while plea agreements were concluded with two defendants for the criminal offence of procuring and facilitating sexual intercourse under Article 183, paragraph 2, of the Criminal Code.

The criminal complaints filed during the reporting period concerned labour exploitation and practices similar to slavery, while the criminal complaints filed in the previous period concerned sexual exploitation.

During the reporting period, one person was indicted for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 3, in conjunction with paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code, pursuant to an indictment filed by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Subotica. The proceedings in question were not concluded by a first-instance judgment.

The National Rapporteur was informed that, during the reporting period, the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was reclassified as other criminal offences in three criminal proceedings, namely in two proceedings dating from 2024 and one proceeding from 2025, in the manner described above.

During the reporting period, two persons were injured parties in the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code. One victim was granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness during the reporting period.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Subotica has equipment for the transmission of image and sound, which is used when interviewing witnesses.

During the reporting period, the number of public prosecutors designated as contact points for handling cases involving trafficking in human beings was increased, so that two public prosecutors at the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Subotica were designated as contact points for trafficking in human beings.

During the reporting period, one person was found guilty at first instance of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to three

years' imprisonment. By the same judgment, the defendant was also subjected to a security measure prohibiting him from approaching and communicating with the injured party under Article 89a of the Criminal Code, for a period of three years.

By the same judgment, the injured party was awarded a property claim in the amount of RSD 800,000 as compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The case concerned a criminal complaint filed in 2023, following which, after the investigation had been conducted, the defendant was indicted in 2024.

Such an approach constitutes good practice, as it enables a victim of trafficking in human beings to exercise the right to compensation within the criminal proceedings, without being additionally referred to civil proceedings, which is particularly important in view of the situation of the victims, the duration of the proceedings and the risk of re-victimisation.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Zrenjanin stated that no criminal complaints were received during 2025 for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code.

During the reporting period, investigations against four persons, which had been initiated by orders to conduct investigations issued in previous years, were concluded. Following the completion of the investigations, indictments were filed against all four persons for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code.

During the reporting period, criminal proceedings remained ongoing against 15 persons on the basis of indictments for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code, namely against 11 persons under indictments filed in the previous period and against four persons under indictments filed during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, no plea agreements were concluded. Furthermore, there were no new injured parties in relation to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings. However, proceedings from the previous period involved six injured parties who had been granted the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Zrenjanin is equipped with technology enabling victims of trafficking in human beings to testify via audio-video link and has a dedicated room for that purpose. The equipment is regularly used in proceedings before this prosecutor's office.

During the reporting period, the number of contact persons designated for cases involving trafficking in human beings was increased, so that two public prosecutors at the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Zrenjanin are now designated as contact persons for this criminal offence.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, one criminal complaint was filed for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code, together with one supplement to that criminal complaint covering one additional person. The criminal complaint and its supplement concerned a total of four persons.

During the reporting period, two criminal complaints were being processed, one from previous years and one filed during the reporting period. One criminal complaint was dismissed due to the death of the suspect, as a circumstance permanently precluding criminal prosecution.

The National Rapporteur was informed that, during the reporting period, one order to conduct an investigation and one order to supplement an investigation were issued, while there were no

unresolved investigations from the previous year. One investigation was concluded, resulting in an indictment against three persons for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 6, of the Criminal Code. The indictment became final and the main hearing is ongoing before the Higher Court in Niš.

During the reporting period, the use of a minor injured party for pornographic purposes was identified as a new form of exploitation compared with previous reporting periods. At the same time, no major deviations were observed in the profiles of perpetrators.

During the reporting period, three persons were indicted for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388, paragraph 6, of the Criminal Code. Five persons were finally convicted of the same criminal offence; in the previous reporting period, for 2024, these persons had been recorded as having been convicted by non-final judgments. There were no acquittals.

The persons finally convicted were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of 13 years and six months, 13 years, six years, 12 years and six months, and eight years. In the case of the person sentenced to 12 years and six months' imprisonment, this was an aggregate sentence imposed for concurrent offences, including the criminal offence of rape. These persons had been recorded in the previous reporting period as having been convicted by non-final judgments.

During the reporting period, two motions to indict and one indictment were pending, with no first-instance judgment rendered. The motions to indict were filed and the indictment was issued during the reporting period.

The National Rapporteur was informed that one plea agreement concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings under Article 388 of the Criminal Code was concluded during the reporting period. The plea agreement did not include compensation for the injured party; compensation will instead be sought in civil proceedings.

During the reporting period, three persons appeared as injured parties in relation to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings. Criminal proceedings based on indictments filed by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš were ongoing in respect of two of them, while proceedings concerning the third person were finally concluded during the reporting period.

One injured party was granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness during the reporting period, while the other injured parties had been granted that status in previous reporting periods. All the injured parties had the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses.

During the reporting period, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš used the equipment of the Higher Court in Niš for the purpose of interviewing particularly vulnerable witnesses.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pirot informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, two persons were sentenced by the Higher Court in Pirot to four years' imprisonment each. Following an appeal by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pirot, the Court of Appeal in Niš rendered a judgment in September 2025 amending the first-instance judgment with regard to sentencing and imposing terms of imprisonment of seven years on each of the convicted persons.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Pirot emphasised that, during the investigations, one of the challenges was securing the technical equipment required for interviewing injured parties. This challenge was overcome by concluding a cooperation agreement with the Home for Children without Parental Care in Niš and obtaining technical equipment on loan.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Šabac stated that, during the reporting period, one court proceeding was finally concluded, resulting in the conviction of one person. A second court proceeding was concluded following the previous quashing of the first-instance judgment, and four persons were convicted in those proceedings. An appeal was lodged against that judgment. There were no acquittals during the reporting period.

In the finally concluded proceedings, one person was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. In the second court proceedings, following the previous quashing of the first-instance judgment, four persons were convicted: one person was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, the second to three years' imprisonment, the third to two years' imprisonment and the fourth to five years' imprisonment.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Šabac does not have its own technology enabling victims to testify via video link from a dedicated room; instead, it uses the equipment and facilities of the Higher Court in Šabac for this purpose. During the reporting period, activities were undertaken, through the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, to equip the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Šabac, and this procedure is still ongoing.

During the reporting period, the number of public prosecutors handling cases involving trafficking in human beings was increased, so that two public prosecutors are now assigned to work in this area.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Jagodina informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, one criminal complaint concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was filed, covering one person.

During the reporting period, a total of one criminal complaint was being processed. One order to conduct an investigation was issued, while four orders to conduct investigations remained pending from an earlier period.

During the reporting period, four investigations were concluded by the filing of indictments, and a total of four persons were indicted.

With regard to judgments rendered in proceedings initiated in earlier periods, two persons were acquitted, while one person was convicted. The convicted person was sentenced to one year and six months' imprisonment and fined RSD 100,000.

There were four injured parties in total. During the reporting period, no person was granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, it dealt with two criminal complaints filed against a total of seven persons, namely against four persons in one case and three persons in the other.

In the case concerning three persons, plea agreements were concluded with two persons during the reporting period. The agreements were accepted by judgments imposing suspended sentences on the defendants, with terms of imprisonment of eight months each, subject to a probation period of two years from the date on which the judgments became final. An indictment was filed against the third person for the criminal offence under Article 388, paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code. No plea agreement was concluded with that person, and the case is currently at the main hearing stage before the Higher Court in Valjevo.

In the case before the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo concerning four persons, the investigation was conducted in relation to the criminal offence under Article 388, paragraph 6, in conjunction with paragraph 3, of the Criminal Code, while the offence was reclassified under Article 388, paragraph 8, of the Criminal Code at a later stage of the proceedings.

In the case concerning four persons, one person has the status of an injured party, while in the other case, one person likewise has the status of an injured party. These injured parties were granted the status of particularly vulnerable witnesses.

The plea agreements did not include compensation for victims.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo stated that it does not have its own technology enabling victims to testify via video link and therefore uses the premises of the Higher Court in Valjevo for this purpose.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo stated that, during the reporting period, no public prosecutor from that Office participated in training aimed at improving understanding of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and its proper distinction from other criminal offences with similar characteristics. The reason given was the workload of public prosecutors arising from their regular duties within the Office, given that the full number of posts provided for in the staffing structure has not been filled since 2023. For the same reasons, the Office did not conduct, organise or participate in training relating to the application of the principle of the non-punishment of victims of trafficking in human beings.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo pointed out that, during the reporting period, challenges arose in connection with the manner in which the Higher Court in Valjevo handled the examination of indictments filed by that Office for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Negotin informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, one criminal complaint was filed for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

Following the criminal complaint, an order to conduct an investigation was issued. Upon the completion of the investigation, an order concluding the investigation was issued, stating that the evidence obtained indicated reasonable grounds to suspect that the criminal offence of procuring for prostitution under Article 184, paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code had been committed.

During the reporting period, the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings was reclassified as the criminal offence of procuring for prostitution. The case concerned one adult female injured party.

A plea agreement was concluded with the defendant. During the investigation, the injured party did not submit a property claim.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Sremska Mitrovica informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, one investigation initiated in an earlier period was concluded by discontinuing the investigation in a case concerning four persons.

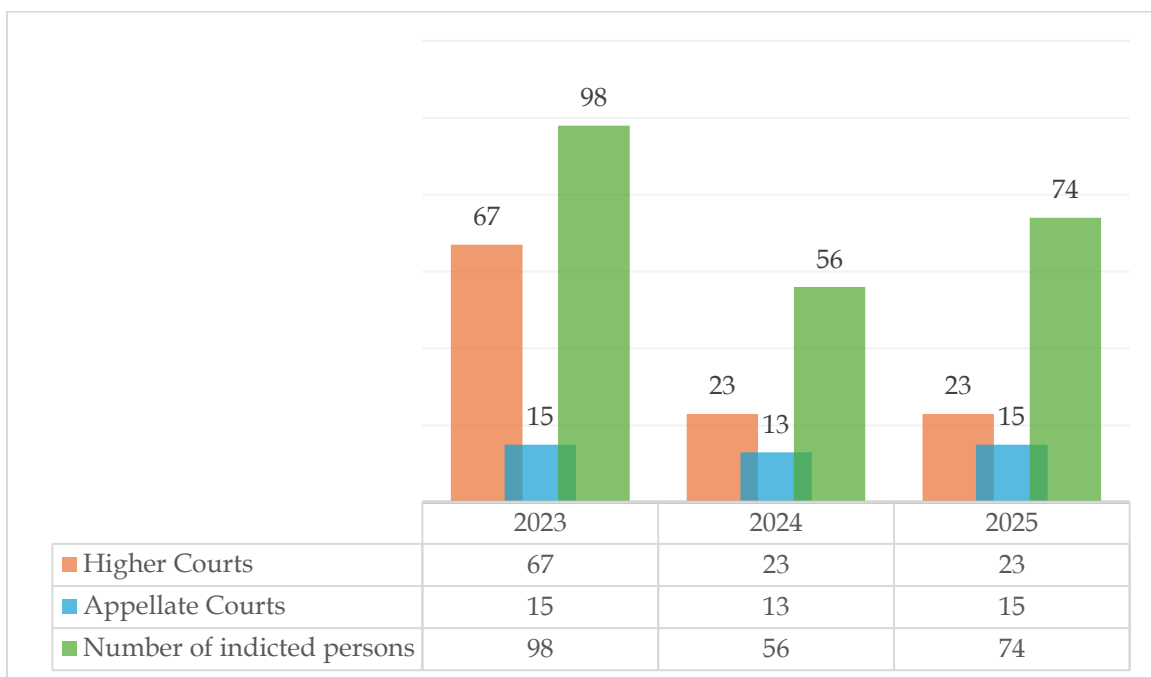
5.3 Judicial Proceedings

During the reporting period, the Higher Courts received a total of 23 cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, while the Courts of Appeal received 15 cases. A total of 33 persons were indicted before the Higher Courts and 41 persons before the Courts of Appeal.

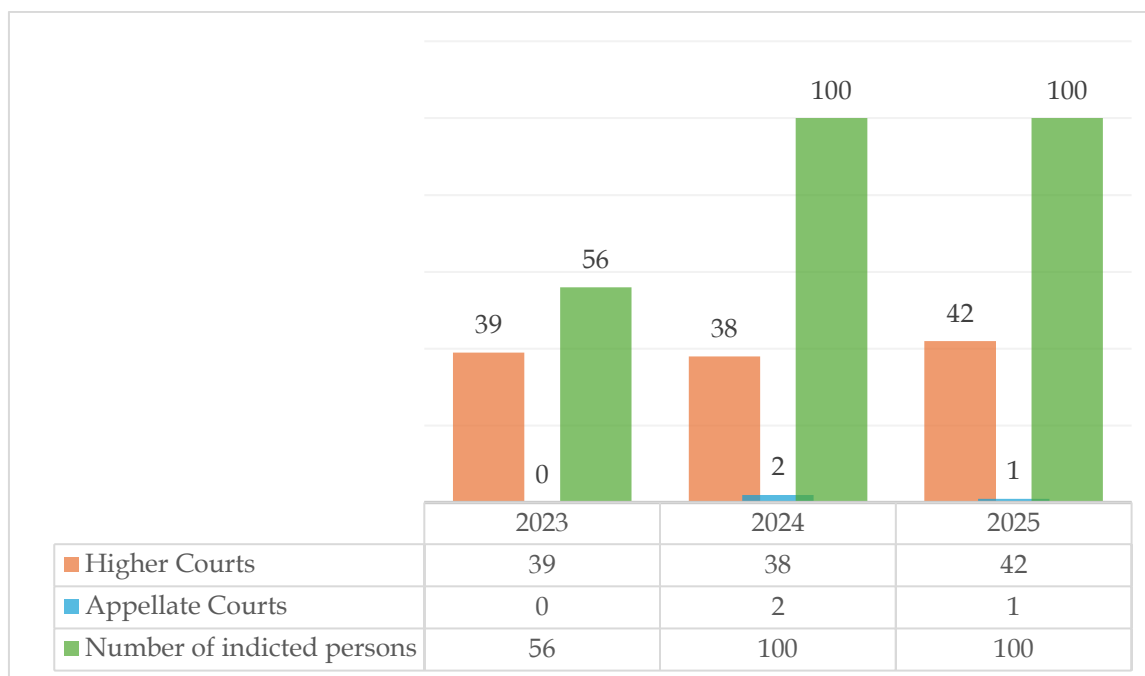
At the beginning of the reporting period, the Higher Courts had 42 unresolved cases involving 99 indicted persons, while the Courts of Appeal had one unresolved case involving one indicted person.

Taking into account both newly received cases and unresolved cases carried over from an earlier period, a total of 65 cases were pending before the Higher Courts during the reporting period. The Courts of Appeal received 15 cases on appeal and, together with one case carried over from the previous period, had a total of 16 cases pending.

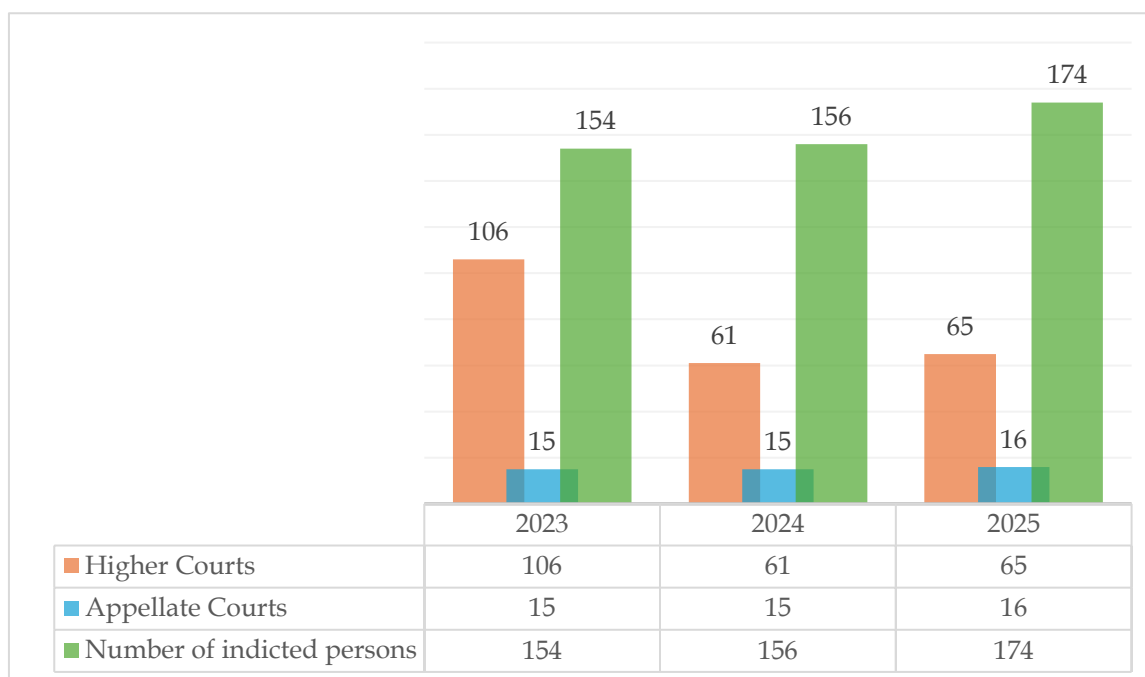
During the reporting period, 19 cases were decided on the merits by the Higher Courts, while 10 cases were decided on the merits by the Courts of Appeal.



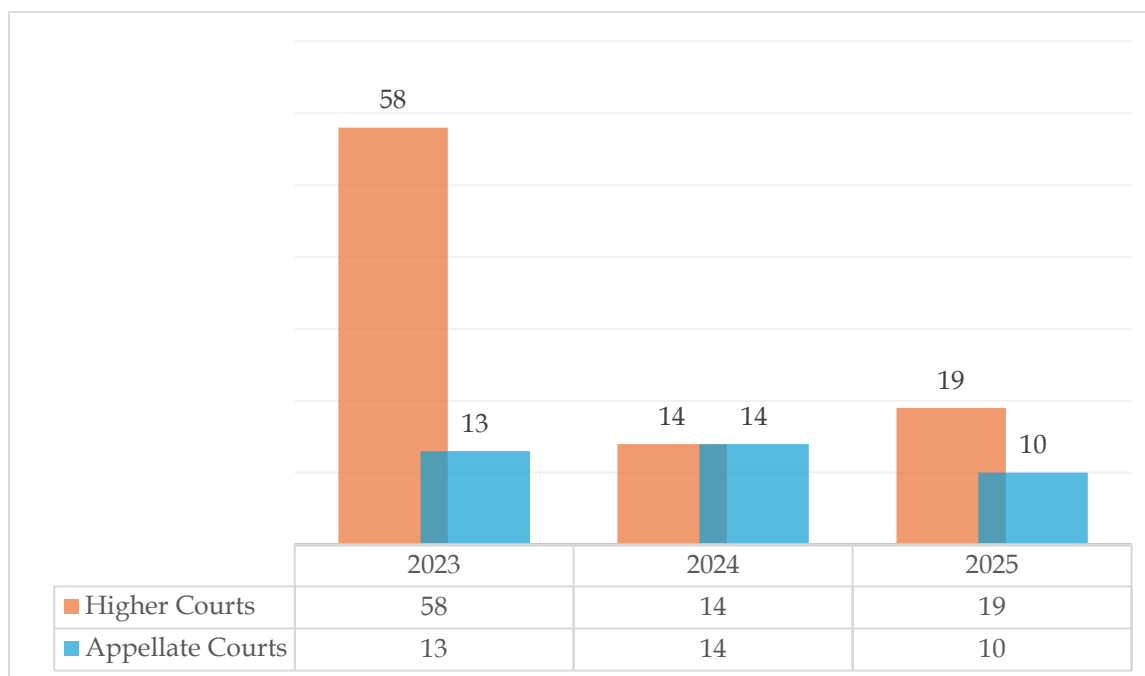
Number of cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings received by the Higher Courts and Courts of Appeal and number of indicted persons over the last three years



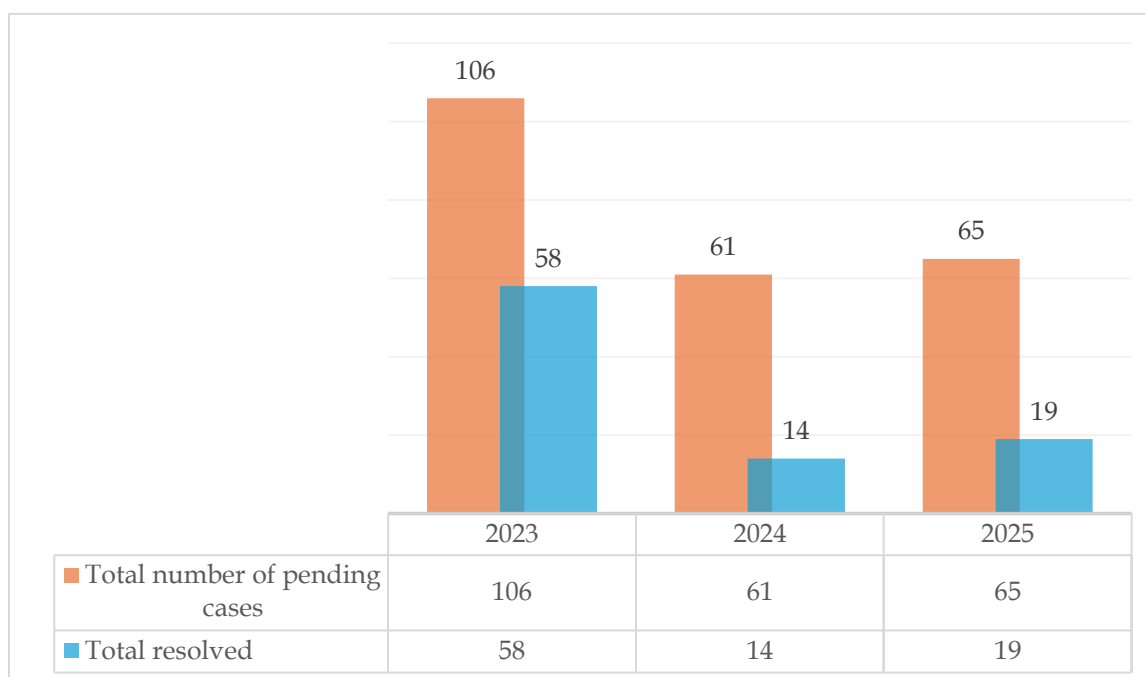
Number of unresolved cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings at the beginning of the reporting period before the Higher Courts and Courts of Appeal over the last three years



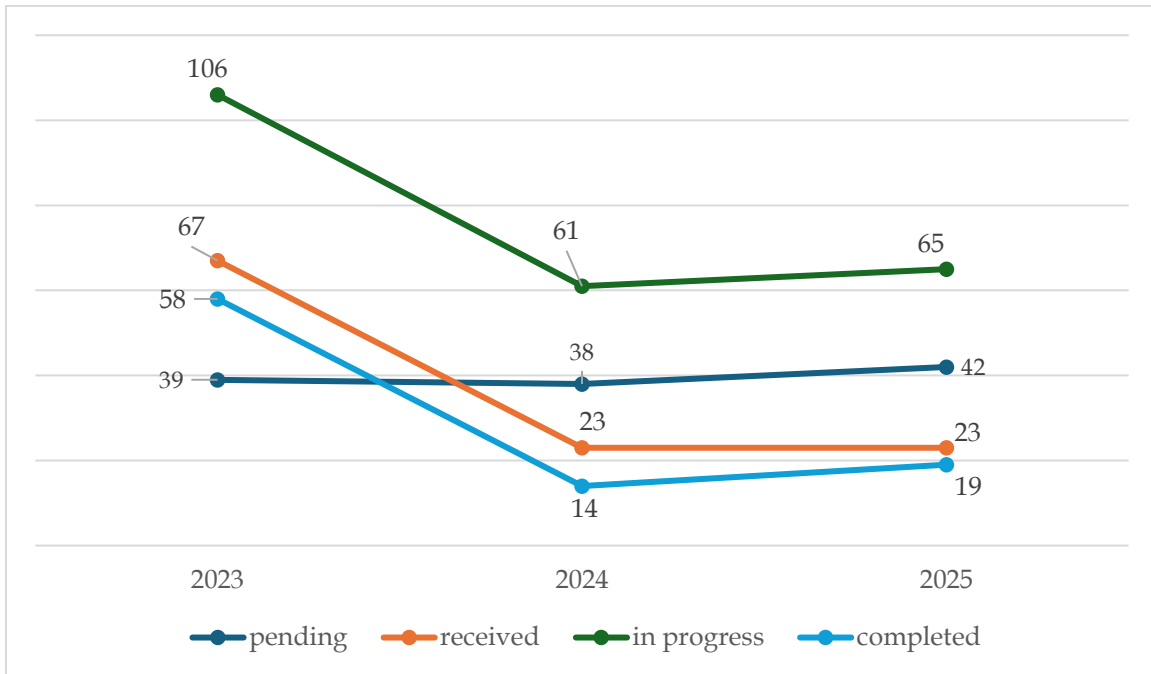
Total number of cases involving trafficking in human beings pending before the Higher Courts and Courts of Appeal over the previous three years



Number of cases involving trafficking in human beings concluded over the previous three years

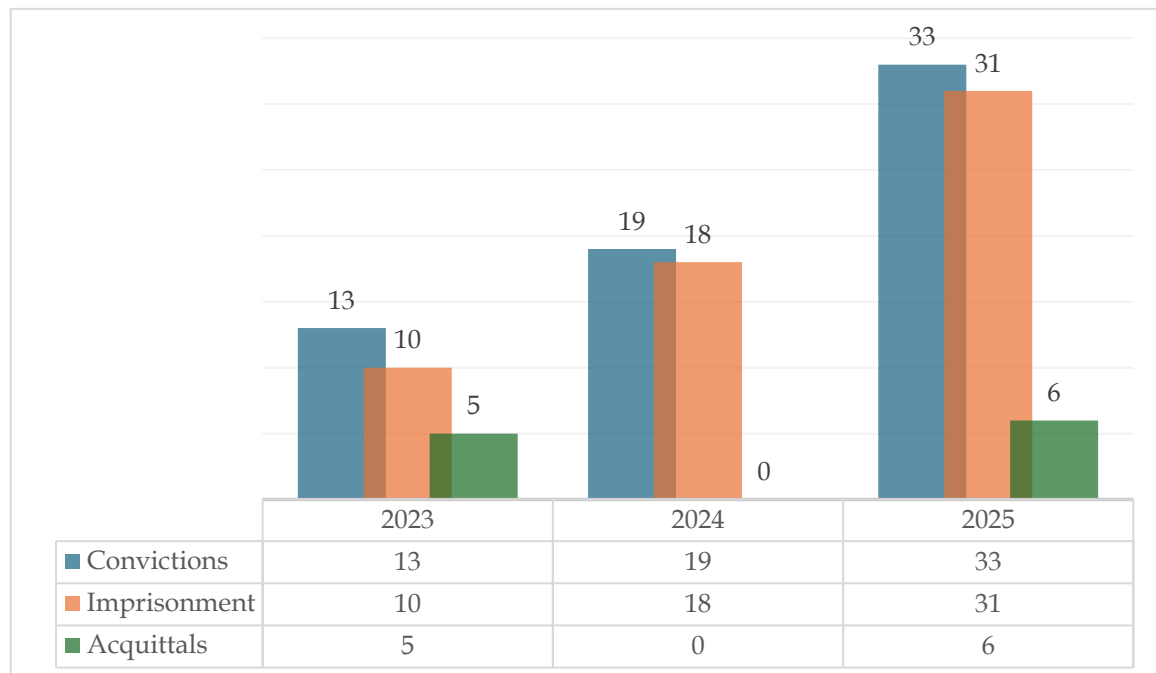


Total number of cases pending and cases concluded by the Higher Courts in connection with the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings over the last three years

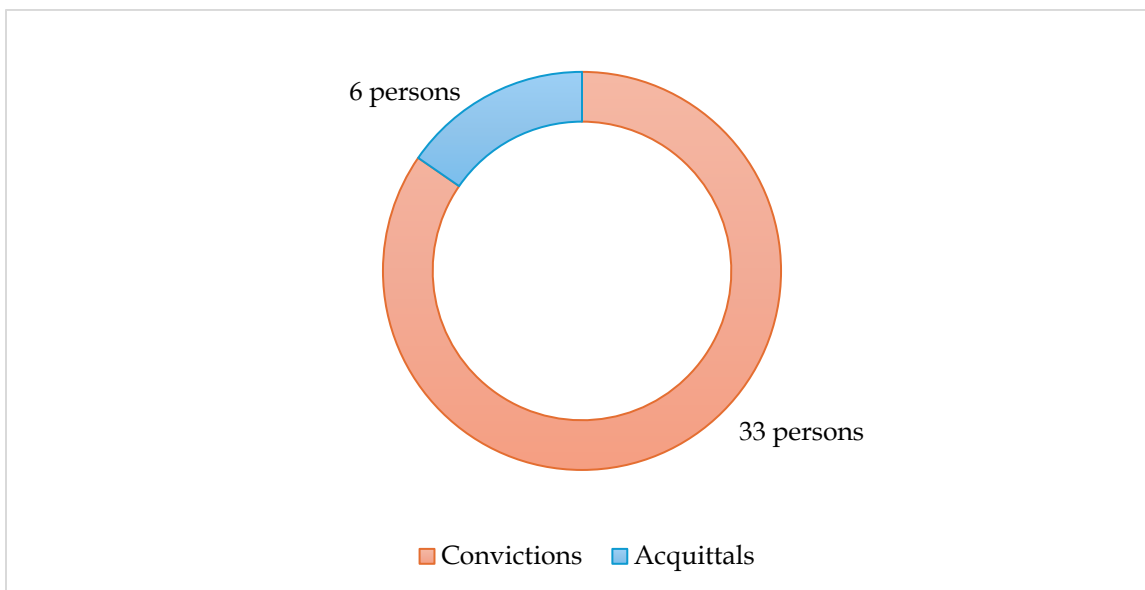


Number of unresolved, newly received, concluded and pending cases before the Higher Courts over the previous three years in connection with the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings

During the reporting period, the courts handed down convictions against 33 persons, while six persons were acquitted.



