

SOUTH AFRICA ANNUAL HOTLINE REPORT 2025

ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

The National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH), operating in South Africa since 2016, serves as an essential resource solely aimed at combatting human trafficking. Run by A21, the hotline is accessible 24/7 via phone, email, social media, an online webform on its dedicated website (0800222777.org.za) and via the [NHTH Chatbot](#). The NHTH plays a critical role in linking survivors to essential support services and supporting law enforcement by sharing intelligence that strengthens and advances human trafficking investigations.

Expertly trained call specialists are equipped to respond to crises with sensitivity and discretion. Assistance is available in several languages, including English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Sotho, and Zulu, with additional support provided through a tele-interpretation service covering over 230 additional languages. This ensures that victims, community members, and frontline professionals can access help in the language they are most comfortable using.

Beyond emergency support, the NHTH also provides a job vetting service. Specialists assess the authenticity of employment offers to help protect individuals from fraudulent recruitment practices often linked to human trafficking, and then share safety advice with job seekers, empowering them to make informed and secure employment decisions.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN 2025

A significant trend identified by the NHTH in 2024, which has continued into 2025, is the recruitment of individuals through fraudulent overseas job offers, whereby victims are deceived and later exploited in Southeast Asia. Recruiters advertise high-paying telesales, data-capturing, or call centre positions, usually in Thailand; however, the recruitment process is illegitimate. Initially, traffickers targeted skilled and experienced workers who were interested in travelling abroad for employment. As scam centres have evolved, however, younger and less experienced job seekers have increasingly become the primary targets. Interviews are often conducted informally

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The NHTH received a total of 3718 CONTACTS, a 19.1% increase from 2024
- 62.3% of contacts were specifically related to Human Trafficking
- The NHTH identified and/or assisted 42 VICTIMS of Trafficking, 22 of whom entered the A21 Aftercare Program
- 57 victims were identified through operations supported by the NHTH involving Southeast Asian scam centres
- Of the cases assisted by the NHTH, 61.9% related to sexual exploitation and 21.4% to labour exploitation
- The majority of victims reported to NHTH were FEMALE (88.1%)
- The majority of victims reported to NHTH were SOUTH AFRICAN (78.6%) nationals
- 61.8% of all contacts originated from the GENERAL PUBLIC
- 33 REPORTS were sent to Law Enforcement
- 40.5% of trafficking victims identified were recruited through FALSE JOB OPPORTUNITIES
- Victims were primarily exploited in SOUTH AFRICA (78.6%)

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

The statistics below are exclusively drawn from substantive contacts made to the Hotline from January to December 2025 concerning human trafficking matters. This report is not a reflection of all substantive calls to the Hotline, which may include calls related to other high-risk crimes, labour exploitation, and other non-trafficking issues.

When available, disaggregated data on descriptive factors, including gender, age, type of trafficking, methods of control and recruitment methods, have been collected on each individual case.

via WhatsApp video calls and text messages, with well-designed hiring packets and job descriptions shared almost immediately.

Recruiters are increasingly local and, in some cases, even visit potential victims' homes to answer questions and reassure nervous first-time travellers, fostering a misleading sense of credibility and security. To make the offers more appealing, recruiters frequently cover the costs of passports, visas, flights, and accommodation. However, once individuals arrive in Southeast Asia, the situation quickly deteriorates. Victims are then taken across borders within the region, where they are taken to isolated compounds and deprived of their freedom. They are subsequently forced to participate in criminal operations such as romance or investment fraud, cryptocurrency scams, identity theft, and other cyber-enabled financial crimes.

In 2025, the NHTH worked in close partnership with NGOs and government departments across South Africa and Southeast Asia to assist South African nationals exiting the scam compounds to support them through the repatriation process. Through these coordinated efforts, 57 victims were formally identified and directly assisted through operations supported by the NHTH.¹ Beyond these cases, nearly 200 victims were recorded through a network of partner organisations in Southeast Asia and South Africa, who were actively responding to desperate victims and family members seeking to ensure their safe return. Throughout this collaborative response, the NHTH played a central role in data collection, information sharing, and case tracking to help strengthen coordination among stakeholders, prevent duplication, and ensure that no victim fell through the cracks.

In response to this ongoing trend, A21 has implemented proactive prevention strategies to raise awareness amongst community groups vulnerable to this type of recruitment. These efforts have included radio and television interviews, as well as incorporating the topic into presentations delivered to frontline professionals, school learners, educators and community groups. Through these initiatives, A21 continues to educate the public, strengthen early