Number of convictions, judgments imposing custodial sentences and acquittals, by number of persons, over the previous three years in connection with the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings



Custodial sentences were imposed on a total of 31 defendants. The most severe sentence was 13 years and six months' imprisonment, which was imposed on one person. One person was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment, while one person received an aggregate sentence of 12 years and six months' imprisonment. One person was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment together with the security measure of compulsory treatment for alcohol dependence, while one person was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

Three persons were each sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. One person was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and fined RSD 200,000, while another person was sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

One person was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, while a sentence of six months' imprisonment was imposed for the criminal offence of displaying, procuring and possessing pornographic material and exploiting a minor for pornography under Article 185 of the Criminal Code. The convicted person was given an aggregate sentence of five years and three months' imprisonment, as well as the security measure of prohibition from engaging in the hospitality business for a period of five years. In addition, pursuant to the Law on Special Measures for the Prevention of Criminal Offences against the Sexual Freedom of Minors²⁶, the following special measures were imposed upon the completion of the prison sentence: mandatory reporting to the competent police authority and the Administration for the Enforcement of Criminal Sanctions; prohibition from visiting places where minors gather, including kindergartens and schools; mandatory attendance at professional counselling centres and institutions; mandatory notification of any change of permanent residence, temporary residence or place of employment; and mandatory notification of travel abroad.

Two persons were each sentenced to five years' imprisonment, while one person was sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

²⁶"Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 32/13.

One person was sentenced to three years and six months' imprisonment. Two other persons were each sentenced to three years and six months' imprisonment and were also subjected to security measures prohibiting them from approaching and communicating with the injured party for a period of three years. These persons were prohibited from approaching the injured party within a distance of less than 100 metres and from entering the area surrounding her place of residence and workplace.

One person was sentenced to three years and four months' imprisonment. Two persons were each sentenced to three years' imprisonment and were also subjected to security measures prohibiting them from approaching and communicating with the injured party, including a prohibition from approaching the injured party within a distance of less than 100 metres and from entering the area surrounding her place of residence and workplace.

One person was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. By the same judgment, the defendant was ordered to pay the injured party a total of RSD 800,000 as compensation for non-pecuniary damage. Two other persons were each sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Awarding compensation within criminal proceedings contributes to the fuller realisation of the victim's right of access to justice and constitutes an important element of the victim's rehabilitation. At the same time, this example demonstrates that there is scope for courts to decide more frequently on property claims submitted by victims of trafficking in human beings within criminal proceedings, when the procedural requirements for doing so are met.

Nevertheless, given that in practice, victims of trafficking in human beings are still frequently referred to civil proceedings in order to exercise their right to compensation, this case should be regarded as a positive example that should be further developed and applied more consistently. In the coming period, it is necessary to monitor not only the number of cases in which compensation is awarded in criminal proceedings, but also whether the amount awarded is actually recovered, i.e. whether the victim has effectively exercised the right recognised by the court's decision.

The National Rapporteur considers it particularly significant that, in this case, in addition to deciding on criminal liability and the sentence, the court also ruled on the injured party's property claim and awarded RSD 800,000 in compensation for non-pecuniary damage.

One person was sentenced to two years and six months' imprisonment, while two persons were each sentenced to two years' imprisonment. One person was sentenced to one year and six months' imprisonment and fined RSD 100,000.

Three persons were each sentenced to one year's imprisonment, to be served on the premises in which they reside. One person was sentenced to ten months' imprisonment, likewise to be served on the premises in which the convicted person resides.

In courts equipped with the appropriate technical equipment and in which criminal proceedings concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings were conducted, video technology was used when interviewing victims and witnesses.

The Higher Courts in Belgrade and Novi Sad reported the highest numbers of victims and witnesses interviewed. The Higher Court in Belgrade stated that, with the assistance of the Service for Assistance and Support to Witnesses and Injured Parties, 273 witnesses were interviewed between 1 January 2025 and 31 March 2026, but none of those cases concerned the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

The Higher Court in Novi Sad stated that, during the same period, a total of 138 hearings were conducted via video-conference link in a specially equipped room, with 30 witnesses interviewed in this manner. Of these, six witnesses were interviewed in cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

Other courts also stated that assistance was provided to victims of criminal offences during the period under review, including victims of trafficking in human beings. The Higher Court in Niš stated that support was provided to 12 persons, two of whom had the status of injured parties in criminal proceedings concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

Before the Higher Court in Pirot, support was provided through the use of video technology during the interview of an injured party.

In addition, the Higher Courts in Zrenjanin, Kraljevo, Negotin, Subotica, Valjevo, Pančevo and Novi Pazar stated that support was provided to a further 12 persons who were victims of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

5.3.1 Misdemeanour Courts

Misdemeanour courts in the Republic of Serbia do not have jurisdiction to conduct investigations, criminal prosecution or proceedings in respect of criminal offences. If an applicant seeking the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings were to submit an application whose content and factual description indicated that the conduct in question constituted the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, the judge dealing with the case would issue a decision declaring the lack of subject-matter jurisdiction and refer the case to the public prosecutor's office with territorial jurisdiction for further action.

5.4 International Cooperation

During the reporting period, in the context of investigations, the Ministry of the Interior cooperated with Europol and Interpol on the basis of international police cooperation. This cooperation involved carrying out appropriate checks on entities covered by investigations, with a view to detecting transnational trafficking in human beings or establishing whether elements of organised crime were present. During 2025, 542 messages were received and 151 messages were sent through these channels.

In June 2025, within the framework of the EMPACT Operational Action Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings, the international operational action "Global Chain 2025" – Joint Action Days "LANA 2025" was conducted.²⁷ Five persons were arrested and two criminal complaints were filed during the action.

²⁷ In the territory of the Republic of Serbia, the action was conducted in Belgrade, Niš, Subotica, Novi Sad, Bor, Pančevo and Kragujevac, with enhanced checks at the Nikola Tesla Airport border crossing point in Belgrade. The action was coordinated and led by the Service for Combating Organised Crime, namely the Department for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants.

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office²⁸ undertakes measures to further enhance international cooperation and mutual legal assistance, in particular by strengthening international judicial cooperation and participation in judicial networks and bodies, developing bilateral cooperation, enhancing informal cooperation and strengthening the capacities of the public prosecution service of the Republic of Serbia²⁹. These activities also include specialisation in the field of mutual legal assistance within the public prosecution service, as well as intensified training in this area.

The spontaneous exchange of information is carried out in accordance with Article 98 of the Law on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and Article 11 of the Second Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters³⁰.

Of particular importance for improving the effectiveness of mutual legal assistance, especially in cooperation with European Union Member States, is the cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and Eurojust, which is based on the 2019 Cooperation Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and Eurojust.³¹

However, during 2025, no requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters were received or sent in cases involving trafficking in human beings. Given that, during the reporting period, no incoming requests were acted upon and no requests were sent to foreign judicial authorities, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office stated that no challenges were identified in this area.³²

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings stated that, during the reporting period, it engaged in international cooperation with organisations providing assistance and support to victims of trafficking in human beings in Germany and Montenegro. Information collected from these organisations was forwarded to the competent organisational units of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia for further action.

²⁸ With a view to increasing the effectiveness of international cooperation and mutual legal assistance, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office has a coordinating role in the provision of mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. This role is of particular importance in view of the growing number of criminal cases involving an international element, the need for direct contacts between the competent authorities, and the need to expedite proceedings that, by their nature, are urgent and confidential.

²⁹ In accordance with the mandatory instruction issued by the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office in 2016, specialisation in the field of mutual legal assistance in criminal matters was introduced by designating contact points for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters within the Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices, whose representatives underwent specialised training in this field. Given the importance of these mechanisms for improving the effectiveness of mutual legal assistance in cross-border cases involving trafficking in human beings, the training, in addition to providing knowledge of traditional forms of mutual legal assistance, also promotes cooperation through innovative mechanisms, such as joint investigation teams and the mechanism of so-called spontaneous exchange of information.

³⁰ This mechanism enables the direct exchange of information obtained in the course of an investigation, namely information relating to a criminal offence and its perpetrator, without the need to submit a formal request for mutual legal assistance, in cases where there is a connection with another State.

³¹ The Office of the Liaison Prosecutor for the Republic of Serbia at Eurojust contributes to the further improvement and acceleration of mutual legal assistance proceedings concerning criminal offences falling within Eurojust's competence, including trafficking in human beings. Cooperation through Eurojust facilitates and expedites the execution of incoming and outgoing requests for mutual legal assistance and enhances the international coordination of investigations and criminal prosecution with States participating in Eurojust.

³² The Liaison Prosecutor facilitates communication and the exchange of information between the competent authorities during the preparation, transmission and execution of requests for mutual legal assistance. The Liaison Prosecutor may also initiate coordination meetings between the competent authorities and the establishment of joint investigation teams. In addition, the Liaison Prosecutor monitors developments in legislation and practice in relevant areas, including judicial cooperation relating to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, and forwards relevant reports to the competent authorities in the Republic of Serbia, including Eurojust's report on trafficking in human beings.

The Centre also stated that it continued to provide support to victims of trafficking in human beings who testified in criminal proceedings conducted before the competent authorities of the Republic of Slovenia, thereby continuing the practice of cross-border cooperation in the field of protection and support for victims of trafficking in human beings.

The Ministry of Justice informed the National Rapporteur that, during the reporting period, a total of 14 mutual legal assistance cases relating to the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings were recorded, comprising two outgoing and 12 incoming requests.³³

In the area of the extradition of defendants and convicted persons, five incoming requests were recorded, of which one was received from Hungary, one from Israel and three from Italy.

In the area of the transfer and assumption of criminal prosecution, one incoming request was recorded, namely a request from the Republic of Slovenia, which was forwarded to the competent public prosecutor's office for further action and had not yet been decided upon during the reporting period.

Within the framework of general forms of mutual legal assistance, eight cases were recorded, comprising two outgoing and six incoming requests. One outgoing request was sent to Switzerland for the purpose of obtaining information and was executed, while the other was sent to Slovakia for the service of a document, with a response still pending.

Of the six incoming requests in the area of general mutual legal assistance, one each was received from Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Mexico and Switzerland.

According to the information provided, the extradition requests submitted by Hungary and Israel were granted, as were the incoming requests for mutual legal assistance received from Germany, Slovakia and Switzerland. The request from Austria was refused, while the request from Slovenia was partially granted. As regards outgoing requests, Switzerland executed the request submitted by the Republic of Serbia to its competent authorities.

5.5 Partnership and Cooperation in Investigations, Criminal Prosecution and Court Proceedings

In cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, the competent authorities cooperate, in the course of investigations, criminal prosecution and court proceedings, with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the relevant civil society organisations Atina and ASTRA.

The Higher Court in Pirot stated that the findings and opinion of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, prepared during the investigation, were considered at the main hearing as a document within the meaning of Article 2, paragraph 1, item 26 of the Criminal Procedure Code. A representative of the Centre attended the main hearing, as well as

³³ The Ministry of Justice, as the central authority for the receipt and transmission of requests for mutual legal assistance, continuously processes all requests submitted by domestic and foreign judicial authorities, in accordance with the bilateral agreements signed and ratified by the Republic of Serbia and the international conventions to which it is a Party. Outgoing requests are transmitted to the central authorities of the requested States, while incoming requests are forwarded to the competent domestic judicial or other authorities for execution.

the examination of the injured party. The Centre also ensured the participation of a social worker and a psychologist in the proceedings.

Some courts also cited the availability of informational materials at court information desks as a form of support for victims and witnesses, including brochures on the right to compensation for damage caused by a criminal offence and leaflets containing useful information for injured parties and witnesses.

The Higher Court in Zrenjanin stated that victims of trafficking in human beings are provided with legal support and that activities are undertaken to ensure that all victims are informed of their right to compensation, as well as of the procedure for exercising that right.

The Higher Court in Kraljevo stated that, for the purpose of protecting victims, and particularly victims of trafficking in human beings, measures are taken that include the protection of privacy and identity, restriction of access to information and the provision of support throughout the proceedings, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and other competent services. The Higher Court in Novi Pazar reported similar measures and forms of cooperation.

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings stated that it participates in criminal proceedings by providing direct support to victims, as well as professional support to the police and public prosecutor's offices. Following a forensic interview and the collection of relevant information, the Centre prepares findings and an opinion that are used in investigations and before the courts, while the Centre's professional staff also participate in court proceedings as witnesses.³⁴

According to the Centre, at the beginning of 2026 there were two cases in which victims gave their statements to a public prosecutor from the premises of the Centre, at the initiative of the Protector of Citizens. The Centre stated that it would continue to propose the use of this method of examination to judicial authorities, with the aim of establishing it as standard practice, and that it expected the support of the Protector of Citizens in this process.

The Centre pointed out that, although such cases have become rare, situations still occur in which victims testify in the direct presence of defendants or suspects. One example concerned a minor girl who was a victim of sexual exploitation and who testified in the presence of the defendant during 2025. The Centre informed the Protector of Citizens of this case.

The Centre also reported a case involving the severe retraumatisation of an identified victim of trafficking in human beings, a man with mental health difficulties who had been subjected for years to exploitation and coercion into committing criminal offences. On the day he was due to testify before the court, police officers approached him with the intention of taking him into custody for the purpose of serving a sentence, even though his criminal responsibility was directly linked to the circumstances of trafficking in human beings. The Centre further stated that certain expert assessments had caused the additional retraumatisation of victims due to the manner in

³⁴ The Centre provides psychological preparation for victims prior to testimony, informs them of their rights, organises transportation and accompaniment by professional staff when attending court hearings, and facilitates communication between victims, the police and judicial authorities. For the purpose of protecting victims, correspondence addressed to victims is, in certain cases, delivered to the Centre's address. The Centre also insists that victims be granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness and organises their attendance at hearings and the giving of statements in a manner that avoids any contact with defendants, including encounters in court corridors and other court premises.

which questions were asked, including questions of a judgemental nature that called the victims' conduct into question.

In the Centre's assessment, it is particularly important that professionals who provide direct support to victims be permitted to attend their testimony as a person of trust whenever requested by the victim. The Centre pointed out that the practice of some courts of designating employees of witness support services as persons of trust does not constitute an adequate solution, since such persons meet the victim for the first time immediately before the testimony and therefore have no opportunity to establish a relationship of trust beforehand or to participate in preparing the victim for testimony.

5.6 Information Provided by Relevant Civil Society Organisations

During the reporting period, the Atina association submitted several reports to the competent institutions indicating reasonable grounds to suspect the existence of organised criminal groups involved in trafficking in human beings and the labour exploitation of foreign nationals. The reports concerned the activities of criminal networks linked to several countries, including Bangladesh and China. According to Atina, the information and testimonies collected and forwarded to the competent authorities indicate the existence of transnational forms of organised trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

The Atina association drew attention to the case of a Bangladeshi national who was identified as a victim of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. According to Atina, owing to a timely response and effective cooperation between Atina, the competent police administration and the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office, proceedings were initiated against the suspects. As stated, the case clearly demonstrates the importance of early identification, intersectoral cooperation and the active involvement of specialised civil society organisations in the protection of victims and the criminal prosecution of perpetrators. The case is currently at the trial stage.

The Atina association also drew the National Rapporteur's attention to problems relating to conducting financial investigations and stated that measures restricting the disposal of assets and measures for the confiscation of assets are not being imposed. Atina considers that such assets could be used to satisfy the victims' claims for compensation. According to Atina, the length of court proceedings is also a problem, as protracted proceedings directly impede the victims' recovery and integration over extended periods. In this context, particular concern was expressed regarding the challenges arising in court proceedings concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings. In one case, as many as three presiding judges have changed over the past five years. According to Atina, such changes in judicial personnel significantly slow down the proceedings, since every change of judge affects continuity in the handling of the case and, in practice, results in evidence having to be taken again and the proceedings reverting to earlier stages.

It was also pointed out that one of the most significant problems continues to be the practice of reclassifying the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings as other, less severely punishable criminal offences, particularly the criminal offence of procuring for prostitution. According to the information provided, this practice reduces the level of protection afforded to victims, limits the possibility of applying special protection measures and may result in the punishment of persons

who are, in substance, victims of exploitation. Of particular concern are cases in which, even in respect of minors subjected to sexual exploitation, the constituent elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings are not recognised and proceedings are instead pursued in relation to other criminal offences.

The Atina association also stated that the inconsistent application of the status of a particularly vulnerable witness remains a challenge. Although victims are granted this status in certain cases, its practical value is, according to Atina, limited by insufficient technical capacities.

5.7 Recommendations for Improving the Situation in the Field of Investigation, Criminal Prosecution and Court Proceedings

With a view to improving the situation in this area, the National Rapporteur issues the following recommendations to the competent authorities³⁵:

- The Ministry of the Interior should establish permanent specialised teams for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings in all police directorates.
- The Ministry of the Interior should increase proactive action in the detection and documentation of criminal offences of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of the Interior should ensure the consistent application of the feedback mechanism between police directorates regarding the action taken and outcomes following reports and information forwarded concerning suspected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should ensure that joint interviews with presumed and formally identified victims are conducted in all police directorates.
- Regular and timely notification of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should be ensured regarding the progress and outcome of criminal proceedings, as well as all decisions that may affect the safety of the victim.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice should ensure the timely assessment of risks to the victim's safety prior to the release of a defendant or convicted person from detention or prison, with the involvement of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and other providers of support to the victim.

³⁵ Although, pursuant to Article 19, paragraph 2 of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, the Protector of Citizens is not authorised to oversee the work of the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Government, the Constitutional Court, the courts or public prosecutor's offices, the Protector of Citizens considers that, in the spirit of good cooperation, it would be useful for these authorities to consider the recommendations.

- The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in cooperation with other stakeholders within the National Mechanism, should develop guidelines for working with presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings during criminal proceedings.
- The Ministry of Justice should undertake further activities to ensure that every judicial authority dealing with cases involving trafficking in human beings has permanent and timely access to audio-visual equipment and a specially adapted room for the examination of victims and particularly vulnerable witnesses, either on its own premises or, under arrangements established in advance, through the use of the facilities of another authority or institution.
- The Ministry of the Interior should continue to provide mandatory, regular and practice-oriented specialised training for police officers dealing with cases involving trafficking in human beings, including training on children's rights and the criminal-law protection of minors, covering all police directorates, with assessment of the knowledge acquired and monitoring of the impact of the training on practice.
- The Judicial Academy and the Ministry of the Interior should continue to provide regular specialised training for judges, public prosecutors and police officers on the interpretation of the statutory elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and its proper distinction from related criminal offences, based on specific cases and analysis of relevant practice.
- Relevant stakeholders within the National Mechanism should develop uniform practical guidelines for interpreting the statutory elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and distinguishing it from related criminal offences, and should ensure that the reasons for and outcomes of the reclassification of offences are monitored.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Judicial Academy should continue to implement mandatory and periodic professional training programmes for police officers, public prosecutors and judges on new methods and techniques for identifying and investigating cases involving trafficking in human beings, including digital and financial investigations and special evidentiary actions, with assessment of the knowledge acquired and monitoring of its application in specific cases.

6. Identification and Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

During the reporting period, activities were undertaken to strengthen professional capacities for the preliminary identification of and work with victims, expand the practice of joint interviews conducted by police officers and professionals from the Centre, and ensure the provision of psychological, healthcare, legal, material and other forms of support. Relevant civil society organisations continued to play an important role in identifying presumed victims and providing specialised services.

However, the uneven participation of individual systems in the identification and referral of presumed victims was observed, as were shortcomings in the availability of long-term support and reintegration, accommodation for men, assistance for foreign nationals, free legal aid, compensation and protection against secondary victimisation. The availability and scope of certain services continue to depend on the victim's place of residence, the available capacities of the competent authorities and the substantial involvement of relevant civil society organisations.

This chapter provides an overview of action taken in response to the National Rapporteur's previous recommendations, as well as an analysis of the activities and results of the competent authorities, institutions, relevant civil society organisations and international organisations in the preliminary and formal identification, protection and support of victims of trafficking in human beings during 2025. Particular attention is paid to the number and sources of referrals, forms of exploitation, the profile of identified victims, the situation of children and foreign nationals, and the availability of rights and services.

6.1 Follow-up to the National Rapporteur's Recommendations in the Field of Trafficking in Human Beings

- **The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should initiate the development and adoption of harmonised indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, consolidating the existing indicators from different sectors into a single integrated document, with a view to ensuring their consistent and effective application across all systems;**

During 2025, several intersectoral meetings were held with the participation of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. The meetings focused on the standardisation and adoption of harmonised indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings. According to the information provided, it was agreed that work on developing harmonised indicators would be intensified following the adoption of the new law governing this area.

During the reporting period, the preliminary identification application used by the Centre was enhanced by integrating, with the support of the GIZ, indicators intended for use within the healthcare system. The application was redesigned and simplified, and a chatbot communication feature was introduced, thereby broadening the possibilities for its use across different systems.

The National Rapporteur notes that initial steps were taken during the reporting period towards improving and standardising the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings.

The adoption of the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims established the legal basis for the adoption of indicators. Accordingly, implementation of the recommendation does not necessarily require the adoption of a single unified document, but rather ensuring that all competent stakeholders adopt appropriate indicators in a timely manner and that these indicators are mutually harmonised, practically applicable and based on common principles of identification and referral.

In view of the intersectoral meetings held, the enhancement of the application and the establishment of the legal basis, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

- **The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should develop clear guidelines for distinguishing trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation from other forms of labour rights violations, including misdemeanours and irregular employment, in order to ensure the proper identification of victims and the referral of cases to the competent authorities;**

The Centre has repeatedly highlighted the need to establish clear criteria for distinguishing trafficking in human beings from violations of labour rights, including in discussions with the National Coordinator and through participation in professional events. The Centre also raised the need to regulate this issue at a meeting with the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office held in early 2026, after the reporting period. During the reporting period, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings expanded its internal guidelines for the preparation of findings and opinions by introducing additional guidance on dealing with cases of suspected trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

Within the framework of a Council of Europe project "Strengthening anti-trafficking action in Serbia", a training course entitled "Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation" was delivered to 21 participants: 18 newly recruited labour inspectors from different cities in the Republic of Serbia and one representative each from the Ministry of the Interior, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Atina association.

The training focused on improving the labour inspectors' knowledge of the legal and strategic framework, the functioning of the National Referral Mechanism, indicators for the detection and preliminary identification of victims, and available assistance and support services. Examples of good practice from Belgium were also presented, together with the relevant legal standards, the distinctions between violations of labour legislation and the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings, and the respective roles and responsibilities of the labour inspectorate, the police, the Centre and civil society organisations.

In cooperation with the Judicial Academy, a training programme was developed to strengthen the capacities of judicial professionals in the field of trafficking in human beings, with particular emphasis on labour exploitation, the non-punishment principle and compensation. On the basis of this programme, a two-day specialised training course on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation was held in Belgrade in November 2025. One of the central

components of the training concerned distinguishing the constituent elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings from violations of labour rights and misdemeanours prescribed by labour legislation.

The training was attended by 27 participants: ten public prosecutors, six judges, three labour inspectors, four representatives of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and four representatives of the Ministry of the Interior.

As part of the implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2029 Period, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs undertook activities aimed at further specifying the provisions governing the operation of employment agencies, particularly with regard to employment placement within the country, abroad and from abroad. This activity has gained additional importance owing to the increasing number of foreign workers engaged through employment agencies.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and the Ministry of the Interior initiated the establishment of the Employers' Network for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation. The National Rapporteur was informed that the Network was established with the aim of improving the exchange of knowledge, experience and examples of good practice among employers, as well as encouraging the adoption of mechanisms for the early detection and prevention of labour exploitation.

The National Rapporteur notes that the activities carried out during the reporting period focused on improving professionals' knowledge of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

The Ministry of the Interior informed the National Rapporteur that it had not undertaken any activities relating to this recommendation during the reporting period. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, did not commence the development of joint guidelines, nor were the responsible stakeholders, methodology, implementation schedule or deadlines for their adoption determined.

Of the 242 referrals received by the Centre in 2025, 118 concerned the suspected labour exploitation of foreign nationals, while 21 persons were formally identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. At the same time, in the course of 247 inspections, the Labour Inspectorate encountered 2,131 foreign nationals, including 305 persons without an employment contract and/or registration for compulsory social insurance and 249 persons without a single permit, yet it did not identify indicators of trafficking in human beings in any of these cases.

These data indicate a high risk of the inconsistent identification of cases and confirms the need for clear, jointly agreed criteria and procedures for action.

Given that the competent authorities did not undertake concrete joint activities and that the guidelines were not developed, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

Given the particular importance of this issue for the timely detection and proper identification of victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, as well as for distinguishing this criminal offence from violations of labour rights and other unlawful practices, the Protector of Citizens will, within the scope of its statutory competences, undertake activities aimed at initiating the process of establishing clear guidelines.

- **The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should provide flexible mechanisms for the registration of residence of foreign nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings, as a prerequisite for obtaining temporary residence and exercising other rights, in accordance with the Law on Foreigners;**

The Ministry of the Interior stated that the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings submits an expert opinion to the Border Police Directorate, on the basis of which a foreign national who is a victim of trafficking in human beings is granted a recovery and reflection period of 90 days, without being required to submit the standard application normally required of foreign nationals.

The Ministry stated that, during the reporting period, it had also worked on the further development of a system designed to address the specific requirements of preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, in accordance with the amendments to the Law on the Employment of Foreigners and the Law on Foreigners, which introduced changes to procedures for the employment of foreign nationals.

The Centre informed the National Rapporteur that the registration of residence also represents a major difficulty for foreign nationals identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. According to the Centre, problems arise in exercising the right to temporary residence because, in practice, officers of the competent foreigners' authorities impose differing requirements regarding the documentation to be submitted and the fees payable, with some victims paying no fees at all while others are required to pay several thousand dinars.³⁶

Given that no flexible mechanism for the registration of residence has been established or formally documented, and that the procedure, responsibilities of the competent authorities and acceptable forms of proof of address have not been regulated, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, should ensure a uniform approach to the registration of residence of foreign victims of trafficking in human beings, including in cases where the victim does not possess the usual proof of address.

- **The Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with local self-government units, should simplify the procedures for victims of trafficking in human beings to access free legal aid, in order to ensure the effective exercise of this right;**

The Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with local self-government units, conducted the "You Have the Right!" information campaign, aimed at raising public awareness of the existence and importance of the free legal aid system and the possibilities for accessing it.³⁷

³⁶ According to the Centre, some victims were required to provide a "white card", i.e. confirmation from a police station that the foreign national's residence had been registered; others were required to provide a written statement from the owner of the dwelling in which they were residing, while still others were not required to provide either of these documents. Furthermore, many were unable to exercise this right for months because landlords were unwilling to allow them to register their residence at the address concerned. Social welfare centres did not agree to register them at their addresses.

³⁷ The first phase of the campaign began in October 2024, in parallel with training on the implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, and the campaign concluded on 30 September 2025. It was conducted through national, regional and

The Ministry of Justice stated that work was underway to improve the partially centralised SIPRES information system, which will include a module for recording cases involving indicators of trafficking in human beings.

Under the Law on Free Legal Aid, victims of trafficking in human beings are recognised as a particularly vulnerable category of beneficiaries. They are entitled to free legal aid when seeking legal protection in connection with trafficking in human beings, irrespective of whether they meet the eligibility requirements relating to their financial circumstances. This legislative provision constitutes an important legal basis for access to legal protection.

However, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings informed the National Rapporteur that, during 2025, no victim of trafficking in human beings had accessed free legal aid through local self-government units. The reasons cited were the complexity of the procedure and the lack of lawyers specialised in providing legal assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings.

During 2025, the Centre provided legal services by engaging a lawyer specialised in working with victims of trafficking in human beings. However, the lawyer's contract expired at the end of the year, resulting in a disruption in the continuity of this form of legal support.

A significant proportion of legal assistance to victims continued to be provided by civil society organisations using donor and project funding. The ASTRA association provided legal support to 73 victims and covered the costs of their representation by lawyers specialising in working with victims of trafficking in human beings in three criminal proceedings.

The Atina association provided legal support to 73 victims through 189 legal services, while arranging legal representation through a law firm for 12 victims.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice did not organise specialised training for lawyers providing free legal aid to victims of trafficking in human beings. In its response to the National Rapporteur, the Ministry stated that no such activities had been initiated, but that the possibility of implementing them could be considered in the forthcoming period.

Within the framework of the Council of Europe project "Strengthening Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia", the Atina association conducted interviews during 2025 with 15 survivors of trafficking in human beings – 13 women and two men – who had participated in judicial proceedings.³⁸

The Bar Association of Serbia, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, began implementing the second tutored HELP course, "Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings", in March 2026, for which 39 lawyers registered.³⁹

local media and included media events, guest appearances and statements, thematic articles, television advertisements, billboards, posters, leaflets, social media activities, temporary information stands and surveys of users regarding their satisfaction with the services provided. A "You Have the Right" website was also launched, bringing together information on the right to free legal aid. Local self-government units and city municipalities participated in the campaign, inter alia, by placing links to the website on their own websites.

³⁸ On the basis of the information collected, guidelines entitled "From Trauma to Testimony: Guidelines for Psychological Support to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in Investigative and Judicial Proceedings" were developed and published, with the aim of reducing secondary victimisation and improving institutional responses.

³⁹ The course lasts eight weeks and comprises 12 modules, together with additional materials on domestic legislation and practical examples. The Bar Association also participated in round tables held in Niš in 2025 and in Kragujevac in

Of particular significance is the information provided by the Centre that, during 2025, not a single victim of trafficking in human beings accessed free legal aid through local self-government units.

The absence of specialised training organised by the Ministry of Justice further limits the quality of legal assistance available. Victims of trafficking in human beings frequently require legal support in relation to the particularly vulnerable witness status, protection of their privacy and safety, compensation, residence status, labour rights and the prevention of secondary victimisation. Providing such assistance requires specific expertise and an approach based on the rights and needs of the victim.

The activities initiated by the Bar Association of Serbia in 2026 represent a positive step towards strengthening the professional capacities of lawyers, but they were undertaken after the reporting period and do not constitute a measure simplifying procedures before local self-government units.

The fact that the Centre and civil society organisations provided legal support to a significant number of victims confirms that there is a genuine need for this service. At the same time, reliance on donor funding, individual contracts and lawyers engaged outside the free legal aid system indicates that the statutory system has not assumed its intended role. The expiry of the Centre's contract with a lawyer specialised in working with victims further demonstrates the risk of disruption to the continuity of legal support.

Given that, during the reporting period, procedures for accessing free legal aid were not simplified, that no victim accessed this mechanism through local self-government units, and that specialised legal aid providers were not made available, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with local self-government units and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, should ensure a simplified procedure for victims of trafficking in human beings to access free legal aid. The Ministry of Justice and the Bar Association of Serbia should ensure the availability of lawyers with specialised knowledge of trafficking in human beings to provide free legal aid to victims, through continuous specialised training and a publicly accessible list of trained lawyers.

- **The Judicial Academy should establish a continuous training programme for judges and public prosecutors on the application of the non-punishment principle in respect of victims of trafficking in human beings;**

During 2025, progress was made in the implementation of training on the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and the application of the non-punishment principle in respect of victims. According to the information provided, the target values set out in the Action Plan for the number of trained public prosecutors, police officers and judges of basic and higher courts were achieved, while the target value for judges of misdemeanour courts was not fully met.

The Judicial Academy delivered four one-day seminars on the application of the non-punishment principle in respect of victims of trafficking in human beings, held in Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Niš and Belgrade. A total of 65 participants attended the seminars, including 12 judges and 28 public prosecutors.

2026, and plans to provide continuous training for lawyers interested in delivering specialised legal assistance to victims.

Between 23 April and 7 July 2025, the Council of Europe HELP online course on combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims was also delivered. Thirty participants enrolled in the course – 15 judges, 13 public prosecutors and two representatives of the Judicial Academy – of whom 19 successfully completed it.

The National Rapporteur notes that significant activities were undertaken during 2025 to improve the knowledge of judges and public prosecutors concerning the application of the non-punishment principle.

The insufficient participation of misdemeanour court judges represents a particular shortcoming. It is precisely in proceedings before misdemeanour courts that victims may be at risk of being punished for acts they were compelled to commit or that they committed as a direct consequence of their exploitation, particularly in cases concerning prostitution, public order, foreign nationals, begging and other misdemeanours. Organisational difficulties and the non-mandatory nature of training cannot constitute a lasting justification for the absence of systematic coverage of misdemeanour court judges.

Data concerning the HELP course show that 19 of the 30 participants who enrolled successfully completed the course. Although this result constitutes an additional contribution to professional development, the reasons why 11 of the enrolled participants did not complete the course should be analysed.

Given the number and content of the training activities delivered and the existence of a certain degree of continuity, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has begun.

The Judicial Academy should establish a formal continuous training programme on the non-punishment principle, covering judges of criminal and misdemeanour courts, public prosecutors, judicial assistants and public prosecution assistants. The programme should include regular training, analysis of domestic and international case law, case studies and dedicated modules on the relationship between the non-punishment principle and the preliminary identification of victims.

Greater accessibility of training for misdemeanour court judges should be ensured, including through regional and online formats, together with the establishment of a mechanism for monitoring the practical application of the knowledge acquired. Data should be collected on cases in which the non-punishment of victims was considered or applied, and an analysis should be conducted to determine whether the practices and decisions of courts and public prosecution offices are consistent.

- **A mechanism should be established for involving misdemeanour courts in the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, through regular and mandatory training for judges and the enhancement of the SIPRES electronic system to enable the recording of cases involving indicators of trafficking in human beings;**

During 2025, the Judicial Academy delivered four one-day seminars on the application of the non-punishment principle in respect of victims of trafficking in human beings, held in Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Niš and Belgrade. A total of 65 participants attended the seminars, including 12 judges

and 28 public prosecutors. However, the information provided does not make it possible to determine how many misdemeanour court judges participated in these seminars.

Between April and July 2025, the Council of Europe HELP online course was also delivered and successfully completed by 19 judges and public prosecutors. Among those who completed the course was one judge of the Misdemeanour Appellate Court.

In its reporting on the implementation of the Action Plan, the Judicial Academy included misdemeanour court judges among the target groups for training on the application of the non-punishment principle. Nevertheless, the Academy itself stated that the target value regarding the acquisition of specialised knowledge by misdemeanour court judges on identifying cases of trafficking in human beings had not been achieved. The reasons cited included their regular caseload, difficulties in taking time away from work and the fact that participation in training is not mandatory.

The Judicial Academy developed advanced training programmes that were also intended to include misdemeanour court judges, but their implementation was postponed until 2026.

The Ministry of Justice stated that the partially centralised SIPRES system was in the process of being upgraded and that, as part of this process, a module was envisaged for recording cases involving indicators of trafficking in human beings.

The Misdemeanour Court in Belgrade stated that misdemeanour courts do not have subject-matter jurisdiction over cases concerning the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and that, when they identify grounds for suspicion that this criminal offence has been committed, they issue a decision declaring that they lack subject-matter jurisdiction and refer the case to the competent public prosecution office.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during the reporting period, certain activities were implemented that may also have included misdemeanour court judges and that the technical enhancement of the SIPRES system was initiated. However, no mechanism has been established for the systematic involvement of misdemeanour courts in the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings.

The non-mandatory nature of the training and the judges' regular workload cannot constitute a lasting justification for the absence of systematic coverage. In cases concerning prostitution, begging, public order, the residence of foreign nationals, irregular work and other misdemeanours, misdemeanour court judges may come into contact with persons in respect of whom there are indicators that the acts in question were committed under compulsion or as a direct consequence of trafficking in human beings.

No clear procedures have been established for identifying indicators, notifying the police, the public prosecution office and the Centre, staying or discontinuing misdemeanour proceedings, considering the application of the non-punishment principle, or recording the outcomes of referred cases. Consequently, practice continues to depend on the knowledge and assessment of the individual judge.

Given the training activities implemented and the initiation of improvements to the SIPRES system, but also the insufficient coverage of misdemeanour court judges and the absence of clear referral procedures, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has begun.

The Judicial Academy should establish a regular training programme specifically designed for misdemeanour court judges, with mandatory content on indicators of trafficking in human beings, the non-punishment principle and the appropriate course of action where there are grounds to suspect that the defendant is a victim.

The Ministry of Justice should complete the enhancement of the SIPRES system and ensure that a functional module is in place for flagging and monitoring cases involving indicators of trafficking in human beings. At the same time, a written procedure should be established governing the identification of indicators, notification of the competent public prosecution office, the police and the Centre, the application of the non-punishment principle, the provision of feedback to the court and monitoring the outcomes of referred cases.

- **The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and other relevant institutions, should ensure systematic and continuous training for healthcare professionals on the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings and the application of indicators in practice, together with the establishment of a mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of training and encouraging healthcare professionals to participate actively in training programmes;**

During 2025, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, with project support⁴⁰, organised a series of regional training sessions entitled “Identification of Cases involving trafficking in human beings and Support for Victims”. A total of 110 healthcare professionals participated in these training sessions.

In December 2025, six health mediators participated in training delivered by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings on identifying cases of trafficking in human beings and providing support to victims. The training presented the indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings intended for use within the healthcare system, as well as a manual for their application, jointly developed by the Ministry of Health and the Centre.

The Ministry of Health stated that, during 2025, it had not systematically organised specific training for healthcare professionals on the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings because a protocol governing the response of the healthcare system to victims of trafficking in human beings was planned following the adoption of the new legislative framework, which would regulate the response of healthcare institutions in this area in greater detail.

According to the Ministry, organising systematic training before the adoption of the protocol could result in healthcare professionals having to undergo further training once the protocol had been adopted. This was considered an inefficient use of budgetary resources and a potential reason for lower participation by healthcare professionals in subsequent training.

⁴⁰ The “Western Balkans Joint Action Against the Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings”, implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the “Support for Social Inclusion in Serbia” project, implemented by the GIZ.

The Ministry of Health plans to organise systematic training for healthcare professionals following the adoption of the protocol. Accreditation of the training programme was identified as a possible mechanism for encouraging participation, as it would enable healthcare professionals to earn continuing professional development credits required for the renewal of their professional licences.

The National Rapporteur notes that significant steps were taken during the reporting period to strengthen the capacity of healthcare professionals to identify potential victims of trafficking in human beings.

Given the activities undertaken and the project-based training delivered, but also the fact that the Ministry of Health has not established a systematic and continuous training programme, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has begun.

The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Centre, should prepare a systematic training plan aligned with the protocol without delay. Training programmes should be accredited and participation linked to continuing professional development and licence renewal, and indicators for measuring their effectiveness should be established.

- **The Ministry of Health should develop a specialised training programme for psychotherapists and psychiatrists working with victims of trafficking in human beings, with particular emphasis on work with child victims and trauma survivors;**

During 2025, the Ministry of Health did not develop a specialised training programme for psychotherapists and psychiatrists working with victims of trafficking in human beings. According to the Ministry, such a programme could be developed following the adoption of a protocol governing the response of the healthcare system to victims of trafficking in human beings, which should regulate indicators for preliminary identification, the response algorithm for healthcare institutions and other matters relevant to determining the content of such training.

During the reporting period, the new Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims had not yet been adopted, and the conditions for adopting the protocol envisaged under the new legislative framework had therefore not yet been met. In its opinion on the Draft Law, the Ministry of Health proposed extending the deadline for adopting the protocol from six months to one year, in order to allow other secondary legislation on which its content depends to be adopted beforehand.

As a measure aimed at strengthening the general capacities of the mental healthcare system, during 2025, the Ministry of Health designated psychiatry and child psychiatry as shortage specialities. This made it possible for unemployed persons and persons employed on fixed-term contracts, in addition to those employed on permanent contracts, to apply for these specialisations, with a view to increasing the number of candidates and creating conditions for a greater number of mental health specialists.

In response to the lack of long-term specialised psychological support, the Atina association established a Counselling Centre for the Psychological Recovery of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. However, its operation is financed predominantly from the association's own resources and project funding, without an established mechanism for stable public funding.

Given that no specialised training programme was developed, no concrete preparatory activities were initiated, and the staffing measure undertaken was not directly aimed at implementing the

substance of the recommendation, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and specialised service providers, should develop and continuously deliver specialised training for psychologists, psychiatrists and other professionals providing counselling and therapeutic support to victims of trafficking in human beings, particularly children, based on a trauma-informed and age-appropriate approach.

- **The Ministry of Education should continue and intensify systematic training for all categories of staff within the education system on the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, ensure the balanced geographical coverage of training, and establish a mechanism for regularly monitoring the effectiveness of such training and the application of indicators in practice;**

During 2025, the Ministry of Education continued activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of education professionals to identify and respond to suspected cases of trafficking in human beings.

Prior to the beginning of the 2025/2026 school year, in August 2025, recommendations and guidelines for further action by education advisers and external advisers for protection against violence were sent to all school administrations, namely 16 school administrations and two groups responsible for professional and pedagogical supervision. The guidelines were also distributed to 63 external advisers in order to provide professional support to school staff in the field of prevention and protection of children from violence.⁴¹

A dedicated webpage on the prevention of trafficking in human beings was created on the Ministry of Education's website, where relevant resources, guidance and examples of good practice were published.

At the end of 2025, the Ministry organised a professional conference entitled "A Safe and Inclusive Education System", intended for education inspectors, education advisers and external advisers working in the fields of protection against violence and inclusive education. One of the topics concerned the response of education professionals to trafficking in human beings. The event was attended by 120 representatives of the education system from all school administrations.

Within the framework of the national "Čuvam te" Platform, during the reporting period, 2,302 education professionals completed the training course "The Role of Education Institutions in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings". The training course for pupils, "Trafficking in Human Beings – Prevention, Identification, Reporting and Support", was completed by 808 pupils, while 179 parents completed the training course "Trafficking in Human Beings – Prevention, Identification and Support".

In cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Ministry of Education also implemented the "Skills for Adolescence" programme, aimed at developing

⁴¹ The recommendations included guidelines for education professionals on how to respond in cases of suspected or known trafficking in human beings. Staff were informed about the revised list of indicators for preliminary identification within the education system, the guide for their application, and the application designed to facilitate the use of indicators in practice.

pupils' social and emotional skills and preventing risky forms of behaviour. The programme involved 366 staff members from primary schools across all school administrations, who, from the beginning of 2024 until June 2025, implemented programme activities with 6,800 sixth- and seventh-grade pupils.

Education professionals also participated in the intersectoral training sessions "Identification of Cases Involving Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims", organised by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, with the support of the Ministry of Education.

The training sessions involved 257 education professionals from 137 institutions, including 78 primary schools and 45 secondary schools, while the remaining institutions comprised preschool institutions, faculties and student dormitories. Participants included teachers, psychologists, pedagogues and education advisers from all school administrations.

The Ministry of Education also continued its activities aimed at preventing pupils from dropping out of the education system, which may be relevant to the prevention of child trafficking and the timely identification of risks. According to data from the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, 16% of children formally identified as victims of trafficking in human beings were not enrolled in compulsory primary education, and therefore could not have been identified within the education system.

During the 2024/2025 school year, training on the prevention of school dropout was provided to 227 participants from 16 schools, while a further 229 participants from 14 schools received such training during 2025. To date, more than 3,000 staff members from primary and secondary schools have completed this training. Schools participating in the programme were required to establish a school dropout prevention team and adopt an action plan for the prevention and reduction of school dropout.

During 2025, the Ministry began improving the system for the preliminary identification of and response to risks relating to school dropout.

According to data from the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, between January 2025 and April 2026, the education system submitted seven referrals and made two consultation calls, representing an increase compared with the previous period. Three referrals concerned suspected forced begging, while the remaining referrals concerned the sexual exploitation of children. In one case, a pupil was not formally identified as a victim of trafficking in human beings, but risks were identified and, in cooperation with the Centre, a protection plan was developed.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during 2025, the Ministry of Education continued and intensified activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of education professionals to carry out the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings and apply the relevant indicators in practice.

Given that training activities were continued and expanded, representatives of all school administrations participated, professional and electronic support was made available for the application of the revised indicators, and specific cases of referrals and consultations with the Centre were recorded, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has been implemented.

Continuous monitoring of the application of the indicators should be maintained, particularly with regard to the professional and geographical profile of trained personnel, the quality of referrals, the timeliness of responses and the outcomes of referred cases. The Ministry of Education should ensure periodic refresher training and monitor data on the coverage and results of training by school administration, type of institution and category of staff, so that areas and parts of the education system requiring additional support can be identified in a timely manner.

- **The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should ensure proactive action by the Labour Inspectorate in detecting cases of trafficking in human beings, through the establishment of internal procedures for the application of indicators, the regular training of inspectors, and the introduction of mandatory reporting on the effectiveness of the activities carried out and the outcomes of referrals;**

During 2025, labour inspectors encountered 2,131 foreign nationals engaged in work in the course of 247 labour inspections. Of these, 305 persons were working without an employment contract and/or registration for compulsory social insurance, while 249 persons were found to be working without a single permit for temporary residence and work. Numerous irregularities relating to employment relations and occupational safety and health were identified during these inspections; however, according to the Labour Inspectorate, no indicators of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation were identified.

During 2025, the Labour Inspectorate and other competent authorities carried out a total of 438 joint and coordinated inspections. These inspections were conducted in construction, trade, manufacturing, hospitality, agriculture and other sectors in which there may be heightened risks of exploitation. According to the information provided, no indicators of trafficking in human beings were identified during these inspections either.

According to statistical data from the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Labour Inspectorate submitted one referral concerning suspected trafficking in human beings during 2025. No person was formally identified as a victim of trafficking in human beings on the basis of that referral.

According to the information provided, at least 314 instances of participation by labour inspectors in various training courses, seminars and professional events were recorded, with some inspectors participating in more than one programme.

Within the framework of the national “Čuvam te” Platform, two online training sessions were held in January 2025, each attended by 85 labour inspectors, representing a total of 170 instances of participation. The training focused on the prevention of violence and the early identification of risks and indicators of exploitation.

In September 2025, a professional conference of the Labour Inspectorate was held and attended by more than 100 inspectors. Particular attention was devoted to the employment of foreign nationals and the application of regulations governing their employment status.

Within the framework of the joint European Union and Council of Europe project “Strengthening Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia”, a two-day seminar entitled “Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation” was held in April 2025. The seminar was attended by 20 labour inspectors who had entered employment during 2024 and 2025.

During October and November 2025, labour inspectors also participated in several targeted training activities on identifying trafficking in human beings and supporting victims. One inspector participated in a seminar on raising young people's awareness of trafficking in human beings, two inspectors attended the training "Identification of Cases Involving Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims", while five inspectors completed training on identifying forms of trafficking in human beings and protecting victims at events held in Belgrade and Novi Sad.

The labour inspector who is a member of the City of Niš Local Anti-Trafficking Team participated on 14 May 2025 in the multidisciplinary training "Identification of Cases Involving Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims", as well as in meetings of the local team aimed at preparing public forums and strengthening cooperation with the local self-government.

The National Rapporteur notes that numerous professional development activities for labour inspectors were undertaken during 2025 and that trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation was addressed in several training courses, seminars and professional events. It is particularly significant that the training included newly recruited inspectors, as well as a large number of inspectors from different parts of the Republic of Serbia.

The results of the inspections demonstrate a very limited impact in terms of proactive detection. Although inspections covered thousands of workers and identified numerous violations of labour rights, the Labour Inspectorate only submitted one referral to the Centre, which did not result in the formal identification of a victim. No indicators of trafficking in human beings were identified either in the 247 inspections involving 2,131 foreign nationals or in the 438 joint inspections.

Violations of labour rights, irregular employment and work without the appropriate permits do not in themselves constitute evidence of trafficking in human beings. Accordingly, the absence of identified victims cannot automatically be interpreted as improper conduct on the part of the labour inspectors. However, the complete absence of identified indicators across such a large number of inspections, combined with only one referral to the Centre, requires a detailed review of the manner in which the indicators are applied in practice.

Given the significant volume of training, but also the absence of an internal procedure requiring the mandatory application of indicators, the lack of a system for reporting on outcomes, and the very limited results in the proactive detection and referral of cases, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate should increase the scope of proactive action by labour inspectors with a view to detecting cases of trafficking in human beings.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should establish a mandatory internal procedure for the Labour Inspectorate to follow in cases of suspected trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. The procedure should include indicators and criteria for an in-depth assessment, the manner in which confidential interviews with workers are to be conducted, the provision of interpretation, documentation of findings, assessment of immediate risk, and the procedure for notifying the police and the Centre.

Regular and practice-oriented training should continue, accompanied by knowledge assessments and the analysis of real and simulated cases. Priority should be given to inspectors responsible for monitoring high-risk sectors and the situation of foreign, seasonal and agency workers.

The Ministry should also introduce mandatory periodic reporting on the number of inspections in which indicators were applied, the number of confidential interviews conducted, risks identified, referrals submitted to the police and the Centre, feedback received, and the outcomes of subsequent action.

- **The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should develop and establish a new accommodation service for male victims of trafficking in human beings, including a supported housing model;**

During 2025, initial steps were taken to secure premises for the accommodation of male victims of trafficking in human beings.⁴²

Following the handover of the keys, an agreement was concluded in August 2025 under which the premises were made available to the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings for the purpose of establishing an accommodation service for male victims of trafficking in human beings.

However, by the end of the reporting period, the premises had neither been adapted nor equipped. The Centre initiated discussions with potential donors with a view to securing funds for renovation and furnishing, but no information was provided indicating that funding had been secured, that the works had commenced or that a deadline for their completion had been set.

The Ministry and the Centre also considered the model for the provision of the future service. One option was to establish a shelter, which, according to the information provided, would require the recruitment of at least seven additional staff members and could be disproportionate to the estimated number of beneficiaries. A supported housing model was considered a more rational and cost-effective option.

According to the Centre, the current system for financing social protection services does not allow this type of supported housing service to be financed directly from the national budget; instead, funding would need to be provided at the level of the local self-government unit. Establishing such a model would therefore require the participation and financial contribution of the City of Belgrade.

The Centre continued to identify the lack of accommodation capacity for men as a significant problem, particularly in cases involving the identification of larger groups of men subjected to trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

At the same time, no significant progress was made in increasing other accommodation capacities for victims of trafficking in human beings. The existing Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings continued to operate with limited capacity, while the Centre highlighted the need for additional space within the same facility in order to ensure its smooth operation and the provision of intensive support to female beneficiaries.

The National Rapporteur notes that securing the property and making it available for use by the Centre constitute a concrete and significant initial step towards establishing accommodation for male victims of trafficking in human beings.

⁴² The Republic Property Directorate responded favourably to the request to secure suitable premises, following which, on 3 July 2025, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted Conclusion No. 360-7174/2025, designating the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs as the user of the property in Belgrade.

Given that the premises have been secured and activities to determine the appropriate service model have commenced, but that the service has not yet been established, is not operational and does not have sustainable funding in place, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should establish and operationalise an accommodation service for male victims of trafficking in human beings, while ensuring an appropriate service model.

- **The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should determine the exact number of foster families in the Republic of Serbia, establish a support and training programme for foster carers to develop the competencies required to work with child victims of trafficking in human beings, and increase the number of foster families willing to accommodate children belonging to this category;**

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs stated that it uses the SOZIS information system, which consolidates data from social welfare centres.⁴³

The Ministry's information system contains data on foster carers who receive remuneration for their work. However, determining the total number of foster families requires all forms of foster care to be included and classified, including kinship and non-kinship foster families, as well as foster carers who are and who are not entitled to remuneration. The Ministry stated that SOZIS has the technical capacity to generate this data.

Nevertheless, the Ministry's response did not specify the exact number of active foster families in the Republic of Serbia, nor the number of families trained and prepared to accommodate child victims of trafficking in human beings. No data was provided on their geographical distribution, available placements, type of foster care or experience in working with children who have experienced complex trauma.

The Ministry indicated that there is a shortage of specialised foster families for child victims of trafficking in human beings in the Republic of Serbia. According to the information provided, existing foster carers often lack sufficient knowledge and appropriate professional support to work with children who have experienced severe and complex forms of trauma. Owing to the lack of suitable family-based accommodation, these children continue to be placed in residential institutions, which may constitute an additional burden for them and a less favourable solution than placement in a family environment.

The Ministry also stated that the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography, with the support of UNICEF, had initiated activities aimed at increasing the number of foster families for children and young people from vulnerable groups. However, no information was provided on the content, scope or results of these activities, nor was it demonstrated that they were specifically targeted at child victims of trafficking in human beings.

⁴³ The Republic Institute for Social Protection is the official producer of statistical data in the field of social protection, while the introduction of the SOZIS system, as well as the earlier AURORA programme, created a need to integrate data from different sources in order to ensure complete and reliable information.

The National Rapporteur notes that the inclusion of data in the SOZIS information system constitutes a technical prerequisite for the more systematic monitoring of the situation in the field of foster care.

During the reporting period, the exact number of foster families in the Republic of Serbia was not determined and provided.

Furthermore, no specialised training programme was developed for foster carers working with child victims of trafficking in human beings.

Given that the exact number of foster families was not established, no specialised training and support programme was put in place, and the number of families willing to accommodate child victims of trafficking in human beings was not increased, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The National Rapporteur notes that the development of specialised foster care requires coordination between the competent ministries and cooperation with social welfare centres and centres for foster care and adoption.

The Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in cooperation with centres for foster care and adoption, social welfare centres and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, should establish a geographically accessible network of trained foster families for child victims of trafficking in human beings.

- **The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the National Employment Service should develop a dedicated economic empowerment programme for victims of trafficking in human beings, including targeted active labour market measures, subsidised employment and self-employment programmes tailored to the needs of this category;**

According to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, victims of trafficking in human beings are recognised as a particularly vulnerable subgroup within the category of persons facing greater barriers to employment, which also includes beneficiaries of financial social assistance and other social welfare services.

Nevertheless, during the reporting period, no dedicated programme or package of measures was developed specifically for victims of trafficking in human beings, nor were targeted subsidised employment and self-employment measures tailored to their specific needs established.

The National Employment Service provided support to victims of trafficking in human beings within the existing system intended for unemployed persons facing greater barriers to employment.⁴⁴

Depending on the assessed needs, people could be offered motivational workshops, additional education and training programmes, and certain forms of subsidised employment. However, no specific criteria, procedures, quotas, financial incentives or support services intended exclusively for victims of trafficking in human beings were developed.

⁴⁴ In planning support, consideration was given to the person's motivation, knowledge and skills, work experience, health status and other circumstances affecting employability, while the relevant measures were determined through an individual employment plan.

During 2025, one person recorded as a victim of trafficking in human beings was included in active labour market measures, specifically in training on active job-search techniques for qualified persons. As at 31 December 2025, one person with this status, a woman, was registered with the National Employment Service, while no more than three persons in this category were registered at any one time during the year.

According to the National Employment Service, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings did not refer any victims to the National Employment Service during 2025. As a result, the National Employment Service did not provide systematic and targeted support to a larger number of victims through active labour market measures.

The National Rapporteur notes that the existing system of active labour market policy formally enables victims of trafficking in human beings, as persons facing greater barriers to employment, to access general support measures under more favourable conditions. An individual employment plan may also allow a certain degree of tailoring of support to the needs of the individual concerned.

Given that no dedicated programme was developed, that no targeted subsidised employment or self-employment measures were established, and that practical coverage was limited to one person participating in a general training programme, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the National Employment Service, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, should establish a dedicated economic empowerment programme for victims of trafficking in human beings, including tailored training, subsidised employment, support for self-employment and secured funding.

- **The National Employment Service should establish a regular mechanism for the exchange of data with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in compliance with the principle of confidentiality, in order to enable the monitoring of victims' participation in support programmes and the impact of economic empowerment measures;**

According to data from the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, employment-related support was provided to 35 beneficiaries during 2025. However, the Centre did not have data on how many victims of trafficking in human beings had used the services and measures of the National Employment Service, which programmes they had participated in, or the outcomes of the support provided.

The Centre recognised the need to improve cooperation with the National Employment Service and, to that end, submitted an initiative for the establishment of an appropriate form of cooperation and data exchange.

The National Employment Service stated that, during 2025, it had not received any referrals of victims of trafficking in human beings from the Centre. The National Employment Service may record a person's status and provide targeted support to that person as a victim of trafficking in human beings if it receives confirmation from the Centre or if the person discloses that status when registering. If this information is not provided to the National Employment Service, it is unaware that the person belongs to this category.

As early as 2023, the National Employment Service designated a total of 85 representatives to participate in providing support to victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of their economic empowerment, of whom 15 were from the Belgrade City Branch. However, during 2025, these representatives were not invited, in that capacity, to participate in the work of public prosecutors or groups for coordination and cooperation.

The National Rapporteur notes that the data provided by the Centre and the National Employment Service indicates the absence of a functional mechanism for mutual referral, data exchange and monitoring of the outcomes of economic empowerment measures for victims of trafficking in human beings.

Given that no regular mechanism for data exchange was established during 2025, that the Centre and the National Employment Service do not hold linked data concerning the same beneficiaries, and that there were no formal referrals between the two institutions, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented and reiterates the recommendation.

The National Employment Service should establish a regular mechanism for the exchange of data with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in compliance with the principle of confidentiality, in order to enable the monitoring of victims' participation in support programmes and the impact of economic empowerment measures.

- **When dealing with cases of suspected trafficking in human beings, all the relevant stakeholders should use all available means of interpretation and translation, including the engagement of professional interpreters and translators, the use of electronic translation services and remote interpreting, in order to ensure the exercise of victims' rights and their protection;**

During 2025, a significant increase was recorded in the number of foreign nationals among the presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings. This development further highlighted the importance of timely and high-quality interpretation and translation, both during preliminary and formal identification procedures and in the provision of legal, healthcare, social and other forms of support.

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings indicated that significant difficulties in securing interpretation and translation continue to exist, particularly for languages that are less frequently encountered in practice. In certain cases, professional interpreters and translators, electronic services and remote interpreting were used, but no uniform and systematic mechanism has been established to guarantee that the police, public prosecutor's offices, social welfare centres, labour inspectorates, healthcare institutions and other competent stakeholders can secure an appropriate form of interpretation or translation without delay.

According to the Centre, individual and temporary solutions were frequently relied upon in practice, which could affect the timeliness and quality of communication with victims. Particular difficulties arose in securing interpreters for taking statements, interviews and other official actions requiring the accurate, confidential and professional communication of information.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration stated that it uses various available forms of interpretation and translation in its work, including electronic services, remote interpreting and the engagement of professional interpreters and translators. Nevertheless, the limited availability of interpreters for less commonly spoken languages was also identified within this system.

The Ministry of the Interior stated that it uses all available means of interpretation and translation in cases where this is possible and available.

The Centre most frequently secured interpreters and translators with the support and funding of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and relevant civil society organisations. Despite this, there were delays in securing interpreters, postponing identification procedures and potentially affecting victims' access to rights and services.

In a significant number of cases, the Atina association independently arranged for interpreters in order to enable victims to understand the proceedings in which they were involved, their rights and obligations, and the forms of support available to them.

Given that professional interpreters and translators were engaged in individual cases and electronic services and remote interpreting were used, but that the availability and timeliness of interpretation and translation were not ensured consistently, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

In the forthcoming period, activities aimed at implementing the recommendation should continue.

- **It is necessary to intensify training for employees of social welfare institutions working with families and children, in order to improve early identification and prevent the prolonged exploitation of victims of trafficking in human beings;**

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, delivered a series of 25 regional training sessions entitled "Identification of Cases Involving Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims". The training was conducted from March 2025 to January 2026 with the support of IOM and GIZ projects.

A total of 1,463 professionals from 399 institutions, establishments and associations were trained through the 25 professional events. The largest group of participants came from the social welfare system – 581 professionals from 101 institutions, including 69 social welfare centres, 13 residential institutions for children, eight centres for foster care and adoption, and four homes for adults and older persons.

In addition to social welfare professionals, the training also included 110 healthcare professionals from 39 institutions, 257 education professionals from 137 institutions, 27 judges of misdemeanour courts, and 101 employees from 20 city administrations. The programme therefore also had an intersectoral dimension, not only enabling the enhancement of individual professionals' knowledge, but also the strengthening of cooperation, referral and information exchange between systems.

The training covered professionals from larger cities and from a total of 110 cities and municipalities, which, according to the information provided, represented 79% of local self-government units in the districts covered. Participants gave the training an average rating of 4.79 out of a maximum of 5.

One significant component of the programme concerned the use of the application for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings. Following the training, the application was redesigned and expanded to include indicators for the healthcare system, with the support of the GIZ.

The National Rapporteur notes that extensive, targeted and geographically wide-ranging training activities for professionals within the social welfare system were undertaken during the reporting period.

The information provided also demonstrates direct results from the application of the knowledge acquired. Training participants submitted 54 referrals concerning suspected trafficking in human beings to the Centre, on the basis of which 11 victims were formally identified, including eight children, while assistance was provided to 57 persons. This data demonstrates that the training did not remain solely at the level of an activity delivered, but resulted in concrete action, referrals and the identification of victims.

Given the significant number and profile of the persons trained, the broad geographical coverage, the practical focus of the programme and the concrete results in terms of referrals, victim identification and support provided, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has been implemented.

- **It is necessary to ensure the systematic provision of information to presumed and identified victims of trafficking in human beings regarding their rights, available services and how to access them, and to ensure the preparation of information brochures and materials in order to increase access to specific information;**

According to the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, every identified victim is provided with information on their rights and the available forms of support. During 2025, the Centre carried out a total of 529 individual activities aimed at informing victims about their rights and the procedures for exercising them.⁴⁵

Certain police directorates applied the practice of providing victims with information brochures at the time of first contact, thereby ensuring that they received basic information on their rights and the services available to them.

During 2025, the Ministry of Justice conducted the “You Have the Right!” campaign, aimed at informing members of the public, including persons belonging to vulnerable groups, about the free legal aid system.

The National Rapporteur notes that relevant activities aimed at informing victims were undertaken during 2025.

Given the scope of the individual information activities carried out by the Centre, examples of good practice by individual police directorates and the activities of the Ministry of Justice, but also the fact that no uniform information system has been established, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

Before the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims becomes applicable, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in cooperation with other stakeholders within the National Mechanism, should develop guidelines for informing presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings about their rights, available services and the procedures for exercising those rights.

⁴⁵ These activities included newly identified victims, as well as persons identified in previous years who continued to require support.

- **It is necessary to train police officers and public prosecutors in the non-suggestive and non-intrusive interviewing of victims of trafficking in human beings, in order to ensure respect for their dignity, avoid retraumatisation and provide victims with legal and psychological support.**

In cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office prepared the Handbook for Public Prosecutors: "Questioning the Defendant and Examining Witnesses during the Investigation". The manual contains a theoretical framework, practical guidance and specific techniques for conducting evidentiary actions, while a dedicated chapter addresses the interviewing of victims of trafficking in human beings and their protection during criminal proceedings.

The Police Training Directorate, in cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings within the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior, developed a Training Programme on the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings.⁴⁶ The programme included the training units "Treatment and Interviewing of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings" and "Status, Protection and Support of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings". During 2025, 14 police officers attended the course.

The NGO Atina organised a seminar entitled "Neuroscience in the Service of Investigation and Interviewing – Communication with Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings", while the NGO ASTRA organised a discussion forum on the status and rights of victims of trafficking in human beings in criminal proceedings. In addition, with the support of the Council of Europe, the publication "From Trauma to Testimony: Guidelines on Psychological Support for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in Investigative and Criminal Proceedings" was developed.

According to information provided by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, at the beginning of 2026, i.e. after the reporting period, victims in two cases were enabled to give their statements to a public prosecutor from the premises of the Centre, at the initiative of the Protector of Citizens. The Centre stated that it would continue to propose the use of this method of interviewing with a view to its gradual establishment as regular practice.

At the same time, the Centre pointed out that there continue to be cases in which victims give statements in the immediate presence of the accused or suspected person, which may result in fear, pressure and retraumatisation. One particularly concerning example concerned a minor girl, a victim of sexual exploitation, who testified in the presence of the accused during 2025.

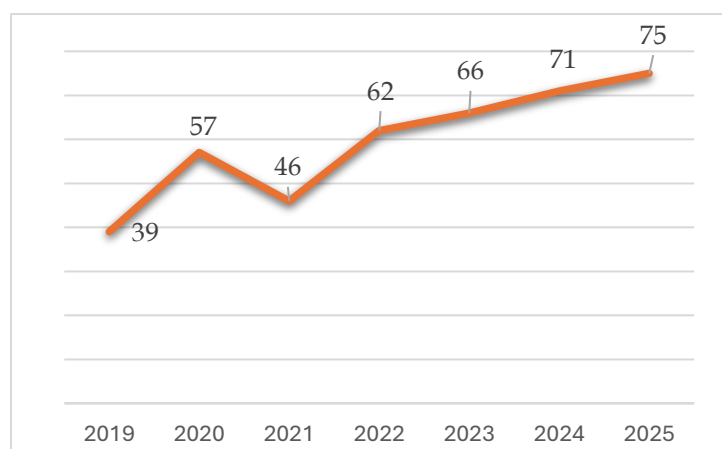
The National Rapporteur notes that relevant normative, training and professional measures directly related to the implementation of the recommendation were undertaken during 2025.

Given the development of a specialised manual for public prosecutors, the adoption of a police training programme, the delivery of the course and other professional activities, but also their limited reach and the existence of cases in which victims were not adequately protected against retraumatisation, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

⁴⁶ Adopted on 16 June 2025.

6.2 Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

During the reporting period, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings formally identified 75 victims of trafficking in human beings. Of the 242 referrals received in 2025, 60 victims were identified, while a further 15 victims were identified on the basis of referrals submitted during the previous year.



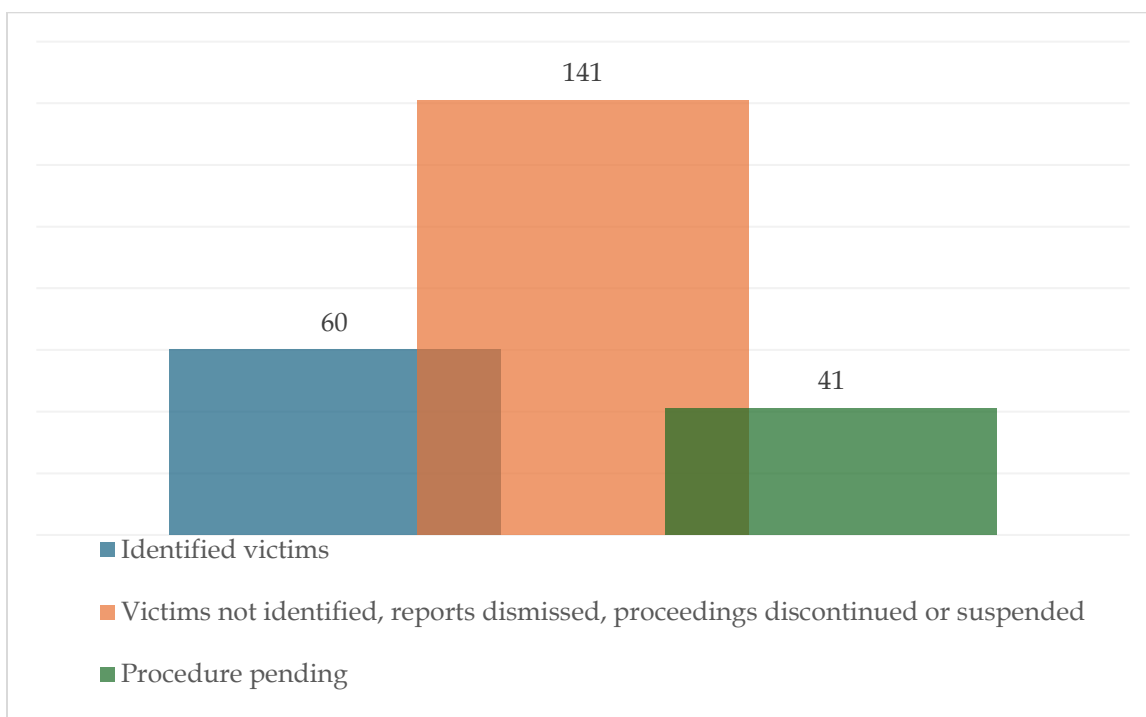
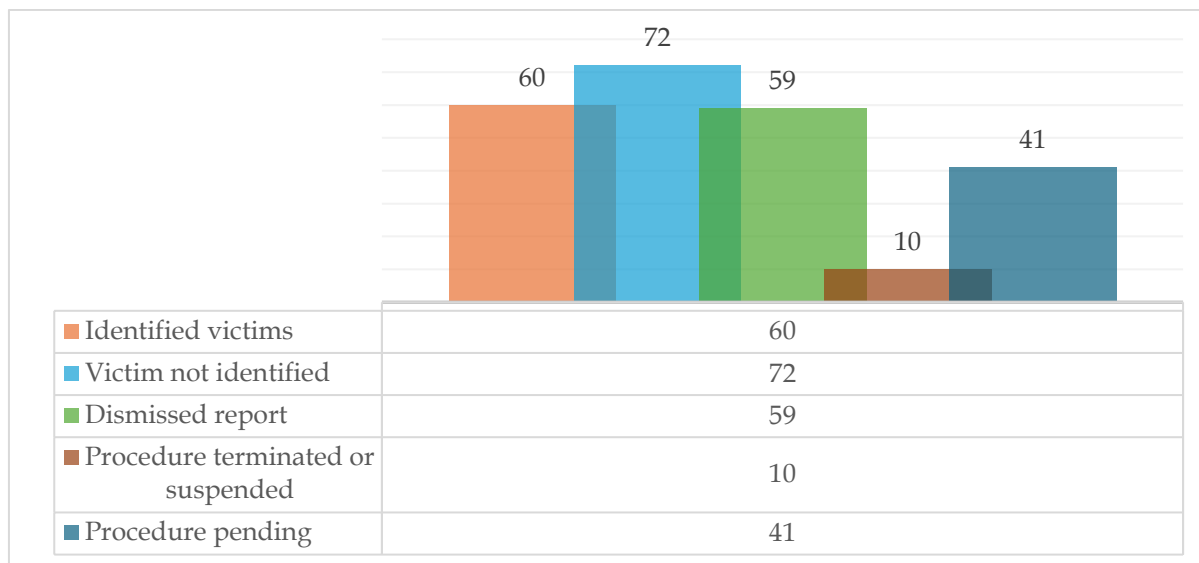
Number of victims formally identified by the Centre between 2019 and 2025

Of the total number of referrals received in 2025, 59 were dismissed. In 76% of these cases, the referrals were dismissed because the information contained in them did not make it possible to establish the identity of the presumed victim, nor was the information necessary to initiate and conduct the identification procedure obtained through supplementary information or by other means. In the remaining cases, it was assessed that the circumstances concerned other forms of abuse or violations of rights. The persons the referrals concerned were informed and referred to institutions and organisations capable of providing them with appropriate assistance, while the Centre, depending on the circumstances of the individual case, notified the competent police directorate, labour inspectorate, social welfare centre and other relevant stakeholders.

A total of 10 identification procedures were discontinued or terminated. In nine cases, the procedure could not be continued because the presumed victim was unavailable or had died, while in one case the person refused to participate in the identification procedure.

It was determined that 72 persons were not victims of trafficking in human beings. In these cases, other forms of violation of the presumed victims' rights were most frequently identified. 62% of the cases involved violations of employment rights and fraud, while the remaining cases involved child neglect and abuse, rape, abduction and domestic violence.

At the end of the reporting period, identification procedures relating to 41 referrals remained ongoing.

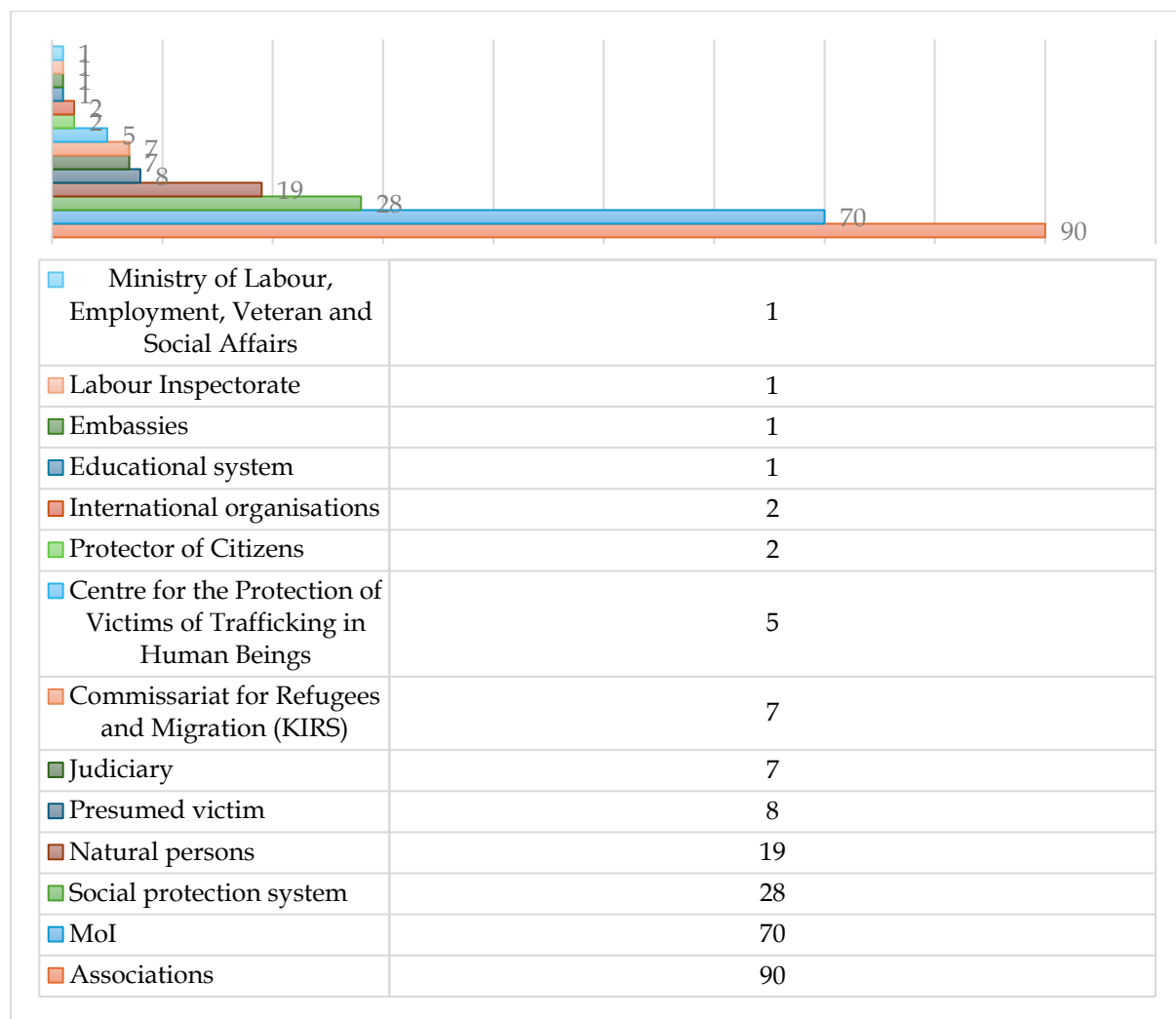


The Centre's Handling of Referrals Received in 2025

6.2.1 Number of Referrals and Trends

During 2025, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings received a total of 242 new referrals concerning suspected trafficking in human beings, representing an increase of 31% compared with 2024. Compared with 2021, the number of referrals almost doubled.

For the second consecutive year, the largest number of referrals was submitted by civil society organisations, with a total of 90 referrals. The number of referrals submitted by the Ministry of the Interior also increased, from 48 in 2024 to 70 in 2025. An increase was also recorded in referrals submitted by individuals, while the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration submitted its highest number of referrals compared with previous years. This distribution of referral sources indicates the involvement of a range of stakeholders in identifying suspected cases of trafficking in human beings, particularly in the context of mixed migration flows and the possible labour exploitation of foreign nationals.



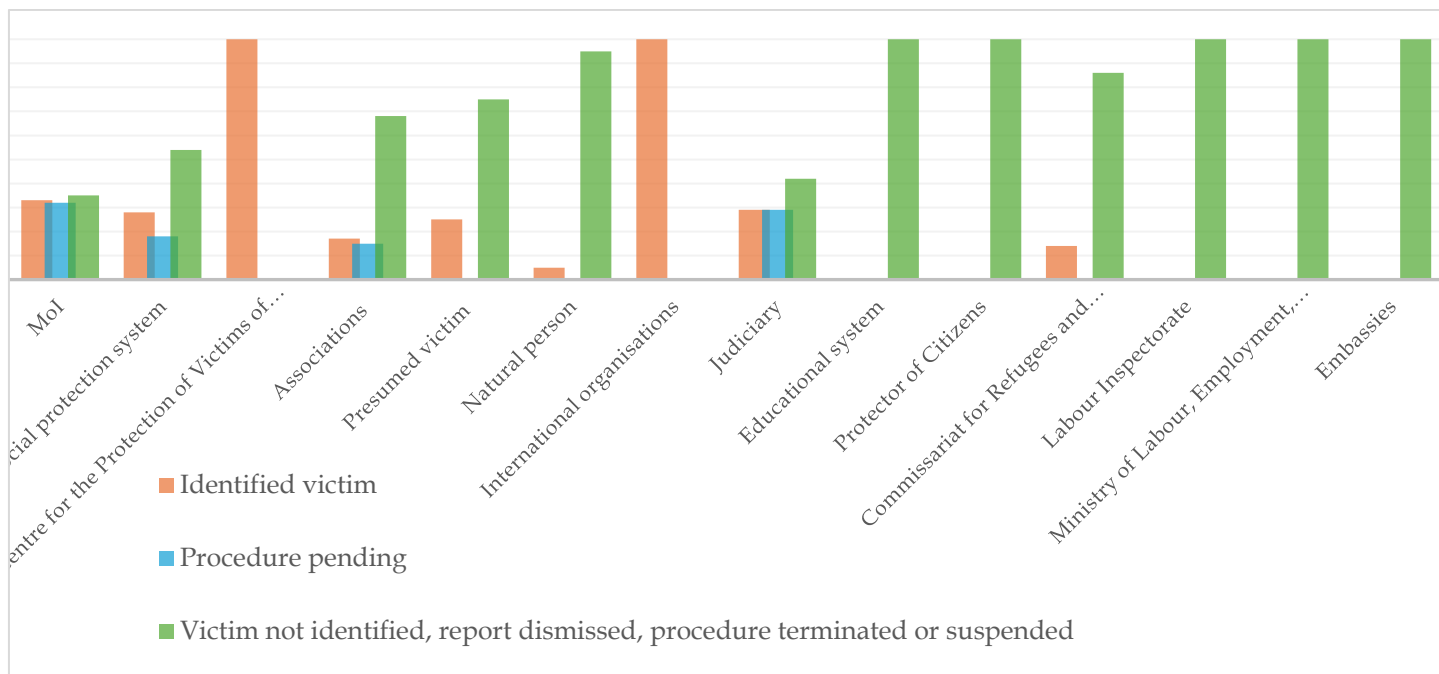
Number of referrals to the Centre by source of referral in 2025

The largest number of referrals concerned suspected trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation – 115 referrals, while 54 referrals concerned suspected sexual exploitation. However, the increase in the overall number of referrals was not accompanied by a proportionate increase in the number of formally identified victims. It was determined that 72 persons involved in referrals submitted in 2025 were not victims of trafficking in human beings, compared with 45 such cases in 2024. In 62% of these cases, violations of employment rights or fraud were identified, while the remaining cases involved other forms of violence, abuse and violations of rights, including domestic violence, child neglect and abuse, and rape.

In cases where trafficking in human beings was not established, the Centre prepared reports and submitted them to the competent authorities, including the police and public prosecutor's offices. The Centre's professionals provided the persons concerned with counselling support, informed them about the available forms of assistance and referred them to the competent institutions and organisations capable of responding to their identified needs.

At the same time, the number of referrals dismissed increased from 35 in 2024 to 59 in 2025. In 76% of these cases, the referrals were dismissed because the information they contained did not make it possible to establish the identity of the presumed victim, nor was the necessary information subsequently obtained through supplementary submissions. This indicates that a significant proportion of referrals did not contain sufficiently specific information to initiate and conduct the identification procedure.

The increase in the number of referrals may indicate greater visibility of the issue of trafficking in human beings and the more active involvement of different stakeholders in reporting suspected cases. Nevertheless, the number of referrals alone is not sufficient to conclude that confidence in the work of the Centre has increased. The increase in the number of dismissed referrals and cases in which the victim status was not established points primarily to the need to improve the quality and completeness of the information submitted to the Centre, as well as the knowledge of referring stakeholders concerning indicators of trafficking in human beings and the information required to conduct the identification procedure. The question of the Centre's capacity to act in a timely manner can only be assessed on the basis of data concerning the duration of identification procedures, the number of unresolved referrals and the human resources available.



Outcomes of the handling of Referrals in 2025, by source of referral

6.2.2 Forms of Exploitation

In 2025, among the total of 75 formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings, the most prevalent forms of exploitation were sexual exploitation and labour exploitation, which were recorded in almost equal proportions.

Type of exploitation	Up to 18 years		Over 18 years		Total
	F.	M.	F.	M.	
Sexual	13		13		26
Forced marriage	6		2		8
Labour		2	11	14	27
Forced begging		3		1	4
Street criminality	3	1	2		6
Forced commission of criminal offences		3	1		4
Total	22	9	29	15	75

Victims of trafficking in human beings identified by the Centre in 2025, by type of exploitation, sex and age

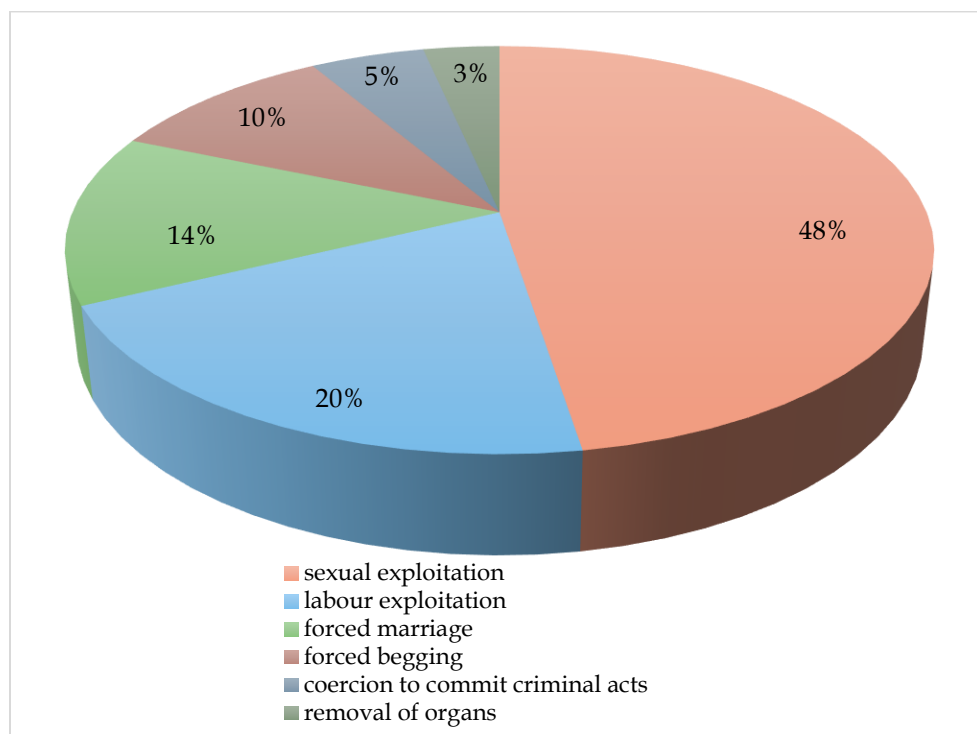
Sexual exploitation was identified in 26 victims, accounting for 35% of all formally identified victims. All the victims of this form of exploitation were female. In 12% of cases, the exploitation was for pornographic purposes, while the remaining victims were forced to provide sexual services in exchange for money.

Labour exploitation was identified in 27 victims, accounting for 36% of cases. The victims included persons of both sexes, including two children. Victims were most commonly subjected to labour exploitation in the hospitality sector, industry and agriculture, as well as through domestic servitude and street-based work.

Forced begging was identified in four victims, three of whom were children. In the majority of these cases, the exploiters were the victims' parents or close relatives. Forced criminality was also identified in four victims, all male, three of whom were minors. In all cases, the victims had been forced to commit theft. Multiple forms of exploitation were identified in six victims, accounting for 8% of cases.

Forced marriage was recorded in eight victims, accounting for 11% of all identified victims. Six of them were minor girls. In all of these cases, sexual exploitation or the intention to sexually exploit the victim was present, while in two cases, labour exploitation was also involved. Four victims of forced marriage were identified as early as the recruitment stage, thereby preventing the exploitation from taking place.

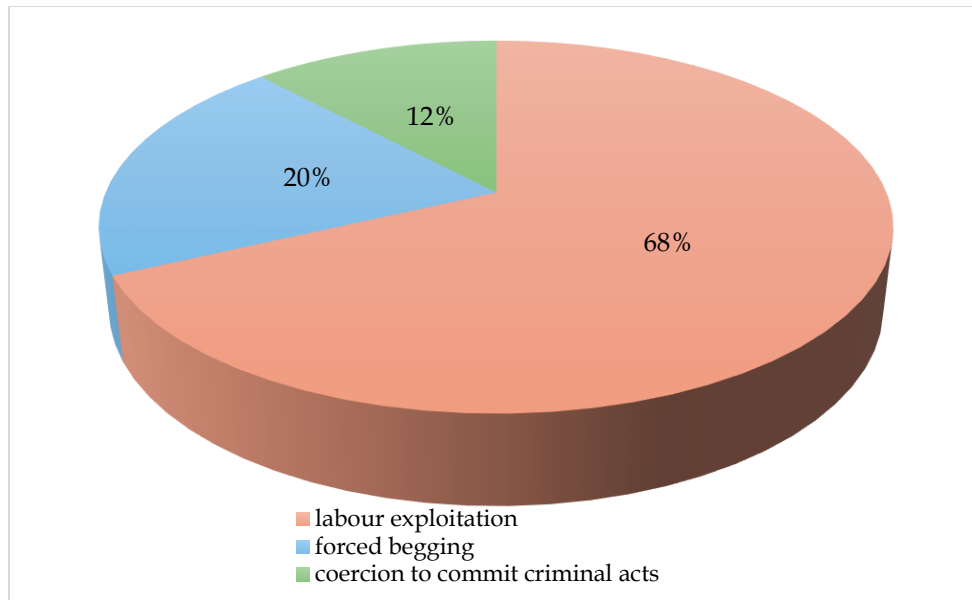
Children accounted for 41% of all formally identified victims. According to the Centre, the forms of exploitation to which they were subjected were particularly severe and resulted in complex trauma. The largest number of children were subjected to sexual exploitation – a total of 15 girls, whose average age was 14. Minor boys were most frequently victims of forced begging or forced criminality, primarily theft, and in the majority of these cases, the exploiters were their parents or close relatives.



Forms of exploitation of female victims in 2025, according to the Centre's records

Female victims accounted for 68% of all identified victims. Although they were most frequently victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, they were also

subjected to other forms of exploitation. The pattern of exploitation among male victims differed significantly: they were predominantly victims of labour exploitation, while among minor boys, the most prevalent forms were forced begging and forced criminality.



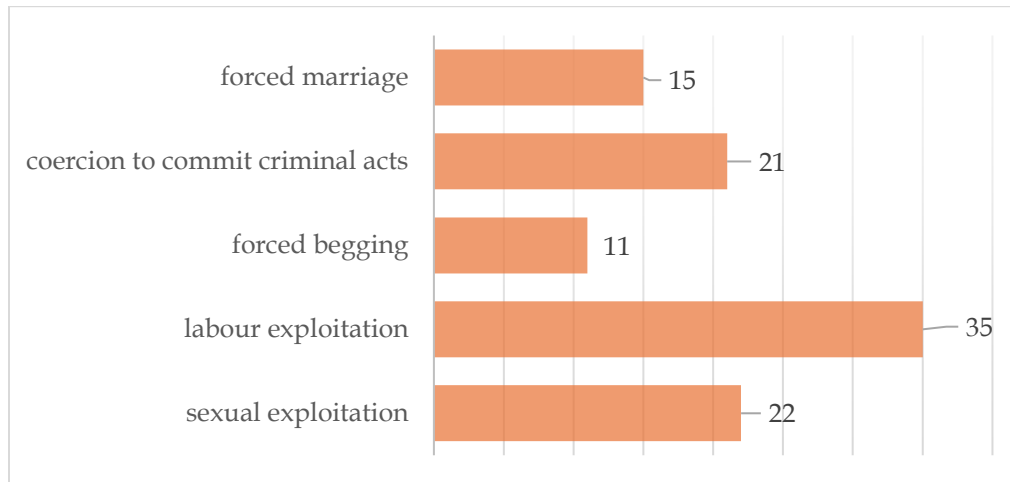
Forms of exploitation of male victims in 2025, according to the Centre's records

In the majority of the detected cases, exploitation took place in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Subotica and Sombor, while ten victims were exploited outside the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

During 2025, the referrals showed a broader geographical distribution than in previous years. The Centre partly attributed this change to the regional training sessions held in 25 cities across Serbia. A significant number of referrals were also received from Niš, while some civil society organisations based in Belgrade reported cases that had occurred in other cities.

6.2.3 Profile of Identified Victims

The average age of the identified victims of trafficking in human beings in 2025 was 23 years.



*Average age of the identified victims by form of trafficking in human beings
in 2025*

According to the Centre's records, the proportion of identified female victims of trafficking in human beings remained exceptionally high in 2025. Female victims accounted for 68% of all identified victims, while male victims accounted for 32%.



Sex distribution of identified victims in 2025

As regards their socio-economic situation, the vast majority of the identified victims did not own immovable property, were not employed and had no other regular source of income, and most had only completed primary education. Differences were also observed by sex, as men were more

likely than women to have regular income or own immovable property. For a certain number of victims, the Centre did not have information concerning their socio-economic situation. In 2025, a change was recorded in the marital and family status of adult victims compared with previous years, when the majority had been neither married nor living in a non-marital partnership. The number of adult victims who were married or living in a non-marital partnership was approximately equal to the number of those who were neither married nor living in such a partnership. Victims who were married were most frequently subjected to labour exploitation, with exploiters taking advantage of their need to provide for their families.

As in previous years, nationals of the Republic of Serbia accounted for the largest number of identified victims in 2025. At the same time, a significant increase was recorded in the number of foreign nationals among identified victims. A total of 28 foreign nationals were formally identified, which, according to the Centre, represents the highest number recorded since its establishment. Among the identified foreign nationals, 21 were victims of labour exploitation, three of sexual exploitation and two of forced marriage, while two were subjected to multiple forms of exploitation.

Country of origin	Country of exploitation/ intended exploitation							
	Serbia	Germany	Pakistan	Italy	Saudi Arabia	Cameroon	Slovenia	Indonesia
Serbia	41	1		4			1	
China	2							
Bangladesh	2							
Pakistan			1					
Philippines	3				1			
Kenya	2							
Zimbabwe	8							
Belarus	1							
Uzbekistan	1							
India	5							
Cameroon						1		
Indonesia								1

Identified victims of trafficking in human beings by country of origin and country of exploitation/intended exploitation in 2025

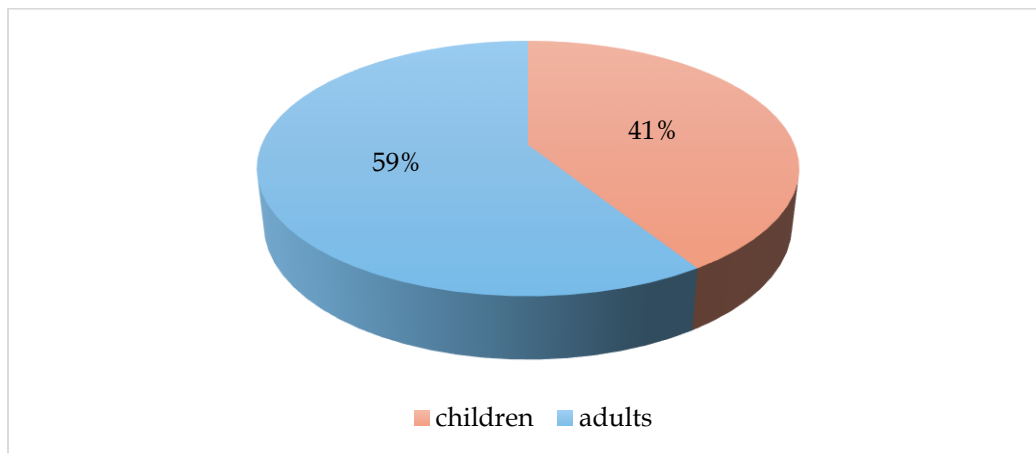
The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings points out that a record number of referrals concerning the suspected exploitation of foreign nationals who had legally entered the Republic of Serbia was recorded in 2025. Most of these persons had come to Serbia through regular migration channels for the purpose of employment and were subsequently subjected to fraud, violations of employment rights and, in some cases, exploitation. Although in the majority of the reported cases it was established that the circumstances did not amount to trafficking in human beings but rather to other forms of violations of rights, the Centre highlighted the need for a systemic response to the risks identified.

According to the Centre, a particular challenge arises in cases where the constituent elements of trafficking in human beings have not been established but there are indications of other criminal offences, misdemeanours or violations of employment rights. In such cases, other criminal offences and misdemeanours often remain unprosecuted, the persons concerned do not obtain compensation, and employers who have defrauded them, failed to pay their wages or otherwise violated their rights are not sanctioned. According to the Centre, some employers subsequently continue to recruit new foreign workers and subject them to the same treatment.

A principle of particular urgency has been introduced in identification procedures concerning foreign nationals and was further developed during the reporting period. The Centre also designated a professional responsible for monitoring these cases and organising identification procedures.

6.2.4 Child Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

Children accounted for 41 % of all the formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings, meaning that almost every second identified victim was a child. According to the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the forms of exploitation to which children were subjected were particularly severe and resulted in complex trauma.

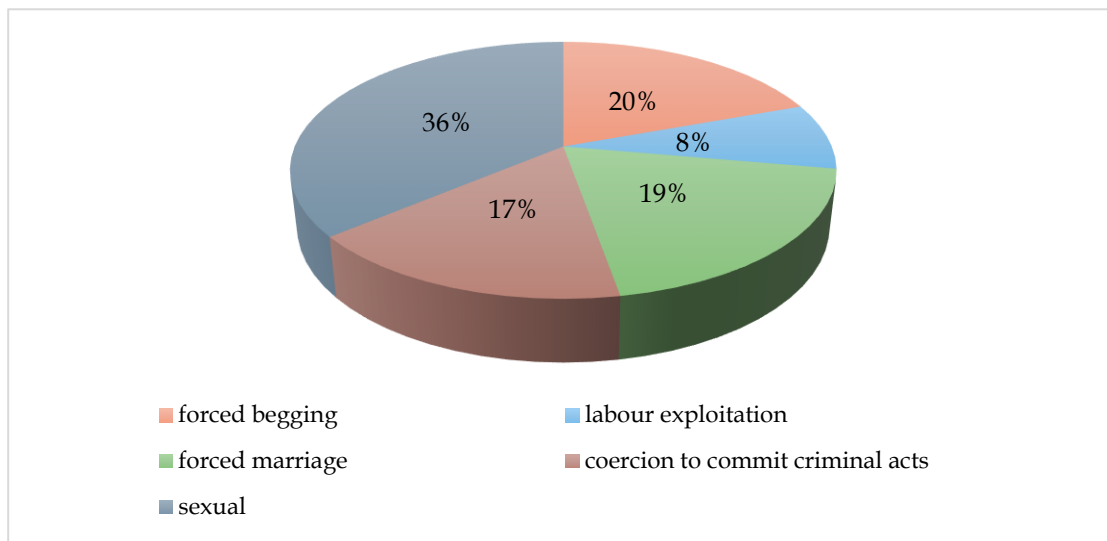


Proportion of children among identified victims of trafficking in human beings in 2025

The largest group among the identified child victims consisted of girls subjected to sexual exploitation – 15 in total, two of whom were exploited in the context of forced marriage. Their average age was 14 years. These cases involved various forms of violence and coercion, including coercion into providing sexual services, the administration of narcotic drugs, threats against the

children or members of their families, and the dissemination of sexually explicit recordings of children. In a significant number of cases, the exploiters were the children's parents or other persons close to them, while some of the children were without parental care.

After sexual exploitation, children were most frequently subjected to forced begging, predominantly by parents and relatives, followed by forced marriage, with all the identified victims of this form of exploitation being girls. Cases of coercion into committing criminal offences, most commonly theft, were also recorded, as were cases of labour exploitation through street work and agricultural work.



Forms of exploitation of children identified as victims of trafficking in human beings in 2025

The majority of identified child victims came from families that had previously been known to social welfare centres due to various difficulties in family functioning, domestic violence, neglect or child abuse. Six children identified as victims of trafficking in human beings were placed in social welfare institutions at the time they were being exploited. Although the exploitation generally did not take place within the institutions themselves, the data indicates that children in residential care are particularly exposed to the risk of trafficking in human beings. Over the past three years, a total of 15 children in residential care have been identified as victims of trafficking in human beings, having been subjected to sexual exploitation or forced begging.

In addition to formally identified victims, risks of exploitation were identified among other children placed in social welfare institutions. The mere identification of risk, however, is insufficient unless followed by timely, concrete and individualised protection measures. Prevention of the exploitation of children without parental care must be intensified through comprehensive programmes of intensive and continuous support, based on an individual assessment of each child's risks and needs. Where required by the child's safety and best interests, protection measures should also include the child's immediate removal from the existing environment and the provision of an appropriate form of accommodation and support.

Cases were also recorded in which children from families that had not previously been known to social welfare centres and in which no difficulties in family functioning had previously been identified were identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. These cases most commonly

involved online sexual exploitation. These data demonstrate that the risk of trafficking in human beings is not confined to children from families already identified by the social welfare system and point to the need to strengthen prevention, early identification and children's safety in the digital environment.

According to the Centre's data, in 34% of cases involving the exploitation of children, the traffickers were their parents, in 27% they were friends, in 15% partners, in 12% relatives, while in the remaining 12% of cases the exploiters were persons unknown to the child. The fact that, in the majority of cases, the exploiters were persons known and close to the children highlights the particular complexity involved in detecting such cases, assessing the child's safety and ensuring lasting protection.

Thirty per cent of the identified child victims were exploited while attending school, while 16% of the identified children of compulsory primary-school age were not enrolled in the education system. These data confirm the important role of the education system in the early identification of indicators of trafficking in human beings and the referral of children to the competent authorities. Non-attendance at school and early school leaving constitute significant risk indicators requiring a timely and coordinated response by schools, guardianship authorities and other competent authorities.

6.2.5 Methods of Recruitment and the Role of Social Media

Traffickers recruited victims in various ways, most commonly through job offers. Exploiters posted job advertisements on social media and cooperated with employment agencies. In addition, victims were recruited through marriage proposals and romantic approaches, primarily in cases of sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Traffickers often presented themselves as the victims' friends, offered them various forms of assistance, invited them to clubs, lent them money or offered them narcotic drugs. In certain cases, victims were openly offered the opportunity to engage in prostitution or to commit criminal offences together with the traffickers, most commonly theft, after which the traffickers assumed control over them.

Children were most commonly recruited by exploiters who posed as their friends and used emotional manipulation, whereas adults were most frequently recruited through job offers.

According to the data available to the Centre, in cases involving the labour exploitation of foreign nationals, victims were almost invariably recruited through online job advertisements, published on social media or specialised job-search websites. Furthermore, in cases of sexual exploitation involving the provision of sexual services, girls were also recruited through social media, either through job offers or offers of a romantic relationship, while their services were usually advertised on specialised websites.

6.3 Protection, Safety and Rights of Victims

6.3.1 Activities of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

During 2025, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings applied the Rulebook on the Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Coordination of Protection⁴⁷. The Rulebook established a continuous, 24-hour on-call system for the Centre's professional staff and an obligation to respond urgently to every report of suspected trafficking in human beings.

According to the Centre, within 24 hours of receiving a report, a professional staff member contacts the person concerned, assesses their urgent needs and, depending on the circumstances of the individual case, informs and involves the police, the competent public prosecutor's office, the social welfare centre, the Labour Inspectorate, the Directorate for Foreigners and other relevant actors. Within the same period, the Centre assesses whether the conditions for initiating the identification procedure have been met.

One of the significant innovations introduced by the Rulebook is the requirement to organise a multidisciplinary and multisectoral meeting or case conference for every identified victim. The victim and relevant actors participate in the preparation of an individualised protection plan, which sets out the objectives, measures, time frames and responsibilities of the participants, while the Centre coordinates, monitors and evaluates the implementation of the plan. According to the Centre's data, a total of 336 team, intersectoral and other meetings and case conferences were organised during 2025.⁴⁸

The Centre once again drew attention to the shortage of professional staff. Although two new professional staff members were recruited to the Service for the Coordination of Victim Protection in 2023, the number of reports has increased. It is therefore necessary to conduct an analysis of the actual volume and structure of the workload and to base the strengthening of the Centre's staffing capacity on the findings of that analysis.

The need for such an analysis is particularly important in view of the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims, which will enter into application on 1 January 2027. The Law prescribes the Centre's responsibilities in the areas of formal identification, needs and risk assessment, the coordination of protection, the preparation and monitoring of individual plans, support for victims in proceedings before the competent authorities, and record-keeping, and regulates in greater detail the procedures for identification and for the planning and coordination of protection. The timely provision of adequate staffing, organisational and financial resources is necessary to ensure that the responsibilities prescribed by law do not result in additional workloads and delays in handling cases.

⁴⁷ Adopted by the Centre's Management Board in December 2024.

⁴⁸ According to the Centre's assessment, case conferences improve intersectoral communication, encourage the more active involvement of the competent actors and enable victims to participate in decisions concerning their protection, recovery and integration. This practice constitutes an important mechanism for individualised and participatory protection planning. However, in order to assess its actual effectiveness, it is necessary to establish data on the proportion of victims covered, the implementation of planned measures, compliance with time frames, obstacles encountered by individual actors in implementing the measures, and the outcomes of the plans implemented.

The Centre stated that, during the reporting period, cooperation with the police and certain public prosecutor's offices had improved, particularly through the expanded practice of joint interviews and better information exchange.

The available data shows that the development of identification procedures, individualised protection planning and intersectoral coordination continued during 2025.

6.3.2 Safety and Special Measures for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

According to data from the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, regular cooperation with the police was maintained during 2025 with a view to ensuring the safety of victims. The Centre communicated information concerning criminal offences to the police through its findings and opinions, as well as through separate written notifications when threats or pressure against victims were subsequently recorded. Where necessary, the Centre's professional staff accompanied victims when reporting criminal offences and giving statements.

During the reporting period, in 47 instances, the Centre provided accompaniment and support to victims when giving statements and testimony before higher public prosecutor's offices and courts. According to the Centre's data, no victim was provided with a police escort when attending court proceedings during 2025.

Various security measures were applied at the Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, including the continuous presence of staff, video surveillance of communal and outdoor areas, technical security measures for windows and entrances, and a specially organised isolation unit. The Shelter is located in the same building as a police station, which, according to the Centre, enables a rapid response in the event of a threat to safety. Cooperation with the police was maintained on a continuous basis, while additional support and protection measures were taken depending on the assessed level of risk.

Associations, however, pointed to shortcomings in the practical arrangements for ensuring victims' safety and privacy. Atina reported cases in which court documents were served at victims' home addresses despite requests that correspondence be channelled through the association providing them with support. The association also reported pressure and attempts to discredit victims' legal representatives and the associations providing them with assistance.

ASTRA reported that, in certain cases, police escorts had not been provided even where there was an increased security risk. It also drew attention to cases in which male victims had been accommodated in facilities that did not provide an adequate level of safety.

6.3.3 Access to Justice and Legal Support for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings undertakes various activities to ensure access to justice for identified and presumed victims.⁴⁹

During 2025, the Centre provided support for victims' participation in investigative and judicial proceedings in 89 cases. In all these cases, cooperation was established with the police and, in the

⁴⁹ These activities include engaging lawyers, providing psychological preparation for victims before giving evidence, submitting requests for the granting of the particularly vulnerable witness status, providing findings and opinions to public prosecutor's offices and courts, and arranging transport and accompaniment for victims when attending judicial authorities.

majority of cases, with public prosecutor's offices. The Centre engaged a lawyer for 14 beneficiaries, but the lawyer's contract expired at the end of the reporting year. The Centre identified the irregular provision of information to victims on the progress and outcome of criminal proceedings as a continuing challenge, as there is no systematically regulated mechanism for the timely provision of such information.

In order to protect the rights and interests of victims during criminal proceedings, the Atina association cooperated with the competent public prosecutor's offices, courts, services for assistance and support to witnesses and injured parties, and the Centre.⁵⁰

As regards the effectiveness of criminal-law protection, attention was drawn to the lack of proceedings against legal persons and employers in cases where there are indications of exploitative practices. At the same time, certain forms of exploitation, particularly forced marriage, are still not sufficiently recognised in the practice of the competent authorities as potential forms of trafficking in human beings. These findings indicate that access to justice depends not only on the availability of legal support, but also on the ability of the competent authorities to correctly identify and legally qualify all forms of exploitation and to examine the responsibility of all natural and legal persons involved.

According to data provided by ASTRA, during 2025, the costs of representation by specialised lawyers were covered in three criminal proceedings. Legal support was provided to 340 persons, of whom 188 were men and 152 were women, while 73 were victims of trafficking in human beings.

The Atina association provided legal assistance to 73 victims through 189 individual legal services. Representation by a law firm was secured for 12 victims, while lawyers cooperating with the association attended 39 hearings and undertook more than 60 legal actions in nine court proceedings. Four convictions were handed down in these proceedings, by the Higher Courts in Pirot, Kragujevac, Šabac and Jagodina.

According to Atina, representatives of the association and legal representatives providing support to victims were subjected to pressure, insults and attempts at discreditation by defendants and their defence lawyers. Attempts by defence lawyers to contact the association directly were also recorded, as were cases in which the defence strategy sought to challenge the credibility of the organisation providing support to the victim. These reports indicate the need for risk assessments to cover not only victims but also, when the circumstances of the case so require, their legal representatives, professional staff and organisations providing them with assistance.

Shortcomings in the protection of victims' privacy were also reported. In certain cases, court summonses and other documents were served at victims' home addresses despite requests that, where permitted by procedural rules, communications should be channelled through the organisation providing them with support. Such practices create a risk that information concerning the victim's experience of exploitation and participation in criminal proceedings may become known to family members or other persons.

The Centre again drew attention to the lack of regular and timely information exchange with judicial authorities. There is no established mechanism that would enable the Centre, within the

⁵⁰ Support was aimed at ensuring legal and psychological assistance, protecting the victims' privacy and dignity, and applying available mechanisms to prevent secondary victimisation. It also included initiating and monitoring procedures for obtaining the particularly vulnerable witness status, as well as involving services for assistance and support to witnesses and injured parties in locations where such services have been established.

limits imposed by the data protection legislation and the rules governing criminal proceedings, to receive information relevant to planning the victim's protection in a timely manner, including information on the conclusion of an investigation, the delivery of a judgment, the ordering or lifting of detention, and the imposition of restraining orders.

The Centre stated that, during 2025, it had proposed that all identified victims should be granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness, but that it had not received information on the decision of the public prosecutor or court in every case. According to the Centre's data, victims gave evidence in the presence of defendants in several cases, resulting in their secondary victimisation.

Individual cases involving severe retraumatisation were also recorded during the reporting period. In one case, a child victim of sexual exploitation gave evidence in the presence of the accused. In another case, on the day on which an identified victim – a man with mental health difficulties – was due to give evidence, the police attempted to take him into custody in connection with a previously unenforced sentence. These cases point to shortcomings in information exchange, the individual assessment of victims' needs and coordination between the competent authorities.

The Centre highlighted the importance of allowing the professional staff member already providing support to a victim to be present when the victim gives evidence, when this is consistent with the procedural rules and the decision of the competent authority. Unlike staff of court services for assistance and support for witnesses and injured parties, who generally have had no prior contact with the victim, a professional staff member from the Centre or another support provider may already have established a relationship of trust with the victim and be familiar with their individual needs and risks.

The available data shows that the Centre and relevant associations provided a significant volume of legal assistance, legal representation and support to victims. However, access to specialised legal assistance continues to depend to a considerable extent on the Centre's time-limited contracts, the capacities of associations and donor funding. The fact that, according to the data provided, no victim accessed the free legal aid system through local self-government units indicates that the formal availability of this right has not resulted in its effective exercise in practice.

6.3.4 Support for Victims in the Areas of Healthcare and Psychological Assistance

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings supports victims in accessing healthcare by assisting them in exercising their right to health insurance, arranging medical examinations and obtaining medicines, as well as organising transport and accompaniment to healthcare institutions.

According to the Centre's data, all identified victims and persons undergoing the identification procedure during 2025 were provided with basic psychological and counselling support, through a total of 379 support activities.⁵¹

⁵¹ This figure refers to the activities undertaken, rather than to the number of beneficiaries or psychotherapy sessions provided. It is therefore not possible, on the basis of this figure, to determine the frequency, duration or intensity of the support provided to individual victims.

The Centre provided psychotherapeutic support in cooperation with relevant associations. During the reporting period, psychotherapy was provided predominantly through online sessions, thereby ensuring additional professional support and the continuous monitoring of the beneficiaries' psychological well-being. The Centre stated, however, that it was unable to secure the permanent engagement of a psychotherapist, although, in its assessment, this type of support is required by the majority of victims of trafficking in human beings.

In response to long-standing shortcomings in the availability of specialised psychological support, the Atina association established the Counselling Centre for the Psychological Recovery of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in Belgrade, intended to provide long-term therapeutic work, psychological stabilisation and support to victims throughout the recovery process.

According to data provided by the association, the Counselling Centre provided 395 psychological and psychotherapeutic sessions during 2025, with this form of support being provided to 51 victims of trafficking in human beings. In addition, social workers and case managers provided 1,109 psychosocial support and counselling services to 107 beneficiaries.

According to the association, the establishment, development and operation of the Counselling Centre have been funded predominantly through its own resources and project-based funding, without a stable public funding mechanism. The data provided shows that specialised associations are developing and delivering services that are not sufficiently available within the public system, including psychological and psychotherapeutic support, legal assistance, supported housing and outreach services.

6.3.5 Challenges in Providing Adequate Accommodation for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

The provision of appropriate and safe accommodation remains one of the major challenges within the system for the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings. Accommodation is most commonly provided at the Shelter of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and through the supported housing service provided by the Atina association, while safe houses, residential institutions for children without parental care and foster families are used in a smaller number of cases.

According to the Centre's data, no request for placement in the Shelter was refused during 2025. A total of 18 persons – 12 adult women and six children – used the accommodation service.

The Shelter's capacity remains limited, while the existing premises do not allow for its straightforward expansion. For some time, the Centre has been drawing attention to the need for additional premises within the building in which the Shelter is located, in order to increase the number of available places, ensure the uninterrupted functioning of the facility and enable the provision of other forms of support for beneficiaries. As the need to expand capacity and the lack of adequate premises were also identified during the previous reporting period, the findings for 2025 show that this problem has not been resolved.

During 2025, the Centre continued its activities aimed at establishing a specialised accommodation service for male victims of trafficking in human beings and was provided with an apartment for this purpose by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. The apartment requires renovation and furnishing, and the Centre therefore initiated discussions with potential donors.

Under the current Law on Social Protection, supported housing falls within services supporting independent living, which are, as a rule, provided by local self-government units, while accommodation services for victims of trafficking in human beings are financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. At the same time, the Law provides for the possibility of financing certain services through earmarked transfers and as services of particular importance to the Republic of Serbia. It would therefore not be sufficiently precise to conclude that the Republic cannot participate in financing such a service; rather, the type and model of the service, the authority or entity responsible for its provision, and a sustainable financing mechanism need to be clearly determined.

Serious systemic problems also persist in securing accommodation for child victims of trafficking in human beings. According to the Centre's data, social welfare centres face refusals of placement requests by residential institutions for children and centres for family accommodation and adoption. It is particularly difficult to secure appropriate accommodation for children with mental health difficulties and significant behavioural support needs, as the available service providers often lack sufficient staffing, professional and organisational capacities to provide the required intensity of individualised support.

6.3.6 Role of the Social Welfare and Guardianship System in the Protection of Victims

During 2025, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings continued its cooperation with social welfare institutions, and activities were carried out to strengthen the capacities of professionals working within this system. Under a joint project of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre, 581 professionals from 101 social welfare institutions received training, including staff from 69 social welfare centres. According to the Centre, this represents the largest number of social welfare professionals to date to have received training in the field of trafficking in human beings.

During the reporting period, the Centre provided various forms of support to a total of 529 persons. This figure comprises 75 victims identified during 2025, 267 victims identified in previous periods who continued to receive support, and 187 persons who were not identified as victims of trafficking in human beings but were assessed as being at risk of exploitation.

According to the Centre's data, in all 31 cases involving children, the competent social welfare centre and guardianship authority were involved. Guardianship protection was provided to 11 children identified during 2025.

According to the Centre, adult victims decide whether a social welfare centre is to be involved in providing them with support. Some victims do not consent to its involvement because they fear that, particularly in smaller communities, they could be recognised and information concerning their experiences could become known to other persons.

The Centre and social welfare centres continued to jointly prepare protection plans and organise case conferences as a mechanism for intersectoral coordination.

The Centre highlighted the need to establish contact persons for trafficking in human beings within social welfare centres, following the model of mechanisms already in place within the police and public prosecutor's offices. Contact persons must not, however, become the sole holders of relevant expertise within an institution, nor can their designation compensate for shortages of professional staff or the underdevelopment of social welfare services.

During 2025, cooperation with the Red Cross of Serbia also continued in the provision of clothing, food, hygiene supplies and financial assistance for housing costs. A total of 34 Red Cross volunteers from 27 cities completed training on identifying cases of trafficking in human beings and providing support to victims.

6.3.7 Labour market integration

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings notes that an effective and systematic programme for the economic empowerment of victims of trafficking in human beings has yet to be established in the Republic of Serbia. Support for victims in this area continued to be provided by civil society organisations, particularly Atina and ASTRA, through vocational training, assistance with preparing CVs, job-search preparation and psychological support. However, cooperation between the Centre and civil society organisations, on the one hand, and the National Employment Service, on the other, has not been developed to an extent that would ensure the regular referral of victims, their inclusion in appropriate active labour market policy measures and the monitoring of the outcomes achieved.

The National Employment Service provides unemployed persons with information, counselling and job-placement services and includes them in active labour market policy measures, including subsidised employment and self-employment. The type of support is determined through an individual employment plan, based on an assessment of the person's needs and labour market conditions. However, this constitutes a general system of support for unemployed persons rather than a specifically developed programme tailored to the needs and risks of victims of trafficking in human beings.

As at 31 December 2025, one person (a woman) with the recorded status of a victim of trafficking in human beings was registered with the National Employment Service. During the reporting period, no more than three persons with the recorded status of a victim of trafficking in human beings were registered as unemployed at any one time.

During 2024, up to six persons with the status of a victim of trafficking in human beings were registered with the National Employment Service, three persons were included in active labour market policy measures, while nine instances of employment were recorded.

During the reporting period, representatives of the National Employment Service were not invited by public prosecutors or the Groups for Coordination and Cooperation to participate in planning the economic empowerment of victims of trafficking in human beings. The same shortcoming was recorded in 2024, although representatives of the National Employment Service had previously been designated to participate in this mechanism. The repeated failure to activate this mechanism demonstrates that the designation of representatives and their formal availability have not resulted in the establishment of a functional system of referral and coordinated action.

The Centre states that victims may register with the National Employment Service independently and declare their status as victims of trafficking in human beings upon registration, without confirmation or referral from the Centre. Consequently, the Centre does not have complete data on victims who have approached the National Employment Service independently or on their participation in employment measures. According to data provided by ASTRA, 35 economic empowerment interventions were carried out during 2025 for 23 female beneficiaries and their children.

According to the civil society organisations, their economic empowerment activities are financed entirely through donor funding. These activities constitute an important form of direct support

for victims, but cannot replace a systematic programme implemented within the framework of public policies and financed from stable public funding sources. Reliance exclusively on project-based funding calls into question the continuity of support, its geographical accessibility and the possibility of ensuring that it is available to every victim who needs it.

6.4 Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings

In December 2025, representatives of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings carried out an official visit to the Shelter for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. The visit included an assessment of accommodation conditions, the organisation of the professional team's work, the availability of healthcare and psychosocial support, security procedures, and support provided to residents in proceedings before the competent authorities. Direct interviews were also conducted with residents under conditions that enabled them to describe their experiences regarding the quality of support, their sense of safety, the recovery process and their relationship with professional staff, without the presence of persons who might have influenced their responses.

Direct observations and the available data indicate that the Shelter provides continuous, professionally organised support to women and girls who are presumed or formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings.

The primary aim of the service is recovery from the consequences of trauma, the establishment of physical and psychological safety, and the empowerment of residents to make independent decisions and access other, less restrictive services as part of the process of integration into the community.

During 2025, a total of 18 residents used the accommodation service, while 15 admissions took place during the year. Five residents had been admitted in the previous year and continued to use the service in 2025. During the reporting period, 13 residents were admitted for the first time, while two residents were readmitted after having left the service, which explains why the number of admissions was higher than the number of new residents. Of the 18 residents, 16 were formally identified as victims of trafficking in human beings, while two were assessed as not meeting the criteria for identification as victims of trafficking in human beings at that time, but rather as victims of other criminal offences.

According to the data provided, 13 residents had been exploited in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and five outside its borders: one in the Republic of Croatia and four in the Republic of Italy.

Six foreign nationals used the accommodation service: one national each of Brazil, the Philippines, the Republic of Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa, and two nationals of the People's Republic of China.

Among the 16 formally identified victims, forced begging and multiple forms of exploitation were the most prevalent, each affecting five victims, or 31.25% respectively. Three victims had been subjected to sexual exploitation, accounting for 18.75%, while forced marriage, labour exploitation and forced criminality were each recorded in respect of one victim, accounting for 6.25% respectively.

Type of exploitation	Under 18	Over 18	Total
Sexual exploitation	1	2	3
Forced begging	3	2	5
Forced marriage	1	–	1
Forced criminality	–	1	1
Multiple forms of exploitation	1	4	5
Labour exploitation	–	1	1
Total	6	10	16

Total number of victims identified while accommodated at the Shelter, by form of exploitation

Compared with 2024, when sexual exploitation and forced marriage were the most prevalent forms of exploitation among the ten identified victims, forced begging and multiple forms of exploitation accounted for the largest shares in 2025.

All the residents were provided with access to the health services they required. In addition to primary healthcare, gynaecological, psychiatric, dental, paediatric and other examinations and interventions were provided in accordance with individual health needs. Some residents experienced co-occurring psychological and physical health problems and were therefore provided with regular psychiatric check-ups and monitoring of their prescribed treatment.

According to the aggregate data provided, a total of 354 medical examinations, tests and interventions were carried out during the year.

Six residents, or 33.3% of the total of 18, reported having used psychoactive substances during the period of exploitation. No crisis situations requiring crisis intervention were recorded during their stay at the Shelter.

Psychosocial support was available to all residents and included individual counselling, professional group work and activities aimed at developing life skills. The professional team monitored the residents' well-being and progress and tailored the forms of support provided to their individual needs. Additional psychotherapeutic support was provided remotely, in cooperation with the civil society organisations Atina and ASTRA.

The safety of residents, staff and the premises was ensured through organisational and technical measures, the continuous presence of staff, access control, cooperation with the police, and the provision of escorts and transport where required on the basis of a risk assessment. The Shelter also has a functionally separate accommodation unit that may be used in the event of an infectious disease, in accordance with health needs and the recommendations of the competent health professionals.

Five residents were prepared for participation in proceedings before judicial authorities. Residents who participated in proceedings were granted the status of an especially vulnerable witness and provided with legal representation. Professional staff prepared them for giving

evidence and provided psychosocial support, accompaniment and direct support during their participation in the proceedings.

Two residents gave evidence in proceedings before a higher public prosecutor's office from the premises of the Shelter via an audio-video link. This enabled them to give evidence in a familiar and safe environment, without direct contact with the accused, and with the support of professional staff with whom they had established a relationship of trust. This practice constitutes an important example of the application of measures aimed at preventing secondary victimisation.

During 2025, 11 residents left the accommodation service, while seven continued to use it in 2026.

Limitations in the Shelter's premises and material and technical resources were identified and, during certain periods, made the optimal organisation of its work more difficult. The breakdown of the official vehicle temporarily restricted activities outside the Shelter, as a result of which priority was given to activities necessary to protect the residents' safety and health.

Challenges in direct work with victims included insufficient trust among some victims in the protection system, fear of traffickers, emotional dependence on exploiters, difficulties in understanding their own situation, the age and level of maturity of children, and the inability to maintain contact with some presumed victims. At the same time, systemic challenges persist, including insufficient staffing levels, a limited number of official vehicles and inadequate premises.

The available data and the National Rapporteur's direct observations show that, during 2025, the Shelter provided residents with safe accommodation, healthcare and psychosocial support, as well as assistance in judicial proceedings. The use of an audio-video link for the purpose of giving evidence is particularly significant.

6.5 Visit by the National Rapporteur to the Asylum Centre in Sjenica

On 16 July 2025, representatives of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings visited the Asylum Centre in Sjenica. The visit included direct observation of accommodation conditions, the organisation of work, the treatment of persons staying at the Centre, and the application of mechanisms for identifying vulnerabilities and risks of trafficking in human beings. It was also established that staff working at the Centre had been trained to identify vulnerable categories of persons and apply indicators of trafficking in human beings.

According to data provided by the Commissariat, throughout 2025 the European Union Agency for Asylum's tool for the Identification of Persons with Special Needs (IPSN) was continuously used in the centres. The tool is designed to facilitate the timely identification of special procedural and reception needs, with victims of trafficking in human beings constituting one of 14 categories of persons with special needs. According to the Commissariat, the section of the tool relating to trafficking in human beings contains 47 physical, psychological and environmental indicators.

Vulnerability assessments are carried out upon admission to asylum centres, and their results are entered into the asylum seeker's individual case file. The International Organisation for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) was also used in reception centres, with a

dedicated module containing indicators of trafficking in human beings incorporated into the matrix in 2025.

Through the application of these tools during 2025, indicators giving rise to suspicion of trafficking in human beings were identified in respect of seven persons, and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings was notified without delay. One of these persons, a national of the Republic of Indonesia, was formally identified as a victim of trafficking in human beings. Prior to the decision on formal identification, a case conference was held to exchange relevant information and coordinate support measures.

The Commissariat states that all persons who were the subject of referrals were provided with assistance and support in cooperation with the Centre, in accordance with their assessed needs and risks. In order to enhance their safety, these persons were accommodated in separate accommodation units. They were provided with accommodation, clothing, footwear, personal and communal hygiene products, three meals a day and food adapted to their religious and health-related needs, as well as access to free interpretation and free legal aid.

The Commissariat identified the short duration of stays in the centres as the main challenge in identifying presumed victims. In 2025, the average length of stay was 15 days. This makes it more difficult to establish a relationship of trust, gain a fuller understanding of the circumstances in which the person finds themselves, and ensure timely referral to the Centre. The limited availability of interpreters for less commonly spoken languages also remains a systemic shortcoming. This problem has been partially addressed by engaging interpreters with the support of United Nations agencies and specialised civil society organisations; however, such arrangements do not ensure the permanent and timely availability of interpretation in all cases.

6.6 Cooperation and strengthening professional capacities for preliminary identification and work with victims of trafficking in human beings

6.6.1 Cooperation in the victim identification process

During the reporting period, cooperation between the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and other stakeholders involved in preliminary identification continued and was expanded. According to the Centre, the highest number of reports of suspected trafficking in human beings to date was recorded in 2025. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of reports should be considered separately from the number of formally identified victims and the outcomes of identification procedures, as a higher number of reports does not in itself demonstrate that a greater proportion of them were substantiated or that the competent authorities responded more effectively.

During 2025, the Ministry of Education continued to apply the revised indicators for the preliminary identification of victims within the education system. Prior to the beginning of the 2025/2026 school year, school administrations were provided with guidelines on how to respond in cases of suspected trafficking in human beings, and a dedicated webpage on the prevention of trafficking in human beings was established on the Ministry's website. According to data provided by the Ministry of Education, seven reports of suspected trafficking in human beings had been submitted by the education system by 1 April 2026.

The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Centre, developed indicators for the preliminary identification of victims within the healthcare system, together with an accompanying manual, which were presented in early 2025. A total of 110 healthcare professionals from 39 healthcare institutions participated in regional training sessions. In December 2025, six health mediators were also trained, marking the first time that the health mediator system had been included in preliminary identification activities.

The social welfare system submitted 28 reports of suspected trafficking in human beings. In 2024, 32 reports had been submitted by this system, meaning that the number of reports decreased by four, or 12.5%.

During 2025, the Labour Inspectorate did not identify indicators of trafficking in human beings in inspections conducted either ex officio or in response to complaints. In some cases, violations of labour rights were identified and misdemeanour measures were taken. According to the data provided, labour inspectors informed the competent authorities when they identified risks and participated in training on the identification of trafficking in human beings; however, no data was provided on the number of notifications made, the nature of the risks identified, or the outcomes of action taken by other authorities.

6.6.2 Activities of the police and judicial authorities in the identification and protection of victims

During the reporting period, cooperation between the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the police and judicial authorities in the identification process and the provision of support to victims continued and expanded geographically. According to the Centre, cooperation took place with higher public prosecutor's offices and police administrations, as well as with basic and appellate public prosecutor's offices, misdemeanour courts and higher courts.

During 2025, the Ministry of the Interior submitted 70 reports of suspected trafficking in human beings to the Centre, compared with 48 reports in 2024. The number of reports increased by 22, or 45.8%⁵².

The Centre continued to expand the practice of conducting joint interviews with the police. In addition to Belgrade, where the Centre's professional staff regularly attend interviews with victims at the Belgrade City Police Administration, this practice was also recorded in Zrenjanin, Novi Sad, Niš, Pančevo, Bor, Požarevac, Sombor and Kragujevac. Joint interviews were therefore conducted in nine cities, representing tangible progress in implementing an earlier recommendation made by the National Rapporteur.

In certain cases, particularly those involving children, interviews were conducted solely by the Centre's professional staff, who subsequently submitted a report to the police and public prosecutor's office. This approach may reduce the need for repeated interviews with the child; however, a clear distinction must be drawn between an interview conducted for the purposes of identification and needs assessment and a procedural interview conducted for the purpose of

⁵² These 70 reports of suspected trafficking submitted to the Centre should not be equated with criminal complaints. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, 18 criminal complaints were filed during 2025, while the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office recorded criminal complaints against 23 persons. These constitute different categories and records and are not directly comparable.

obtaining evidence. The effectiveness of this approach should also be assessed by reference to whether unnecessary repetition of the victim's account at a later stage has been avoided.

The Centre provided victims with psychological preparation for giving evidence, information on their rights, transport and accompaniment, and advocated for victims to be granted the status of a particularly vulnerable witness. Legal support was provided through the engagement of a lawyer who, according to the Centre, has specialised knowledge in the field of trafficking in human beings.

In two cases, victims gave evidence to a public prosecutor via an audio-video link from the Centre's premises, at the initiative of the Protector of Citizens. This enabled them to give evidence in a familiar and safe environment, without the direct presence of the accused and with the support of professional staff. This practice constitutes a concrete example of the application of measures aimed at preventing secondary victimisation; however, its use in only two cases indicates that it has not yet become a systematically and routinely available mechanism.

The Centre pointed to cases in which protective measures had not been sufficient to prevent retraumatisation. In one case, a child victim of sexual exploitation gave evidence in the direct presence of the accused. In another case, a male victim with difficulties in mental functioning, who had appeared before the court to give evidence, was approached by police officers for the purpose of taking him into custody to serve a prison sentence. The Centre also reported cases in which questions posed by court-appointed experts were judgemental in nature and caused additional distress to victims.

6.6.3 Role of relevant civil society organisations in the identification and support of victims

According to ASTRA, the procedure for renewing the licence for its SOS Helpline lasted more than 32 months, without a formal decision by the competent ministry. Such a lengthy procedure creates legal and financial uncertainty and poses a risk to the continuity of this specialised service. During 2025, 3,958 calls concerning or involving 677 persons were handled through the ASTRA SOS Helpline.

During 2025, Atina submitted 20 reports of suspected trafficking in human beings to the competent authorities, resulting in the identification of 13 victims: 11 victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, one victim of sexual exploitation and one victim of forced criminality.

According to ASTRA, in some cases, particularly those involving foreign workers, a considerable period of time elapsed before a joint interview by the police and the Centre was conducted, and difficulties were also encountered in securing and paying for interpreters. Cases were also reported in which, following an assessment that there were insufficient indicators of trafficking in human beings, foreign workers were not referred to other competent services and institutions.

An important support mechanism is the licensed supported housing service that has been provided by Atina since 2018. According to the data provided, the licence for this service was renewed for the 2026–2032 period. This service is intended for victims and presumed victims over the age of 15 who require safe accommodation and intensive support during the process of stabilisation and recovery.

According to data on the implementation of the Action Plan, accommodation was provided to 65 victims, compared with the target of 35, indicating that the number of beneficiaries exceeded the planned target.

6.6.4 International organisations

During the reporting period, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) provided direct assistance to a total of 114 persons, including potential victims of trafficking in human beings and other vulnerable migrants. The assistance was provided in cooperation with the Centre, reception centres and the civil society organisation Atina.

The IOM stated that, with the support of Atina, comprehensive support was provided to 56 women, girls, men and boys who had experienced trafficking in human beings. The support included safe accommodation, basic necessities and legal assistance, with the aim of ensuring their protection, empowerment and reintegration.

Although it does not have a mandate to monitor and evaluate criminal prosecutions, the IOM, drawing on its experience of direct work with beneficiaries, pointed to the need to further strengthen the early identification of victims, particularly in cases of possible labour exploitation among the migrant population. According to the IOM, the number of beneficiaries of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme increased during the reporting period, with labour migrants in vulnerable situations accounting for a significant proportion of beneficiaries.

The IOM conducts internal evaluations of the AVRR programme and protection measures by monitoring the implementation of activities and collecting feedback from beneficiaries, partner organisations and IOM missions in countries of origin. According to the IOM's assessment, these activities contributed to improving access to protection and reintegration through individualised support and cooperation with the competent institutions.

In cooperation with IOM, Atina supported the voluntary return to their countries of origin of four victims of trafficking in human beings, two women and two men. One was a national of China and three were nationals of Bangladesh. According to the organisation, this cooperation included the coordination of support, needs assessment and arrangements for safe return.

International support for capacity building was provided through IOM and GIZ projects. As part of regional training on the preliminary identification and protection of victims, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, 1,463 professionals from 399 institutions, service providers and organisations were trained.

With GIZ support, the application for the preliminary identification of victims was adapted and upgraded, with healthcare indicators also integrated into the application. Assessing its effectiveness requires data on the number of active users and institutions, the number of reports submitted through the application, response times and the outcomes of procedures initiated.

The Council of Europe, through the project "Strengthening the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia" under the Horizontal Facility programme, provided expert and financial support for the preparation of the Draft Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims, including a legal analysis of its compliance with Council of Europe standards and GRETA recommendations. Training was also provided for

labour inspectors, judges and public prosecutors, including through a HELP course, and round-table discussions were held on legal support for victims and the prevention of sexual exploitation.

The UNHCR and its partner organisations established contact with presumed victims during regular visits to asylum and reception centres and notified the Centre in cases of suspected trafficking. The main challenges identified in the identification process were language barriers, the absence of self-identification and the focus of many migrants on continuing their journey towards their intended country of destination, as a result of which they are often unwilling to participate in proceedings before the authorities of the Republic of Serbia.

Support for presumed and identified victims was provided either directly or through partner organisations and included interpretation and cultural mediation; psychosocial support, including assistance from psychologists and psychiatrists through the partner organisation IAN; financial assistance; support in accessing healthcare and social welfare rights; legal assistance in asylum proceedings; and assistance in finding accommodation and employment. Some persons were referred to Atina for temporary accommodation. The UNHCR assessed its cooperation with the Centre as excellent and operationally effective.

According to UNICEF data, a total of seven cases were identified and referred during the reporting period. Four concerned persons who, according to the data provided, were formally identified as victims of trafficking in human beings, while three concerned presumed victims. In four cases, referrals were made directly to the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Through workshops and outreach activities in migrant accommodation centres and a safe space in Belgrade, UNICEF and its partner organisations provided persons in transit with information on the risks of trafficking in human beings.

6.7 International Cooperation

During 2025, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings cooperated with organisations providing assistance and support to victims in Germany and Montenegro, and the information obtained was forwarded to the competent police authorities in Serbia.

During 2025, Atina was involved in six cases referred through the International Social Service (ISS) network from Germany and Switzerland. The cases concerned nine children and one adult and involved issues relating to suspected violence, guardianship and the regulation of civil-law status. As no victims of trafficking in human beings were identified in these cases, they do not constitute a direct result of international cooperation in combating trafficking in human beings, but rather an example of broader cross-border cooperation in the protection of children and other persons at risk.

According to Atina, cooperation also took place with civil society organisations in Bangladesh in connection with several cases of suspected labour exploitation of Bangladeshi nationals in Serbia. This cooperation included the exchange of information, support for potential victims and the monitoring of proceedings, which, according to Atina, had been initiated in Serbia and Bangladesh. No data was provided on the number of persons concerned, the outcomes of identification procedures, or the legal nature and stage of the proceedings referred to; consequently, it is not possible to assess their results.

6.8 Recommendations for improving the identification and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings

With a view to improving the situation in this area, the National Rapporteur issues the following recommendations to the competent authorities⁵³:

- All actors within the National Mechanism, as provided for by the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims, should, within the scope of their respective competences and before the Law begins to apply, ensure the necessary regulatory, organisational, staffing, technical and financial conditions, harmonise procedures and establish the necessary cooperation and exchange of data.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should prescribe indicators for the formal identification of victims of trafficking in human beings within the time limit laid down by the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims.
- The preliminary identification actors designated by the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, adopt harmonised indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings within the time limits laid down by that Law.
- Before the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims becomes fully applicable, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should, in cooperation with other actors within the National Mechanism, develop guidelines for informing presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings about their rights, the available services and the procedures for exercising those rights and accessing those services.
- Joint guidelines should be developed and adopted to clearly distinguish trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation from violations of labour rights, misdemeanours, fraud and irregular employment. The guidelines should establish criteria for determining competence, referring cases and taking action where the elements of trafficking in human beings have not been established but other unlawful conduct has been identified.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate should increase the scope of proactive action by labour inspectors aimed at detecting cases of trafficking in human beings.

⁵³ Although, pursuant to Article 19, paragraph 2 of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, the Protector of Citizens is not authorised to oversee the work of the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Government, the Constitutional Court, the courts or public prosecutor's offices, the Protector of Citizens considers that, in the spirit of good cooperation, it would be useful for these authorities to consider the recommendations.

- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate should establish a mandatory internal procedure for detecting cases of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.
- The Ministry of the Interior should, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, ensure uniform procedures for registering the residence of foreign victims of trafficking in human beings, including in cases where the victim does not possess the usual proof of address.
- The Ministry of Justice should, in cooperation with local self-government units and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish a simplified procedure enabling victims of trafficking in human beings to access free legal aid.
- The Ministry of Justice and the Bar Association of Serbia should ensure the availability of lawyers with specialised knowledge in the field of trafficking in human beings to provide free legal aid to victims, through continuous specialised training and a publicly available list of trained lawyers.
- The Judicial Academy should establish a formal continuous training programme on the non-punishment principle, covering judges of criminal and misdemeanour courts, public prosecutors, judicial assistants and public prosecution assistants.
- The Ministry of Justice should complete the enhancement of the SIPRES system and ensure that a functional module is in place for flagging and monitoring cases involving indicators of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Health should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish and implement an accredited, regular and territorially accessible professional training programme for healthcare professionals on the application of indicators and appropriate responses to presumed victims of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and specialised service providers, develop and continuously implement specialised training for psychologists, psychiatrists and other professionals providing counselling and therapeutic support to victims of trafficking in human beings, particularly children, based on a trauma-informed and age-appropriate approach.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Judicial Academy should provide regular practical training for police officers and public prosecutors on the trauma-informed, non-suggestive and age-appropriate interviewing of victims of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Education should continue the ongoing training of education professionals and the periodic updating of their knowledge, while regularly monitoring the application of indicators and the quality and outcomes of reports, disaggregated by school administration, type of institution and category of staff.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should establish and operationalise an accommodation service for male victims of trafficking in human beings, while ensuring an appropriate service model.

- The Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should, in cooperation with centres for family placement and adoption, social welfare centres and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish a territorially accessible network of trained foster families for child victims of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should establish a mandatory procedure for assessing and managing the risk of trafficking in human beings and the exploitation of children placed in social welfare institutions.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the National Employment Service should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish a dedicated economic empowerment programme for victims of trafficking in human beings, with tailored training, subsidised employment and support for self-employment, and ensure the necessary funding.
- The National Employment Service should establish a regular data exchange mechanism with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, while respecting the principle of confidentiality, in order to enable the monitoring of victims' participation in support programmes and the effects of economic empowerment measures.
- When dealing with suspected cases of trafficking in human beings, all relevant actors should use all available means of interpretation, including the engagement of professional interpreters, the use of electronic translation services and remote interpretation, in order to ensure that victims can exercise their rights and receive appropriate protection.

7. Prevention, Partnership and Cooperation

During 2025, the competent authorities, relevant associations and international organisations carried out numerous activities aimed at raising public awareness and providing education, strengthening professional capacities, improving children's safety in the digital environment and protecting persons from refugee and migrant populations. The activities covered various areas of prevention and involved a large number of participants, while cooperation with international organisations and relevant associations contributed to the exchange of professional expertise and the presentation of good practices.

Particular shortcomings were identified in the functioning of prevention mechanisms at the local level.

The Ministry of the Interior informed the National Rapporteur that 18 local anti-trafficking teams had been established in the Republic of Serbia, but only three teams responded to the National Rapporteur's questionnaire. Such a limited response makes it impossible to reliably assess the regularity of their work, the activities undertaken and the results achieved, and further highlights the need to establish a systemic mechanism for monitoring their functionality.

During the reporting period, activities were undertaken to bring local teams together, facilitate the exchange of experience and strengthen their capacities, but no systematic, methodologically structured and documented assessment of the work of all the established teams was carried out.

With regard to the establishment of a local anti-trafficking team for the City of Belgrade, internal discussions with relevant institutions were initiated, on the basis of which the National Rapporteur assessed that the implementation of the previously issued recommendation had commenced.

The planned training of employees of local self-government units on the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings was likewise not carried out.

The expected results have still not been fully achieved with regard to the implementation of coordinated media campaigns, the prevention of sensationalist reporting, the protection of victims' privacy and dignity, and the allocation of dedicated funding for media content on the prevention of trafficking in human beings.

This chapter analyses the implementation of previously issued recommendations, preventive activities undertaken by the competent authorities and other actors, media reporting, professional training, the functioning of local teams, and cooperation with associations and international organisations. Particular attention is devoted to assessing whether the activities undertaken have developed into systemic and sustainable mechanisms and whether data is available to substantiate their concrete results and effects.

7.1 Implementation of recommendations from the previous report in the area of prevention, partnership and cooperation

- **The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should develop guidelines for communication with the media in cases of trafficking in human beings, containing clear rules on the protection of victims' identity and privacy, and establish mechanisms for sanctioning the unauthorised disclosure of information from proceedings.**

During the reporting period, no activities by the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications aimed at developing guidelines for communication with the media in cases of trafficking in human beings were recorded.

Given that no concrete activities for the development of such guidelines were recorded, the National Rapporteur assesses that the recommendation has not been implemented.

In the forthcoming period, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the competent judicial authorities, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, media and journalists' associations and other relevant actors, develop guidelines precisely regulating communication with the media in cases of trafficking in human beings.

- **The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should ensure that the prevention of and fight against trafficking in human beings remain among the priority topics of calls for proposals for the co-financing of media projects, while increasing the level of financial support in order to encourage greater interest and sustained engagement by the media in this area.**

During 2025, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications launched nine calls for proposals for the co-financing of projects for the production of media content, within which trafficking in human beings was identified as one of the priority topics.

A total of RSD 2,400,000 was allocated for the prevention of and fight against trafficking in human beings. Only one quarter of these funds was used, to support a single project.

More specifically, through the project co-financing mechanism, funding in the amount of RSD 600,000 was awarded to the project of the Surdulica Centre for Information and Development (CIRS), entitled "Trafficking in Human Beings in the Pčinja District", which is aimed at raising public awareness of trafficking in human beings in that district.

The National Rapporteur considers that support for a project focusing on the Pčinja District can contribute to better public awareness in a local community that, owing to its geographical location and migration movements, is particularly relevant for preventive action.

Given that trafficking in human beings has been retained as a priority topic, the National Rapporteur assesses that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

The National Rapporteur reiterates that, in the forthcoming period, it is necessary to increase financial support, ensure the effective use of allocated funds and support a greater number of high-quality projects at the national and local levels.

- **The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, within the budget for the co-financing of media content in the public interest, establish a dedicated budget line or priority category exclusively for the prevention of trafficking in human beings, in order to ensure continuous and systemic support for media projects in this area.**

The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications stated that no dedicated budget line exclusively for the prevention of trafficking in human beings was established during the reporting period. Projects addressing this topic continue to be co-financed from the overall budget funds allocated to calls for proposals for the co-financing of projects for the production of media content in the field of public information.

Given that neither a dedicated budget line nor a priority category with clearly earmarked funds has been established, the National Rapporteur assesses that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The National Rapporteur considers that the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should ensure that the prevention of trafficking in human beings remains a priority area for the competitive co-financing of media content by establishing a dedicated budget line or a clearly defined priority category with funds earmarked in advance, in order to support a greater number of high-quality media projects at the national and local levels.

- **The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Republic Institute for Social Protection, should ensure the regular delivery of accredited training programmes in the field of trafficking in human beings, together with their evaluation and adaptation to current risks and practical needs, in order to strengthen the capacities of professionals within the social welfare system.**

According to data from the Republic Institute for Social Protection, the records of its Department for Professional Training include four accredited programmes thematically related to the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings:

- “Support for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings within the Social Welfare System - Detection, Needs Assessment and Support Planning”, which was delivered once during 2025;
- “Identification, Assistance and Protection of Male Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings”, which was not delivered during the reporting period;
- “Training for Work on an SOS Helpline for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings”, which was not delivered during the reporting period;
- “The Foster Family as a Setting for the Recovery and Reintegration of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings”, which was not delivered during the reporting period.

As part of its work programme, the Chamber of Social Protection provided professional development opportunities for employees within the social welfare system and categorised all 25 professional events organised during 2025 by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. The events were approved by a decision of the Chamber, which is responsible for licensing professionals within the social welfare system. Prior to granting approval, the Chamber reviewed the content and concept of the programme and the quality of the trainers.

The training programme covered the concept of trafficking in human beings, forms of trafficking in human beings occurring in the Republic of Serbia, the situation of particularly vulnerable groups, including women, migrants, Roma and children, the victim protection system, the identification and reporting of suspected trafficking in human beings, the provision of emergency assistance and support to victims, the basic principles of communication with victims, and the use of the application for the preliminary identification of victims.

A total of 1,463 professionals from the social welfare system, judiciary, police, healthcare, education and other relevant sectors, representing 399 institutions, establishments, associations and organisations, were trained through the 25 professional events.

The training included professionals from all the cities in the Republic of Serbia with more than 100,000 inhabitants, from 25 district centres and from a total of 110 cities and municipalities, representing 79% of local self-government units in the districts covered.

A total of 34 police officers from 12 police administrations, mainly inspectors working on the suppression of trafficking in human beings, also received training. In addition to acquiring new knowledge, they participated in exchanges of experience with other participants by presenting cases on which they had worked.

Within the scope of its competences and its continuous supervisory support to social welfare centres in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the Provincial Institute for Social Protection organised a professional event for supervisors and case managers focusing on the role, tasks and responsibilities of supervisors in the protection of child victims of trafficking in human beings. The event was registered with the Chamber of Social Protection and was attended by 14 participants from smaller social welfare centres.

The National Rapporteur notes that a significant number of professional events with broad geographical and intersectoral coverage were held during the reporting period.

Of the four accredited programmes in the field of trafficking in human beings, only one was delivered during 2025, and only once, while the remaining three programmes were not delivered. In particular, there was an absence of training concerning male victims, the operation of SOS helplines, and the role of foster families in victims' recovery and reintegration.

The data provided also does not demonstrate that the accredited programmes were systematically reviewed and adapted to the current risks and practical needs. No information was provided as to whether the content had been updated to address new forms of digital recruitment, labour exploitation, the situation of foreign victims, the needs of male victims, responses to children, or the application of the new legislative framework.

Given the number of professional events held, the broad range of participants and the evaluation mechanism in place, but also the fact that three of the four accredited programmes were not delivered, the National Rapporteur considers that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Republic Institute for Social Protection should establish an annual plan for the regular delivery of all relevant accredited programmes, with clearly defined target groups, geographical coverage and implementation schedules. The content should be periodically updated in line with emerging risks and findings from practice.

- **It is necessary to ensure funding for, and the formal inclusion within the institutional framework of, associations providing specialised services to victims of trafficking in human beings, in order to ensure the sustainability, quality and continuity of support services.**

As regards the financing of specialised services⁵⁴, no substantial progress was made during the reporting period. Associations providing specialised support to victims of trafficking in human beings continue not to receive systematic financial support from the State, nor have mechanisms been established to ensure the sustainability of these services.

According to information provided to the National Rapporteur by relevant associations, the absence of stable public funding directly jeopardises the continuity of services, the retention of specialised staff and the possibility of the long-term planning of support for victims. As pointed out, project-based funding, occasional public calls for proposals and limited one-off allocations cannot replace the systematic financing of services that are necessary for victims and form part of the overall system for their protection, recovery and reintegration.

Given that no stable financing mechanism, clear timetable for the allocation of funds, minimum standards of financial support or mechanisms for monitoring the sustainability of services have been established, the National Rapporteur considers that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The National Rapporteur points out that, taking into account the provisions of the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should establish a stable system of public funding for licensed services and other forms of specialised assistance and protection provided by associations to victims of trafficking in human beings, and ensure their participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of support measures within the National Mechanism.

- **The Ministry of the Interior - Police Directorate, Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, should conduct a systematic assessment of the functionality of the existing teams in order to improve their work.**

No new local anti-trafficking teams were established during the reporting period. However, representatives of local self-government units from Prijepolje and Užice participated in the Annual Meeting of Local Teams in Vrnjačka Banja⁵⁵, with a view to initiating the establishment of local teams in those communities. In response to changes in the composition of local authorities, the local team in Prokuplje was reconstituted.

⁵⁴ The need to finance specialised services is not new. As early as 2013, GRETA, the Council of Europe's expert body on action against trafficking in human beings, recommended in its report on Serbia that the State ensure sustainable funding for associations providing specialised services to victims. The same recommendation was reiterated in the 2017 and 2023 reports. Nevertheless, more than a decade later, no functional support mechanism has been established, and associations have therefore been compelled to secure funding through projects, despite providing services that are often unique within the system and that the State has not developed within its own capacities.

⁵⁵ Approximately 60 representatives of local anti-trafficking teams participated in the Annual Meeting of Local Teams in Vrnjačka Banja. On that occasion, examples of good practice and the activities carried out by local teams during the previous year were presented.

The Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the GIZ and within the project “EU Support for Strengthening the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans” – EU4FAST, organised two training sessions for members of the local teams from Kraljevo and Zrenjanin. Representatives of local teams from Kragujevac, Smederevo, Požarevac, Pančevo, Subotica and Sremska Mitrovica also participated in the training.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during the reporting period, activities were undertaken to bring local teams together, facilitate the exchange of experience, provide training, reconstitute one team and encourage individual local self-government units to establish teams.

Given that no systematic, methodologically structured and documented assessment of the functionality of the existing local teams was carried out, the National Rapporteur assesses that the recommendation has not been implemented.

The National Rapporteur points out that the Ministry of the Interior, Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, should establish a methodology for the periodic assessment of the functionality of all local teams, covering their composition, regularity of work, planning, intersectoral cooperation, action taken in individual cases and results achieved, and should, on the basis of that assessment, adopt an action plan for supporting, reorganising or reactivating the teams.

- **Measures should be taken to establish a local anti-trafficking team for the City of Belgrade.**

According to the data provided, internal discussions with relevant institutions were initiated during the reporting period with a view to establishing a local anti-trafficking team for the territory of the City of Belgrade.

The National Rapporteur positively assesses the initiation of the first activities aimed at establishing a local anti-trafficking team for the City of Belgrade.

Given the steps taken, the National Rapporteur assesses that the implementation of the recommendation has commenced.

Activities aimed at establishing a local anti-trafficking team for the City of Belgrade should continue.

- **Monitoring and education concerning the misuse of internet platforms and social media for the recruitment and exploitation of victims of trafficking in human beings should be intensified, with particular emphasis on fraudulent job advertisements, grooming through electronic means of communication and the advertising of sexual services;**

During 2025, police officers of the Criminal Police Directorate, the Service for Combating Organised Crime and the Department for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, while working within a Europol Operational Task Force (OTF), monitored several websites indicating possible trafficking in human beings or particular forms of exploitation. In cooperation with partner units coordinated by the Phoenix-Europol Task Force, websites that could indicate sexual exploitation or recruitment for sexual exploitation through prostitution were monitored as part of specific OTF operations. Similar activities are also carried out through hackathons organised by

the United Kingdom and Romania, which lead this type of activity within EMPACT actions in which the Ministry of the Interior participates.

In February 2025, a social media campaign was carried out to promote the National Anti-Trafficking Helpline (0800 100 388) as a key mechanism for reporting suspected trafficking and providing support to victims.

A dedicated banner on trafficking in human beings is available on the official website of the Ministry of the Interior and contains relevant information on the phenomenon in the Republic of Serbia and globally.⁵⁶

During 2025, the National Contact Centre for Child Safety on the Internet within the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications delivered 119 presentations on children's safety online. These were attended by 5,373 children, 1,108 parents, 295 teachers, 53 librarians and 69 trainers, who were informed about mechanisms for reporting various forms of digital violence, including the grooming of children and their exploitation for the production of pornographic material.

In addition to these activities, the National Contact Centre provides training on online safety for civil servants and librarians through accredited training programmes and regularly publishes content on social media, including content related to trafficking in human beings. In accordance with the Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of prevention and protection of children from violence and abuse, the National Contact Centre continued its cooperation with ASTRA.

During 2025, the National Contact Centre⁵⁷ referred 33 cases containing elements of criminal offences to the Ministry of the Interior, including grooming by sexual predators, the distribution of child pornography, blackmail and threats against minors.

The Ministry of Education continuously contributes to the development of the information and educational component of the national "Čuvam te" platform, which contains 25 training courses and more than 460 information and educational resources. During the reporting period, training courses related to protection against trafficking in human beings were completed by 808 pupils, 179 parents and 2,302 employees of education institutions⁵⁸.

With a view to preventing risky behaviour among children in the digital environment, the Ministry of Education prepared three brochures for parents within the Digital Compass for Parents series: Digital Literacy, Social Media and Artificial Intelligence. Based on the content of these publications, two training courses for pupils and parents were created on the "Čuvam te" platform, which were completed by 288 pupils.

Within the project "Together and Safely through Childhood", the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior implemented 2,503 interactive workshops devoted to the prevention of

⁵⁶ Members of the public have access to information on the forms of trafficking in human beings, the stages of the trafficking process – recruitment, transit and exploitation – and clear guidance on identifying and reporting this criminal offence.

⁵⁷ In accordance with the Regulation on the Safety and Protection of Children when Using Information and Communication Technologies, upon receiving reports of digital violence against children, the National Contact Centre cooperates with the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, primary healthcare centres and social welfare centres.

⁵⁸ Activities aimed at preventing risks and the misuse of information and communication technologies and digital tools in education institutions are carried out through compulsory school subjects and through annual programmes for protection against violence, which include the prevention of digital violence and the safe use of ICT.

peer violence in the physical and digital environment, 4,096 workshops on the prevention of peer violence in the physical and virtual environment – online games, in primary schools throughout Serbia, as well as 67 workshops for parents on prevention and mechanisms for protecting children from abuse on the internet and social media, attended by 2,180 parents and 146 school representatives.

During 2025, ASTRA prepared and published the national study “The Digital Dimension of Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia – Case Analysis and Protection Challenges”, based on an analysis of 925 recorded entries from the databases of the ASTRA SOS Helpline and the European Hotline for Missing Children 116000 for the period from 2020 to mid-2025, of which 123 cases contained a pronounced digital component.

The study shows that, in more than two-thirds of the analysed cases, initial contact with the victim was established through social media or online advertisements, while in approximately 70% of cases digital communication continued after recruitment as a means of control, surveillance and blackmail. The study points out that it is particularly concerning that, in cases involving child victims, the digital environment frequently constituted the primary space for manipulation and isolation, indicating that technology is no longer a secondary but a central instrument in the trafficking process.

Taking into account the operational, preventive and educational activities undertaken, the National Rapporteur assesses that the recommendation has been implemented.

The National Rapporteur points out that it is necessary to continue detecting and reporting the misuse of internet platforms and social media for digital recruitment and technology-facilitated exploitation, and to develop targeted educational activities, with particular emphasis on fraudulent job advertisements, recruitment through emotional manipulation and the advertising of sexual services.

- **It is necessary to continue and strengthen efforts to raise awareness of trafficking in human beings among young people in the Republic of Serbia, as informed young people are better able to recognise risks and avoid dangerous situations, thereby contributing to the creation of a society that is more aware of and responsive to the problem of trafficking in human beings;**

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, implemented a programme devoted to the development of skills for adolescence, namely pupils’ socio-emotional skills relevant to the prevention of risky forms of behaviour. The programme involved 366 employees from primary schools within the territories of all school administrations, who, from the beginning of 2024 until June 2025, implemented programme activities with 6,800 sixth- and seventh-grade pupils as part of Civic Education classes and class teacher periods.

During 2025, Atina used sport, through several projects, as a means of preventing trafficking in human beings, gender-based violence and social exclusion, particularly among young people from marginalised communities. Within the regional initiatives “Sport Together”, “Football Together” and “Game Changers”, the “Mini-Van Tour 2025” was implemented, covering eight cities in six countries of the Western Balkans and the European Union. In Bujanovac, the activity brought together several hundred children and young people from primary schools, sports clubs and the Reception Centre for Refugees and Migrants.

Through mini-tournaments, fair-play workshops and team games, participants developed solidarity, intercultural dialogue and equality through sport. As a result of the activities, the handbook *Different Jerseys, Same Team* was developed for work with children and young people through sport. An inclusive sports festival was also organised in Bujanovac within the “Sport Together” project, with the aim of promoting equality, non-violence and the inclusion of children from different communities.

Within the project “Strong Alone, Unstoppable Together”, a methodology for working with young people through sport was developed, focusing on the prevention of gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings. Based on this methodology, workshops were held in Novi Pazar, Tutin and Vranje, with the participation of 74 young people. Two sports tournaments were also organised in Tutin and Novi Pazar as a continuation of the educational process, with a total of 102 young participants.

In October 2025, during two school periods with pupils of Savremena Gimnazija in Belgrade, ASTRA delivered training on the concept of trafficking in human beings, ways of recognising it and protection measures. The training was attended by 71 pupils, of whom 42 were girls and 29 boys.

ASTRA also organised two workshops in Belgrade for pupils of the Hospitality and Tourism School on recognising risks and protection against trafficking in human beings. The workshops were attended by 43 pupils, of whom 18 were girls and 25 boys. The work was interactive and based on discussion, practical examples and the encouragement of critical thinking.

In November 2025, within the “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” campaign, ASTRA, in cooperation with the local self-government and the Čukarica municipal branch of the Red Cross, organised a lecture for teachers and secondary-school pupils from the territory of that municipality. The activity was aimed at empowering teachers and pupils to identify risks at an early stage and create a safer school environment.

The Centre for Girls association delivered 11 educational lectures on the prevention of trafficking in human beings, attended by 282 pupils and ten teachers from seven secondary schools in Niš and one secondary school in Aleksinac. The lectures were aimed at familiarising secondary-school pupils with the concept of trafficking in human beings, associated risks, forms of exploitation, methods of prevention and available mechanisms of assistance in situations of risk.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during the reporting period, numerous activities aimed at young people were implemented, involving primary- and secondary-school pupils, teachers, young people from marginalised communities, and children and young people accommodated in reception centres.

Taking into account the significant number of activities implemented and young people reached, but also the fragmented nature of these activities and their differing thematic focus, the National Rapporteur assesses that the implementation of the recommendation has begun.

The National Rapporteur points out that the Ministry of Education should ensure the systematic and continuous inclusion of age-appropriate content on trafficking in human beings, methods of recruitment, risks in the digital environment, and mechanisms for reporting and protection in educational and preventive programmes for young people throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

- **It is necessary to involve the media in coordinated and comprehensive measures for the prevention of and fight against trafficking in human beings, through responsible and educational media campaigns that inform the public about the seriousness of this problem and raise awareness of how to recognise and respond to risks, while avoiding sensationalism and the retraumatisation of victims;**

The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media stated that it continuously analyses published media content relating to trafficking in human beings. According to the data provided, media service providers complied with the obligations laid down in the Rulebook on Urgent Public Notification of the Disappearance of a Minor.

The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) also stated that it carries out activities aimed at continuously improving ethical and professional standards in reporting on trafficking in human beings, particularly with regard to protecting the privacy and identity of victims, through training for media service providers.

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in cooperation with the REM, organised an online training course for journalists entitled “Ethical Reporting on Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings”, attended by journalists from more than ten media outlets.

During 2025, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, in cooperation with Radio Television of Serbia, continued broadcasting programmes on child online safety intended for children, young people, parents, guardians and teachers. The activities were aimed at promoting digital literacy and the safe use of the internet.

According to the analysis of media content conducted by ASTRA for 2025, trafficking in human beings appeared as a secondary topic in 69% of the analysed articles, while it constituted the central topic of the media report in 31% of cases. At the same time, 67% of the analysed headlines were sensationalist in nature. These findings indicate that trafficking in human beings is frequently presented through dramatised narratives, without a broader context or a systemic understanding of the phenomenon, which may affect the way in which the public understands the position of victims and the nature of this criminal offence.

The National Rapporteur notes that, during the reporting period, certain activities were undertaken with a view to media reporting, monitoring media content and improving professional standards.

Taking into account the relevant activities undertaken, but also the fact that a coordinated and comprehensive model of media-based prevention has not been established, the National Rapporteur assesses that the implementation of the recommendation has begun.

The National Rapporteur considers that the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, in cooperation with public service media, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, media and journalists’ associations, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and relevant associations, develop and implement coordinated media campaigns on trafficking in human beings and ensure continuous training for journalists and editors, as well as monitoring media reporting, with a view to reducing sensationalism, protecting the privacy and dignity of victims, and improving the quality of information provided to the public.

7.2 Activities of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

During the reporting period, police officers of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Ministry of the Interior participated in a total of 54 international activities: 29 meetings, three workshops, 10 training courses, seven conferences, four round tables and one case study presentation.

With a view to coordinating activities in combating trafficking in human beings, as well as monitoring the situation and reporting in this field, continuous cooperation was maintained with the Protector of Citizens, in its capacity as the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings.

Meetings and communication were also maintained on a continuous basis with representatives of the Centre – two meetings; other state authorities and organisations – 11 meetings; representatives of the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, with a view to improving cooperation – one meeting; associations – seven meetings; representatives of local anti-trafficking teams – nine meetings; representatives of the Embassy of the United States of America – three meetings; while 19 meetings were held with representatives of organisational units of the Ministry of the Interior.

In addition, four meetings were held with representatives of the National Council of the Roma National Minority with a view to planning joint activities in the field of combating trafficking in human beings.

The Office also held a meeting of the Special Working Group for the implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2024–2029. At the meeting, the Report on Activities Implemented in 2024 was adopted, according to which 61 of the 64 planned activities had been implemented, representing an implementation rate of 95.31%.⁵⁹

In September 2025, the Head of the Office and National Coordinator participated in a meeting in Sarajevo of national coordinators and rapporteurs or other equivalent mechanisms.

Representatives of the Office participated as speakers in training courses for social protection professionals on the prevention of and fight against trafficking in human beings, which were delivered in 25 local self-government units in cooperation with the Centre.

The Office organised and coordinated the implementation of all activities related to GRETA's fourth-round evaluation visit, in which approximately 40 participants from various state institutions took part.

⁵⁹ The Ministry of the Interior informed the National Rapporteur that, during the implementation in 2025 of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2026 Period, certain challenges were identified that partially affected the pace of implementation of individual activities. The most significant difficulties related to the limited human and organisational capacities of certain institutions involved in implementing the activities, as well as the need for more intensive inter-institutional cooperation. Despite these challenges, the majority of the planned activities were implemented or their implementation had begun, representing a significant contribution to improving the system for combating trafficking in human beings.

The Office also organised a round table attended by representatives of state authorities and organisations, associations, and a representative of the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade, at which the activities implemented in relation to GRETA's recommendations from the third evaluation round were presented.

On the occasion of the European Anti-Trafficking Day, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), in cooperation with the Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators, produced a video on trafficking in human beings focusing on foreign workers, with a view to preventing trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. The video was broadcast in Serbian on the Ministry of the Interior's social media channels.

7.3 Preventive measures targeting the Roma population

The Ministry of Education continues to implement support measures for Roma pupils, the most significant effects of which are reflected in the increased participation of Roma children in primary and secondary education, reduced school dropout and the prevention of early school leaving.

The affirmative action measure for enrolment in secondary schools for the 2025/26 school year was used by 2,502 Roma pupils, 50% of whom were girls, while this measure has been used by 25,500 Roma pupils since 2003.

Scholarships for Roma secondary-school pupils, as a systemic support measure, have contributed to an increase in the education completion rate and a reduction in dropouts. Over the past 11 years, 10,931 scholarships have been awarded to Roma secondary-school pupils, 65% of whom were girls. In the 2024/25 school year, 1,097 scholarships were awarded, while in the 2025/26 school year, 1,119 scholarships were awarded.

Training on the planning, implementation and monitoring of measures to prevent pupil dropout is attended annually by an average of 230 employees of education institutions, with RSD 950,000 allocated from the budget for this purpose each year.

The affirmative action measure for the enrolment of prospective Roma students in higher education has been implemented for many years, and the Ministry of Education supported the initiative of the National Council of the Roma National Minority to increase the scope of this affirmative action measure from the current 1% to 2% in the coming period.

As an important support measure, particularly in secondary schools, 296 Roma pedagogical assistants have been engaged to date: 249 in primary schools, 15 in secondary schools and 32 pedagogical assistants in preschool institutions.⁶⁰

In the 2025/26 school year, 2,896 Roma pupils studied the elective subject Romani Language with Elements of National Culture.

The number of pupils returned under the Readmission Agreement⁶¹ has been declining in recent years and ranges from 35 to 85 pupils; on average, 55% are boys and, in at least 85% of cases, they

⁶⁰ All pedagogical assistants have been provided with free online training financed from the budget of the Ministry of Education. Laptop computers have also been provided to support their field work.

⁶¹ Over the past three school years, the highest concentration of these pupils has been within the school administration areas of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Zrenjanin, Sombor, Leskovac and Kraljevo, as well as in schools within the territory covered by the Novi Pazar Professional Pedagogical Supervision Group.

are primary-school-age pupils. Between 85% and 88% of pupils returned under this Agreement are enrolled in an age-appropriate grade. The decrease in the number of pupils recorded by schools as returnees under the Readmission Agreement is attributable to the affirmative approach taken by primary and secondary schools, namely the implementation of a range of systemic measures, while advisers/external associates also constitute a continuous support measure.

During the reporting period, six health mediators participated in training on the identification of cases of trafficking in human beings and support for victims, delivered by the Centre. The training presented the new indicators for identifying cases of trafficking in human beings within the healthcare system, as well as the manual for their use, jointly developed by the Ministry of Health and the Centre.

7.4 Preventive measures aimed at registration in the birth register

As one of the preventive measures, the Operational Group established under the latest Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the UNHCR also prepared a guide for expectant mothers, with a view to ensuring that they are informed in a timely manner about how to exercise the right to registration in the birth register.

The new Law on the Civil Register⁶² established a new, proactive model of action, introducing an obligation for registrars to initiate, ex officio, proceedings for registration in the birth register if they become aware that a person born in the territory of the Republic of Serbia has not been registered in this basic official record of the personal status of citizens, whether through administrative or non-contentious proceedings. In this way, responsibility for initiating proceedings no longer rests exclusively with citizens but becomes part of the systemic action of the state. In addition, the Law provides for the adoption of a by-law regulating procedures in cases involving the birth of a child whose mother does not possess personal identification documents, with coordination between the competent ministries. This measure has a strong preventive role and enables consistent and timely action by institutions, thereby preventing new cases of legal invisibility.

The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government continuously provides training and professional development for registrars in the field of the personal status of citizens and exercising the right to registration in the birth register.

Furthermore, in cooperation with the UNHCR, specialised training was held during the reporting period at the Judicial Academy for judges on non-contentious proceedings for determining the time and place of birth, with a view to harmonising judicial and administrative practice and ensuring the more effective exercise of the right to registration in the birth register.

⁶² Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 109/25. The Law entered into force in December 2025 and is due to become applicable in December 2028.

7.5 Measures targeting the migrant population

Over the past ten years, the education system has received more than 5,500 migrant children. Through the direct inclusion of pupils with a migrant background in regular classes, accompanied by additional support measures for learning the Serbian language, more than 87% of the migrant pupil population has been included in the education system, including all girls from this social group who are currently in Serbia.

Over the past decade, the Ministry of Education has established a range of sustainable mechanisms to support migrants in education, while the challenge posed by the language barrier has been addressed by translating educational materials into migrants' mother tongues – Arabic and Ukrainian.

Sixteen training programmes on the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) have been developed, and more than 25,000 pupils and school staff have received training through conferences, training courses and mentoring meetings, as well as peer learning. In addition, 13 adviser/external associates for democratic culture have been engaged to provide support to schools. More than 60 schools and 36 mentor schools are involved in these activities, reaching more than 50,000 pupils through their work.

Specialised information sessions and workshops on the risks of trafficking in human beings, how to recognise such risks and available protection mechanisms were organised in asylum centres and reception centres. During 2025, 38 persons engaged by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration participated in four training courses that included the identification of presumed victims. A further 18 employees, mainly centre managers and interpreters, attended training on preliminary identification organised in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.

Cooperation between the Commissariat and the Centre is regulated by a memorandum of cooperation. The Commissariat also cooperates with the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, centres for social work, the International Organisation for Migration, and the associations Atina, IDEAS, CRPC, PIN and IAN.

In cooperation with Atina, the Red Cross and the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, the Commissariat held a total of 111 workshops aimed at empowering women and girls to recognise and report various situations, including trafficking in human beings.

At the asylum centres in Sjenica, Obrenovac and Vranje and the reception centre in Preševo, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, organised four workshops on the prevention of trafficking in human beings, migrant smuggling and labour exploitation, attended by a total of 65 participants.

At Atina's Reintegration Centre, 48 information and educational workshops were held for a total of 57 women, predominantly originating from Syria, Türkiye, Afghanistan, Palestine and Morocco. The topics addressed during the workshops included strengthening personal capacities and recognising inner strengths for overcoming life challenges, language and culture, solidarity, reproductive health, gender, gender roles, stereotypes and prejudices, and women's education and employment.

Training for staff working in asylum centres and reception centres is provided by the European Union Agency for Asylum through a regional IPA project.

With a view to raising public awareness of trafficking in human beings, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration provided support to local self-government units in developing local action plans through which local authorities identify the situation, problems and needs of different categories of migrants present in their territory. A total of 23 local self-government units defined specific objectives and envisaged activities relating to victims of trafficking in human beings in their local migration plans, while a further 20 local self-government units recognised victims of trafficking in human beings as one of the vulnerable categories in these plans.

In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Commissariat developed an Information System for monitoring the implementation of local action plans and the situation in the field of migration management.

Given that migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons are at greater risk of labour exploitation and trafficking in human beings, during the reporting period all banks acted upon the recommendation of measures issued by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, which recommended that all banks enable refugees, persons granted subsidiary protection and asylum seekers to access and open payment accounts.

7.6 Preventive measures to reduce the risk of labour exploitation

During 2025, labour inspectors encountered a total of 2,131 foreign nationals engaged in work in the course of 247 inspections. Of this number, 305 foreign nationals were found working without a concluded employment contract and/or without registration for compulsory social insurance, while 249 persons were working without having obtained a single permit for temporary residence and work in the Republic of Serbia.

Of the total number of foreign nationals encountered, 1,099 persons, or 52%, were employed by a foreign employer in another country and posted to work for an employer registered in the Republic of Serbia for the purpose of carrying out contracted work. The remaining 1,032 foreign nationals, or 48%, were engaged by employers registered in the Republic of Serbia.

In the areas of the employment of foreign nationals, labour relations, and occupational safety and health, the Labour Inspectorate filed 135 requests during 2025 for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings against employers who had engaged foreign nationals, two criminal complaints against responsible persons for violations in the field of occupational safety and health, and one criminal complaint in the field of labour relations. A total of 56 decisions containing 106 orders to remedy identified irregularities were issued, as well as 26 decisions prohibiting work at the workplace, 65 orders contained in 51 inspection records, 31 instructions and warnings, and 14 notifications to the Ministry of the Interior – Directorate for Foreigners.

According to data from the Labour Inspectorate, no indicators of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation were identified during these inspections. Irregularities identified in the field of labour relations concerned, inter alia, the engagement of persons without employment contracts and without registration for compulsory social insurance, failure to keep an employment contract or a copy thereof at the workplace, the calculation and payment of wages, the provision of wage statements, working-time schedules, and deficiencies in the content of employment contracts.

In the field of occupational safety and health, the irregularities concerned the absence of, or failure to update, risk assessment documents; inadequate organisation of occupational safety and health activities; the absence of training programmes for safe and healthy work; failure to carry out the testing of working environment conditions and electrical installations; the absence of medical examinations for employees working in jobs involving increased risk; insufficient training of employees; failure to provide personal protective equipment and first aid supplies; as well as deficiencies concerning the safety of equipment and the securing of hazardous areas on construction sites.

7.6.1 Seasonal work in agriculture

Labour inspectors monitored employers in the agricultural sector and family agricultural holdings for compliance with the Law on Simplified Work Engagement in Seasonal Jobs in Certain Activities, as well as with other regulations falling within the competence of the Labour Inspectorate.

Nine inspections were carried out, of which four were conducted ex officio, four at the request of a party, and one was a follow-up inspection. Seven inspections were conducted at registered business entities operating in the agricultural sector, and two at agricultural holdings.

A total of 56 seasonal workers were encountered, of whom 15 had been registered with the Tax Administration, while no such registration had been submitted for 41 workers. Of the total number of seasonal workers encountered, 55 were nationals of the Republic of Serbia and one was a foreign national. According to the Labour Inspectorate, no indicators of labour exploitation were identified.

Due to irregularities in the application of regulations governing seasonal work, seven requests for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings were filed. A further two requests were filed in connection with violations of the Labour Law and the Law on Occupational Safety and Health. Inspectors issued one order contained in an inspection record and six instructions, as well as one decision containing one ordered measure due to irregularities in the application of other regulations.

7.6.2 Employment of minors

During 2025, in the course of 17 inspections of 17 employers, the Labour Inspectorate encountered a total of 18 minors, of whom 14 were aged 17 and four were aged 16.

The minors were engaged in the hospitality sector, retail trade, food sales, construction, motor vehicle maintenance and repair services, and bakery activities. Of particular significance is the fact that some minors were found performing construction work, including work as auxiliary construction workers, carpenters and assistant tilers, as well as work involving the installation of panels.

For three persons aged 17, the employers had concluded employment contracts, obtained the written consent of their parents and registered them for compulsory social insurance. For two of these three persons, a medical assessment by the competent health authority had also been obtained, while no such assessment had been obtained for one person.

For two minors aged 17, employment contracts had been concluded and they had been registered for compulsory social insurance, but parental consent and the appropriate medical assessments had not been obtained.

Three persons aged 17 had concluded contracts for temporary and occasional work through a youth co-operative. Written parental consent had been obtained for two of them, but no medical assessment, while for one person, neither parental consent nor a medical assessment had been obtained.

One person aged 16 was engaged under a contract for temporary and occasional work and registered for compulsory social insurance, but without parental consent or the appropriate medical assessment.

In the case of nine minors, six of whom were aged 17 and three aged 16, the employers had not concluded an employment contract or another appropriate contract, nor had they obtained parental consent or a medical assessment from the competent health authority.

On the basis of the findings, labour inspectors filed 14 requests for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings in the field of labour relations. One decision and 17 orders were issued concerning the lawful establishment of employment, registration for compulsory social insurance, obtaining parental consent and a medical assessment, as well as the termination of the engagement until the statutory requirements were met.

Four decisions were also issued ordering the cessation of work by minors until the required consent and medical assessment had been obtained, or prohibiting persons under the age of 18 from performing work involving particularly strenuous physical labour or work at considerable heights.

In the field of occupational safety and health, four decisions containing orders to remedy irregularities and four decisions prohibiting work due to the failure to provide training for safe and healthy work were issued. Four requests for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings were also filed.

7.6.3 Temporary agency work

During 2025, the Labour Inspectorate carried out 18 inspections concerning the application of the Law on Agency Employment. Of these, 16 inspections concerned verification of compliance with the prescribed premises and technical requirements for the operation of agencies, one inspection was conducted ex officio, and one following a complaint. The inspections covered 22 employees.

Decisions were issued in respect of all 16 applications for verification of compliance with the prescribed requirements, confirming that the agencies met those requirements.

In the proceedings conducted following a complaint, it was established that six Indian nationals had been engaged in cleaning and maintenance work at a construction site on the basis of a service agreement between the user undertaking and the agency, but that, at the time of the inspection, they had not concluded employment contracts or other contracts governing their work engagement nor been registered for compulsory social insurance. Contracts were concluded with them following the inspection. A request for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings was filed against the agency.

7.6.4 Joint and coordinated inspections

During 2025, labour inspectors also carried out extraordinary joint inspections with police officers of the Ministry of the Interior and the Directorate for Foreigners in order to verify the employment status of foreign nationals and whether they held single permits for residence and work. Violations of labour regulations were identified and measures falling within the competence of the Labour Inspectorate were taken. According to the data provided, no indicators of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation were identified.

The Labour Inspectorate and other competent authorities and inspectorates⁶³ carried out a total of 438 joint inspections in the construction sector, trade, manufacturing activities, hotels and other short-stay accommodation facilities, agriculture and personal service activities.

The Labour Inspectorate carried out 211 inspections, while other inspectorates and authorities carried out 227 inspections. During the joint inspections, labour inspectors encountered 141 persons working without a formal legal basis for their engagement and identified six natural persons carrying out unregistered activities.

A total of 32 decisions containing 71 orders to remedy irregularities were issued, together with seven decisions prohibiting work, 11 orders contained in seven inspection records, and 13 instructions. A total of 92 requests for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings were filed, as well as 11 joint criminal complaints with police officers against the responsible persons of employers on suspicion of violations of employment-related rights and social insurance rights.

7.6.5 Strengthening the capacities of labour inspectors

Within the framework of the joint European Union and Council of Europe project “Strengthening Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia”, 20 labour inspectors who entered into employment in 2024 and 2025 participated in the seminar “Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation”, held in Vrnjačka Banja.

During the reporting period, labour inspectors also participated in other training activities aimed at strengthening capacities for inspection in the area of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation and the prevention of prohibited child labour.⁶⁴

⁶³ The Tax Administration, Tourism Inspectorate, Market Inspectorate, Social Welfare Inspectorate, Republic Road Transport Inspectorate, Municipal Inspectorate, Sanitary Inspectorate, Health Inspectorate, Veterinary Inspectorate, employees of the Social Welfare Centre, the Sector for Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, members of the Crime Suppression Department of the Ministry of the Interior, the Emergency Situations Sector of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of the Interior’s departments for foreigners, police officers and the municipal police.

⁶⁴ Eighty-five labour inspectors participated in online training on the use of the “Čuvam te” (“I Am Keeping You Safe”) platform, organised for labour inspectors and other inspectorates, authorities and institutions involved in the operation of the “Čuvam te” platform;

a labour inspector who is a member of the City of Niš Local Anti-Trafficking Team participated, on 14 May 2025, in the training “Identification of Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims”, implemented by GIZ in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, as well as by the International Organisation for Migration and the GIZ project “Support for Social Inclusion in Serbia”, with the aim of establishing strong intersectoral cooperation and involving local stakeholders, including the City of Niš, in combating trafficking in human beings;

7.7 Public awareness-raising

The Ministry of the Interior continuously promoted and presented the operation of the “Find Me” system through various media outlets, the Ministry of the Interior’s website, its official YouTube channel and social media.

Following the establishment of the “Find Me” platform, 54 police officers from all police directorates were trained, and following the upgrading of the platform, a further 137 police officers from all police directorates received training.

In addition, the Ministry held a meeting with Viber, at which further cooperation was agreed. Work is underway to harmonise the text of a memorandum of cooperation between Viber and the Ministry of the Interior, which will, inter alia, address the “Find Me” system.

The tenth “Safety and Responsibility” conference, organised by the Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, was also held. A session entitled “The Dark Side of Technology: How Artificial Intelligence Empowers Abusers”, which brought together key stakeholders from Serbia, the region and the EU with a view to improving child protection and cross-border cooperation, addressed the question of how AI models can contribute to the creation of harmful content and the abuse of children.⁶⁵

The event was attended by more than 300 participants, ensuring the high visibility of the operational model of the “Find Me” system among domestic and international experts.

During the year, the Centre participated in 67 professional events. At 34 of these events, Centre staff participated actively as speakers or trainers and contributed to the training of more than 2,000 professionals from various fields.

The Centre also continued its cooperation with the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Belgrade, enabling social work students to undertake practical placements at the Centre. Cooperation was also initiated with the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade,

- 100 labour inspectors participated in the Labour Inspectorate’s professional conference held in Zlatibor from 17 to 19 September 2025, on the Law on the Employment of Foreigners and secondary legislation governing the employment of foreign nationals;

one labour inspector participated in a seminar in October 2025 entitled “Raising Awareness of Trafficking in Human Beings among Young People – Responsibility of Society and Institutions”;

two labour inspectors participated in a seminar in October 2025 entitled “Identification of Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims”;

a labour inspector participated in a meeting of the Niš Local Anti-Trafficking Team on the topic “Preparation and Organisation of a Public Forum and Establishment of Cooperation with the City Municipality of Palilula”;

five labour inspectors participated in training in November 2025 on “Identifying Forms of Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting Victims”, at events held in Belgrade and Novi Sad.

⁶⁵ A representative of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia presented specific methods used by predators and authentic correspondence. This presentation provided a technical and psychological basis for understanding the critical importance of rapidly alerting the public through an early warning system. The conference also highlighted that AI models facilitate the creation of harmful content and that systems such as “Find Me” must therefore be integrated into broader legal frameworks capable of keeping pace with rapid technological change. A representative of the Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska and a representative of Europol participated in an exchange of operational experience. The need to strengthen connections between police forces in the region in combating new forms of AI-enabled crime was presented, which is directly linked to the regional effectiveness of the “Find Me” system.

enabling psychology students to undertake practical placements, during which they acquired extensive knowledge relevant to working with victims of trafficking in human beings and had the opportunity to gain unique practical experience.

The Red Cross network of peer educators and trainers conducted more than 1,000 information workshops, reaching more than 25,300 persons with messages concerning the need for protection and precautionary measures against trafficking in human beings, particularly children and young people belonging to vulnerable, socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups among both the domestic population and migrants.

During the reporting period, 30 participants from 20 Red Cross organisations in cities and municipalities attended specialised training for trainers.

Pursuant to the Decision Establishing the Criteria and the Process for the Licensing and Re-Licensing of Trainers under the National Anti-Trafficking Programme, 20 candidates successfully passed the licensing examination for the “Trainer” certification level.

The Red Cross marked the 20th anniversary of its anti-trafficking programme by holding a meeting of anti-trafficking trainers.

With a view to raising children’s awareness of this complex issue, on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, 30 July 2025, educators from the Kragujevac Red Cross also conducted the “Miša and Maša” information workshop with preschool children.

To mark the European Day against Trafficking in Human Beings on 18 October, as many as 30 Red Cross organisations from different parts of Serbia actively participated in numerous educational and preventive activities in their local communities. More specifically, an information workshop was organised for pupils in both lower and upper grades, and educational materials were distributed at several public locations in the city and at points where hot meals are distributed to beneficiaries of the Soup Kitchen Programme, who constitute a particularly vulnerable population.

7.8 Media reporting on trafficking in human beings

During 2025, the ASTRA Association continued its ongoing monitoring and analysis of media content relating to trafficking in human beings, including victims of trafficking in human beings. The Media Content Analysis for 2025 was published under the title “Invisible Victims in Prominent Headlines – How the Pursuit of Attention Shapes the Narrative on Trafficking in Human Beings” and covered print, electronic and online media. A total of 1,552 media reports were analysed. Online media accounted for the largest share (79%), followed by print media (15%) and television content (6%).

The qualitative analysis examined forms of exploitation and thematic frameworks. The most prevalent form was sexual exploitation (45.81%), followed by general reporting on trafficking in human beings (43.36%), while 4.45% of the content was devoted to labour exploitation.

The ASTRA Association also carried out activities in this area through the intensive promotion and direct distribution of the third, expanded edition of the publication “Trafficking in Human Beings – A Handbook for Journalists”.

7.9 Additional capacity-building training

During the reporting period, the Police Training Directorate of the Logistics Sector organised and participated in training and professional development on trafficking in human beings – mandatory theoretical instruction on the topic “The Concept and Identification of Trafficking in Human Beings and Police Response to the Criminal Offence of Trafficking in Human Beings”, which was attended by 24,733 police officers of the Ministry during 2025.

In addition, during the reporting period, the Police Training Directorate of the Logistics Sector, in cooperation with the Judicial Academy and the Criminal Police Directorate of the Police Directorate, organised and delivered seminars entitled “Juvenile Offenders and the Protection of Minors in Pre-Investigation and Criminal Proceedings”, which were attended by a total of 299 police officers of the Ministry.

During the reporting period, one seminar entitled “Identification of Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings among the Migrant Population” was also held and attended by four police officers during 2025, as well as one seminar entitled “Detection, Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings”, which was attended by eight police officers during 2025.

In addition, according to data available to the Police Training Directorate of the Logistics Sector, training activities were also conducted outside the Ministry during 2025.⁶⁶

In October 2025, in Ankara, Turkey, a training course entitled “Combating Migrant Smuggling, Trafficking in Human Beings and Trafficking in Organs and Tissues” was organised by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) and attended by one representative of the Department and three representatives of the Regional Border Police Centres.

In November 2025, the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings held training for police officers of the Department on the topic “Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings among the Migrant Population”, which was attended by one police officer from the Department for Combating Cross-Border Crime and Irregular Migration.

Within the General Professional Development Programme for Civil Servants for 2025 of the National Academy of Public Administration, distance learning was organised on the topic “Improving the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings at the National Level”. The training was attended by 28 participants.

Within the General Training Programme for Employees of Local Self-Government Units for 2025, under the Sectoral Programme for Continuous Professional Development of Employees in Local

⁶⁶ “Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling”, attended by seven police officers;
“Basic Training on the Use of Advanced Technologies and Conducting Digital Investigations in Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling”, attended by nine police officers;
“Identification of Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings”, attended by three police officers;
“Neuroscience in the Service of Investigation and Adjudication: Communication with Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings”, attended by four police officers;
“Regional Training on Advanced Cyber-Investigation Techniques in Cases of Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation in the Western Balkans and Ukraine”, attended by one police officer.

Self-Government Units, training entitled “Improving the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings at the Local Level” was envisaged.⁶⁷ According to data from the central register of professional development programmes, the training was not implemented. In accordance with the law, local self-government units are responsible for securing the necessary funding and implementing training under the aforementioned Sectoral Programme for the Continuous Professional Development of Employees in Local Self-Government Units.

7.10 Information collected from associations

During the reporting period, the Atina Association worked with groups at risk and victims of trafficking in human beings, with the aim of providing them with support in their recovery and preventing their re-exploitation. These activities were organised at Atina’s Reintegration Centre (occupational workshops, counselling, etc.), at the Bagel social enterprise (job training, economic empowerment programme), and in reception and asylum centres accommodating persons from the refugee and migrant population (through regular empowerment workshops).

The round table “Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Trafficking in Human Beings and Prostitution in Serbia” was organised by the Atina Association⁶⁸ and brought together 71 participants⁶⁹.

During the reporting year, the long-standing cooperation with the University of Belgrade continued. Two panels were held at the Faculty of Political Sciences, with the participation of representatives of Atina, as well as a lecture as part of the Summer School at the Faculty of Political Sciences, where students were introduced to the topic, groups at risk and indicators.

During 2025, cooperation continued with primary and secondary schools throughout Serbia, as well as with institutions working with children and young people at increased risk, including the Centre for the Protection of Infants, Children and Youth in Belgrade and the Mother and Child Home.

During the reporting period, the Atina Association organised lectures, guest lectures and expert discussions at the Faculty of Political Sciences and the Faculty of Law of the University of Belgrade.

During the reporting period, the ASTRA Association delivered both licensed and non-licensed training for employees of various institutions within the system, participated in programmes organised by partners, and responded to requests from educational institutions to conduct workshops for children and young people.

At the end of 2025, the ASTRA Association conducted the information campaign “If It Seems Suspicious, Call 116000”, focusing on the risks of online recruitment, including grooming and

⁶⁷Thematic area: Exercise, protection and promotion of human and minority rights; target group: representatives of the Local Anti-Trafficking Team (the mayor, deputy mayor, members of the City Council, representatives of the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office, Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office, Basic Court, Court of Appeal, National Employment Service, social welfare centre, municipal police, Labour Inspectorate, primary healthcare centres, and school administrations – primary and secondary schools).

⁶⁸ With the support of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of France to the United Nations and other international organisations in Vienna and the Council of Europe.

⁶⁹ 35 participants attended in person and 36 online.

other tactics involving the gradual gaining of children's trust and control over them, which may precede disappearances and subsequent exploitation.

Group 484, in cooperation with partners from the region, organised a targeted educational and discussion session devoted to risks associated with the use of advanced technologies in migrant smuggling, with a particular focus on recognising and identifying potential victims of trafficking in human beings within migration flows. The activity was based on a multidisciplinary approach and an investigation-simulation methodology developed on the basis of actual cases from practice. Participants included representatives of public prosecutor's offices, police services and associations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.

A separate segment of the session was devoted to conducting targeted interviews with migrants as an important tool for identifying indicators of migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and other forms of exploitation. This part of the programme was developed in cooperation with the Centre and included practical approaches to identifying potential victims of trafficking in human beings among different categories of migrants, including persons subjected to labour exploitation and other forms of abuse.

The session also presented experiences in the development and use of the Smuggle Alert tool, developed by Group 484 and partner organisations from the Western Balkans for the anonymous recording of field information and situations that may indicate various forms of risk, exploitation and violations of rights. The tool also enables the systematisation of information on emerging forms of risk, including deceptive recruitment practices, transitions from regular to irregular status, labour exploitation and other situations that may constitute indicators of trafficking in human beings.

Group 484, as one of the partners, participates in the implementation of the regional project "Fostering the Inclusion of Foreigners in the Western Balkans – Access to Social and Economic Rights" (FOSTER).⁷⁰ During the reporting period, work began on a regional report on foreigners' access to rights and protection mechanisms, which, inter alia, maps aspects of the employment and legal status of foreign nationals and the available mechanisms for protection against various violations and infringements of rights, including labour exploitation.

In addition, within the project "Safe Work, Stronger Community: Advancing the Rights of Migrant Workers", particular attention was devoted to the prevention of labour exploitation, trafficking in human beings and other forms of abuse to which foreign workers may be exposed.

Group 484, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, developed a multilingual information and referral package for foreign workers in six languages.⁷¹ To ensure sustained access to information, a dedicated website for foreign workers was also established. In addition, an overview of international, European and national standards in the

⁷⁰ Particular emphasis is placed on strengthening the capacities of associations to prepare and implement national and regional projects and advocacy materials aimed at advancing the social and economic rights of vulnerable foreign nationals, as well as preventive activities for their protection. One of the objectives of the call for support to associations also concerns the prevention of trafficking in human beings. Through national-level support, projects implemented by three associations received support, one of which focused on protecting foreign workers and raising awareness of the risks of various violations of their rights.

⁷¹ English, Russian, Turkish, Chinese, Hindi and Nepali. The package contains information on labour rights, protection against labour exploitation and trafficking in human beings, protection against discrimination, access to justice, healthcare and available support services.

field of labour migration was developed and served as the basis for the preparation of six protocols for providing support to foreign workers⁷².

A public campaign aimed at promoting the rights of foreign workers was also conducted. Activities on social media directly reached more than 20,000 users, while posts generated almost 500,000 impressions, and it is estimated that the outdoor advertising campaign reached more than 200,000 citizens in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš.

During the reporting period, Group 484 organised a discussion forum attended by 17 representatives of key institutions and organisations involved in the employment of foreign nationals, the protection of their rights and the provision of support to foreign nationals in the Republic of Serbia.

In cooperation with the Serbian Association of Employers, Group 484 organised an event dedicated to supporting foreign workers, at which the challenges faced by employers in working with foreign workers were discussed, as well as opportunities for improving cooperation with institutions and associations providing support to migrants.

The conference “New Migration Realities and New Risks: Systemic Responses in Serbia”, organised by Group 484, was dedicated to new forms of migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and exploitative practices arising from changes in migration patterns and the misuse of legal migration channels.

During the reporting period, the association Freedom Has No Price organised a scientific and professional conference dedicated to contemporary forms of trafficking in human beings, the psychological consequences of exploitation, legal and institutional protection mechanisms, the role of the media in prevention, and trafficking in human beings in sport.

In addition, the association organised a conference on labour exploitation from a gender perspective, with a particular focus on early indicators of labour exploitation, psychological mechanisms of manipulation and the safe employment of young people.

The Centre for Girls Association conducted two campaigns on forced begging and labour exploitation.

⁷² These cover procedures in cases involving difficulties in regularising status, violations of employment rights, retention of personal documents by employers, discrimination, difficulties in accessing healthcare and other situations that may constitute indicators of labour exploitation or an increased risk of trafficking in human beings.

7.11 Cooperation with international organisations

The Council of Europe project “Strengthening Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia” aims to improve the prevention of trafficking in human beings, the identification and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings, the prosecution and conviction of perpetrators, as well as access to remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings.⁷³ The project supports the implementation of recommendations addressed to Serbia arising from monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), as well as the implementation of the European Union Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021–2025.

The project is implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior (the Office for the Coordination of Activities in the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Criminal Police, etc.), the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs (the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Labour Inspectorate), the Ministry of Education, the Protector of Citizens and associations. The project also cooperates with other partners, such as public prosecutor’s offices, the Judicial Academy, bar associations, trade unions, etc. During 2025, the project continued to be successfully implemented, providing support to project beneficiaries in strengthening their legal, institutional and operational response to trafficking in human beings, in accordance with GRETA recommendations and the Republic of Serbia’s Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the 2024–2026 Period.

Particular attention was devoted to supporting the preparation of the Draft Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims. The Draft was prepared by a multisectoral Working Group led by the Ministry of the Interior, with the participation of relevant state institutions, associations, and national and international experts. The project provided targeted support through the preparation of an independent legal analysis of the Draft Law’s compliance with Council of Europe standards, in particular the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and GRETA recommendations, as well as with the European Union acquis.

Following its publication, with the support of the project “Strengthening Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia”, the Second Report of the National Rapporteur was translated into English and presented to key stakeholders in the fight against trafficking in human beings at a conference held in Belgrade on 30 September 2025. At the same time, numerous capacity-building activities were carried out, enhancing the knowledge and operational skills of

⁷³ The project is implemented under the European Union/Council of Europe joint programme “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye”, for the 2023–2026 period – a joint initiative of the European Union and the Council of Europe, aimed at strengthening the rule of law and democracy and to comply with European standards, which is also a priority in the EU enlargement process. The project budget for the four-year period amounts to EUR 1,000,000. It is aimed at strengthening the capacities of institutions, professionals/practitioners and associations for: improved monitoring and reporting on trafficking in human beings; improved access to justice and remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings; and the enhanced prevention of and action against child trafficking and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. It is implemented through activities aimed at: • strengthening capacities to identify, investigate and prosecute cases of trafficking in human beings; • improving responses to the needs of victims and persons at risk; • providing expertise, developing practical tools and guidelines, and facilitating the exchange of experience and good practices; • improving multisectoral cooperation between competent institutions and associations.

key professionals and enabling the exchange of experience and the presentation of examples of good practice.

With a view to improving the prevention of and action against child trafficking, with a particular focus on the vulnerabilities of children from the Roma community, the Council of Europe project team held a consultative meeting with representatives of the National Council of the Roma National Minority and the Ministry of the Interior in order to identify key challenges, exchange information and define priorities for further activities aimed at preventing child trafficking in Roma communities. Subsequently, on 18 September 2025, an online meeting was organised with representatives of Roma associations, relevant institutions and organisations active in the field of combating trafficking in human beings. Participants discussed the specific risks faced by Roma children, including early and forced marriages, forced begging and other forms of exploitation, as well as opportunities for improving preventive activities at the local level. The guidelines for the call for project proposals intended for Roma associations were also presented during the meeting.⁷⁴

A professional meeting organised by the Council of Europe for representatives of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, dedicated to improving cooperation in combating child trafficking, brought together representatives of competent institutions and organisations with the aim of strengthening inter-institutional cooperation and improving the response to child trafficking, with a particular focus on forced begging.⁷⁵ The meeting was attended by 10 participants from Serbia⁷⁶ and 12 representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina⁷⁷.

During the reporting period, IOM maintained continuous cooperation with relevant state institutions, international organisations and associations in the identification, referral, protection and support of victims and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings.

⁷⁴ Following the publication of the call for grants for the implementation of activities aimed at preventing child trafficking in Roma communities and the subsequent evaluation of the project proposals received, two grants were awarded to the following associations: the Roma Association Novi Bečej and the Roma Women's Association OSVIT. The supported projects are aimed at reducing the vulnerability of Roma children to trafficking in human beings, with a particular focus on preventing early and forced marriages and forced begging. The activities are being implemented from December 2025 to 1 June 2026 and include community awareness-raising, informing children and parents about the risks of trafficking in human beings, and strengthening local capacities for the early identification and prevention of exploitation.

⁷⁵ Particular attention was devoted to the working methods of the police and public prosecutor's offices, the application of protocols and guidelines for detecting criminal offences and conducting preliminary investigations, the categorisation of cases, and the presentation of concrete examples from practice, including successful models of action and examples of cases concluded by final judgments. Participants also discussed the role of referral mechanisms in the identification and protection of child victims of trafficking in human beings, available forms of support and assistance, as well as statistical indicators and challenges in providing adequate protection. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of a multisectoral approach, coordinated action by all relevant stakeholders and the continuous exchange of information.

⁷⁶ The National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator; the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings; the Criminal Police Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior; the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings; a judge of the Higher Court in Belgrade; a public prosecutor from the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia; the Social Protection Sector of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia; representatives of the ASTRA and Atina associations; and the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade.

⁷⁷ Representatives of the Ministry of Security; the Cantonal Court of Tuzla Canton; the Cantonal Prosecutor's Office in Tuzla; the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator; the Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska; the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator; the Ministry of the Interior of Tuzla Canton; the Cantonal Centre for Social Work; the Centre of Women's Rights Zenica association; and IFS-EMMAUS.

In coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, and in synergy with the GIZ, IOM Serbia organised a series of training courses entitled “Identification of Cases of Trafficking in Human Beings and Support for Victims”. During 2025, 25 training courses were delivered in different regions of Serbia, enabling participants from local self-government units to acquire knowledge of emerging forms of trafficking in human beings in Serbia, the victim protection system, as well as practical skills in using the application and providing support and assistance.

Within the framework of the AVRR programme and protection activities, cooperation included the exchange of information in accordance with the principles of confidentiality and data protection, coordination of referral procedures, assessment of beneficiaries’ needs, psychosocial support, as well as the organisation of the safe return and reintegration of beneficiaries.

During 2025, staff participated in training activities carried out in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, aimed at improving victim identification, recognising indicators of exploitation and strengthening inter-institutional cooperation. All field workers engaged in direct work with beneficiaries completed the above-mentioned training. Five field workers are currently involved in this type of work.

In cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior and the Ministry of the Interior, IOM Serbia organised a one-day hybrid event in Belgrade on 27 February 2025 – a workshop entitled “Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation”. The aim of the workshop was to improve the knowledge and skills of 20 professionals from relevant state institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, the Serbian Association of Employers and the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia in identifying, preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

During 2025, the project “EU Support to Strengthen the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans” (EU4FAST)⁷⁸ continued to provide support to partner institutions of the Republic of Serbia in implementing activities envisaged under the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the 2024–2029 period, as well as the Action Plan (AP) for the 2024–2026 Period.

The activities were implemented in close cooperation with and with the active participation of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, relevant organisational units of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia, including the Border Police Directorate, competent public prosecutor’s offices, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the Judicial Academy, as well as other relevant institutions and stakeholders.

⁷⁸ The project “EU Support to Strengthen the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans” (EU4FAST) is a multi-donor regional project jointly financed by the European Union, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMZ), the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Italy (IT MoI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (NL MFA). The project implementation partners are the GIZ, CIVIPOL, IT MoI and NL MFA, which are also signatories to the Multi-Partner Contribution Agreement. The German Federal Police (BPOL) and the Austrian Criminal Intelligence Service (CIS AT) are recipients of GIZ grants, while the Centre for International Legal Cooperation (CILC) is a grant recipient of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

During the reporting period, UNICEF cooperated with the associations Info Park and the Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN), as well as with its partner organisation the Red Cross, which conducted various workshops on child protection and/or gender-based violence with children and young people in accommodation centres for refugees and migrants. Info Park also conducted various workshops on child protection and gender-based violence within a safe space in central Belgrade for refugees and migrants in transit. The topic of trafficking prevention was incorporated into these workshops, while some workshops were devoted exclusively to trafficking in human beings.

As part of outreach work in central Belgrade, as well as in border areas where irregular border-crossing entry and exit points and informal gathering places for refugees and migrants are located, including women, children, unaccompanied children and separated children, the partner organisation Info Park provided information to people, including information on the risks of trafficking in human beings, how to recognise such risks and available support services.

7.12 Activities of local teams

The City of Kragujevac Anti-Trafficking Team has 32 members.⁷⁹

During the reporting period, activities planned under the Operational Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the City of Kragujevac were implemented.⁸⁰ All activities of the Local Anti-Trafficking Team during the reporting period were supported by the local self-government unit, in accordance with the activities defined in the Operational Plan of the Anti-Trafficking Team.

With a view to increasing the efficacy of the fight against trafficking in human beings, the Kragujevac Red Cross, with the support of trained volunteers, disseminates information to children, young people and older citizens on precautionary measures. During the period concerned, trained volunteers conducted 24 workshops for 537 children and young people.

The Local Anti-Trafficking Team in the City of Niš comprises 16 representatives.⁸¹

⁷⁹ The members of the team are representatives of: the City of Kragujevac, including the City Administrations; the Ministry of the Interior – Kragujevac Police Directorate; healthcare institutions; the School Administration; the Police Directorate; the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office; the Court of Appeal; the Kragujevac Red Cross; the Šumadija Administrative District; the "Solidarnost" Centre for Social Work; the "Knežinja Ljubica" Centre for the Development of Social Protection Services; and associations.

⁸⁰ These activities include campaigns, workshops and media promotion aimed at raising public awareness of trafficking in human beings; campaigns in schools and local communities to raise awareness among vulnerable groups; training professionals to recognise signs of trafficking in human beings; providing accommodation and psychological and legal assistance to victims; media campaigns on the consequences of trafficking in human beings and the importance of reporting cases; workshops for young people and work with the Roma population; surveys and interactive workshops in schools to raise pupils' awareness; training volunteers to provide first aid to victims; and analysing data on trafficking in human beings. They also include participation in international projects and cooperation with partners; development of operational procedures for a faster response to reported cases; accreditation of training programmes for school teachers; campaigns on signs of trafficking in human beings and online safety; establishment of investigation teams with other countries to combat trafficking in human beings; opening shelters for victims; and preparing individual support plans.

⁸¹ The team comprises representatives of local self-government, the police, the public prosecutor's office, the centre for social work, the Red Cross, the Safe House, the Labour Inspectorate, a preschool institution, the City Municipality of Palilula, the Niš Primary Healthcare Centre, the National Employment Service and relevant associations.

A contact person was appointed within the Local Team, a working structure was established and an email address was created. In addition, the Local Team opened further communication channels and created an email address for the submission of proposals, recommendations and initiatives.

During the reporting period, an annual report in the field of trafficking in human beings was prepared and submitted to the Office for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Mayor of the City of Niš, and the competent City Administration for Social and Family Protection, Education, Culture and Sport.

Cooperation was established and a Protocol on Cooperation was signed with the municipalities of the Nišava Administrative District (Svrljig, Merošina, Gadžin Han and Ražanj), as well as with the Republic of North Macedonia, through the presentation of the work of the Local Team and participation in a programme broadcast by the national television service.

The City of Niš Local Team organised educational workshops in more than 20 primary schools in urban and rural areas on recognising the risks of trafficking in human beings, protecting children from digital violence and potential online exploitation. Lectures were also held for parents and teaching staff, alongside activities to inform citizens and cooperate with the media with a view to raising awareness.

The Niš Local Anti-Trafficking Team organised a public forum entitled “Invisible Chains – Prevention and Protection of Children from Digital Violence, Trafficking in Human Beings and Online Exploitation”, while the Kragujevac Local Team organised an event dedicated to raising awareness of trafficking in human beings among young people. The two events were attended by approximately 150 secondary-school pupils and young people, as well as their parents and representatives of the education system.

The City of Kikinda Local Anti-Trafficking Team has 15 members⁸² and, in cooperation with the Centre, delivered training for 30 public-sector employees on education and prevention in combating trafficking in human beings.⁸³

⁸² The members of the team are representatives of the Red Cross, the Centre for Social Work, the Police Directorate, the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office, the City Administration – the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the North Banat Administrative District – Labour Inspectorate, the Primary Healthcare Centre, the preschool institution and local law offices.

⁸³ The training was attended by the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, a representative of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, representatives of the Kikinda Police Directorate, as well as members of the Local Team. The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration allocated RSD 250,000 for the activity, and promotional materials and brochures distributed to participants were produced from the allocated funds.

7.13 Recommendations in the area of prevention, partnership and cooperation

With a view to improving the situation in this area, the National Rapporteur addresses the following recommendations to the competent authorities⁸⁴:

- The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, representatives of judicial authorities, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, and media and journalists' associations, develop guidelines for communication with the media in cases of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should ensure that the prevention of trafficking in human beings remains a priority area within competitive co-financing schemes for media content by establishing a dedicated budget line or a clearly defined priority category with funds allocated in advance, in order to support a larger number of high-quality media projects at the national and local levels.
- The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, in cooperation with public service media, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, media and journalists' associations, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and relevant associations, develop and implement coordinated media campaigns on trafficking in human beings and provide continuous training for journalists, with a view to reducing sensationalism, protecting the privacy and dignity of victims and improving the quality of information provided to the public.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Republic Institute for Social Protection, should establish and implement an annual plan for the regular delivery of all relevant accredited training programmes in the field of trafficking in human beings and periodically adapt their content to the current risks and the needs identified in practice.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should establish a stable system of public funding for licensed services and other forms of specialised assistance and protection provided by associations to victims of trafficking in human beings and ensure their participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of support measures within the National Mechanism.
- The Ministry of the Interior – Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings should establish and apply a methodology for the periodic assessment of the functioning of local teams and, on the basis of the results identified, take measures to improve their work, provide the necessary support, and reorganise or reactivate teams that are not functioning.

⁸⁴ Although, pursuant to Article 19, paragraph 2 of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, the Protector of Citizens is not authorised to oversee the work of the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Government, the Constitutional Court, the courts or public prosecutor's offices, the Protector of Citizens considers that, in the spirit of good cooperation, it would be useful for these authorities to consider the recommendations.

- Activities aimed at establishing a local anti-trafficking team for the City of Belgrade should continue.
- Efforts to detect and report the misuse of internet platforms and social media for digital recruitment and technology-facilitated exploitation should be continued, and targeted educational activities should be developed, with a particular focus on fraudulent job advertisements, recruitment through emotional manipulation and the advertising of sexual services.
- The Ministry of Education should ensure the systematic and continuous inclusion of age-appropriate content on trafficking in human beings, methods of recruitment, risks in the digital environment, and reporting and protection mechanisms in educational and preventive programmes for young people throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

8. Annex I – Recommendations from the Third Report of the National Rapporteur in the Field of Trafficking in Human Beings

8.1 Recommendations for Improving the Situation in the Field of Investigation, Criminal Prosecution and Court Proceedings

- The Ministry of the Interior should establish permanent specialised teams for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings in all police directorates.
- The Ministry of the Interior should increase proactive action in the detection and documentation of criminal offences of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of the Interior should ensure the consistent application of the feedback mechanism between police directorates regarding the action taken and outcomes following reports and information forwarded concerning suspected criminal offences of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should ensure that joint interviews with presumed and formally identified victims are conducted in all police directorates.
- Regular and timely notification of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should be ensured regarding the progress and outcome of criminal proceedings, as well as all decisions that may affect the safety of the victim.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice should ensure a timely assessment of risks to the victim's safety prior to the release of a defendant or convicted person from detention or prison, with the involvement of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and other providers of support to the victim.
- The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in cooperation with other stakeholders within the National Mechanism, should develop guidelines for working with presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings during criminal proceedings.
- The Ministry of Justice should undertake further activities to ensure that every judicial authority dealing with cases involving trafficking in human beings has permanent and timely access to audio-visual equipment and a specially adapted room for the examination of victims and particularly vulnerable witnesses, either on its own premises or, under arrangements established in advance, through the use of the facilities of another authority or institution.
- The Ministry of the Interior should continue to provide mandatory, regular and practice-oriented specialised training for police officers dealing with cases involving trafficking in human beings, including training on children's rights and the criminal-law protection of minors, covering all police directorates, with assessment of the knowledge acquired and monitoring of the impact of the training on practice.
- The Judicial Academy and the Ministry of the Interior should continue to provide regular specialised training for judges, public prosecutors and police officers on the interpretation of the statutory elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and its

proper distinction from related criminal offences, based on specific cases and analysis of relevant practice.

- Relevant stakeholders within the National Mechanism should develop uniform practical guidelines for interpreting the statutory elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings and distinguishing it from related criminal offences, and should ensure that the reasons for and outcomes of the reclassification of offences are monitored.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Judicial Academy should continue to implement mandatory and periodic professional training programmes for police officers, public prosecutors and judges on new methods and techniques for identifying and investigating cases involving trafficking in human beings, including digital and financial investigations and special evidentiary actions, with assessment of the knowledge acquired and monitoring its application in specific cases.

8.2 Recommendations for improving the situation in terms of the identification and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings

- All actors within the National Mechanism, as provided for by the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims, should, within the scope of their respective competences and before the Law begins to apply, ensure the necessary regulatory, organisational, staffing, technical and financial conditions, harmonise procedures and establish the necessary cooperation and exchange of data.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should prescribe indicators for the formal identification of victims of trafficking in human beings within the time limit laid down by the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims.
- The preliminary identification actors designated by the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, adopt harmonised indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings within the time limits laid down by that Law.
- Before the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Protection of Victims becomes fully applicable, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should, in cooperation with other actors within the National Mechanism, develop guidelines for informing presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in human beings about their rights, available services and the procedures for exercising those rights and accessing those services.
- Joint guidelines should be developed and adopted to clearly distinguish trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation from violations of labour rights, misdemeanours, fraud and irregular employment. The guidelines should establish criteria for determining competence, referring cases and taking action where the elements of trafficking in human beings have not been established but other unlawful conduct has been identified.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate should increase the scope of proactive action by labour inspectors aimed at detecting cases of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate should establish a mandatory internal procedure for detecting cases of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.
- The Ministry of the Interior should, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, ensure uniform procedures for registering the residence of foreign victims of trafficking in human beings, including in cases where the victim does not possess the usual proof of address.

- The Ministry of Justice should, in cooperation with local self-government units and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish a simplified procedure enabling victims of trafficking in human beings to access free legal aid.
- The Ministry of Justice and the Bar Association of Serbia should ensure the availability of lawyers with specialised knowledge in the field of trafficking in human beings to provide free legal aid to victims, through continuous specialised training and a publicly available list of trained lawyers.
- The Judicial Academy should establish a formal continuous training programme on the non-punishment principle, covering judges of criminal and misdemeanour courts, public prosecutors, judicial assistants and public prosecution assistants.
- The Ministry of Justice should complete the enhancement of the SIPRES system and ensure that a functional module is in place for flagging and monitoring cases involving indicators of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Health should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish and implement an accredited, regular and territorially accessible professional training programme for healthcare professionals on the application of indicators and appropriate responses to presumed victims of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and specialised service providers, develop and continuously implement specialised training for psychologists, psychiatrists and other professionals providing counselling and therapeutic support to victims of trafficking in human beings, particularly children, based on a trauma-informed and age-appropriate approach.
- The Ministry of the Interior and the Judicial Academy should provide regular practical training for police officers and public prosecutors on trauma-informed, non-suggestive and age-appropriate interviewing of victims of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Education should continue the ongoing training of education professionals and the periodic updating of their knowledge, while regularly monitoring the application of indicators and the quality and outcomes of reports, disaggregated by school administration, type of institution and category of staff.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings should establish and operationalise an accommodation service for male victims of trafficking in human beings, while ensuring an appropriate service model.
- The Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should, in cooperation with centres for family placement and adoption, social welfare centres and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish a territorially accessible network of trained foster families for child victims of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should establish a mandatory procedure for assessing and managing the risk of trafficking in human beings and the exploitation of children placed in social welfare institutions.

- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the National Employment Service should, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, establish a dedicated economic empowerment programme for victims of trafficking in human beings, with tailored training, subsidised employment and support for self-employment, and ensure the necessary funding.
- The National Employment Service should establish a regular data exchange mechanism with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, while respecting the principle of confidentiality, in order to enable the monitoring of victims' participation in support programmes and the effects of economic empowerment measures.
- When dealing with suspected cases of trafficking in human beings, all relevant actors should use all available means of interpretation, including the engagement of professional interpreters, the use of electronic translation services and remote interpretation, in order to ensure that victims can exercise their rights and receive appropriate protection.

8.3 Recommendations in the area of prevention, partnership and cooperation

- The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, representatives of judicial authorities, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, and media and journalists' associations, develop guidelines for communication with the media in cases of trafficking in human beings.
- The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should ensure that the prevention of trafficking in human beings remains a priority area within competitive co-financing schemes for media content by establishing a dedicated budget line or a clearly defined priority category with funds allocated in advance, in order to support a larger number of high-quality media projects at the national and local levels.
- The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications should, in cooperation with public service media, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, media and journalists' associations, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and relevant associations, develop and implement coordinated media campaigns on trafficking in human beings and provide continuous training for journalists, with a view to reducing sensationalism, protecting the privacy and dignity of victims and improving the quality of information provided to the public.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Republic Institute for Social Protection, should establish and implement an annual plan for the regular delivery of all relevant accredited training programmes in the field of trafficking in human beings and periodically adapt their content to current risks and the needs identified in practice.
- The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should establish a stable system of public funding for licensed services and other forms of specialised assistance and protection provided by associations to victims of trafficking in human beings and ensure their participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of support measures within the National Mechanism.
- The Ministry of the Interior – Office for the Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings should establish and apply a methodology for the periodic assessment of the functioning of local teams and, on the basis of the results identified, take measures to improve their work, provide the necessary support, reorganise or reactivate teams that are not functioning.
- Activities aimed at establishing a local anti-trafficking team for the City of Belgrade should continue.
- Efforts to detect and report the misuse of internet platforms and social media for digital recruitment and technology-facilitated exploitation should be continued, and targeted educational activities should be developed, with a particular focus on fraudulent job advertisements, recruitment through emotional manipulation and the advertising of sexual services.
- The Ministry of Education should ensure the systematic and continuous inclusion of age-appropriate content on trafficking in human beings, methods of recruitment, risks in the

digital environment, and reporting and protection mechanisms in educational and preventive programmes for young people throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia.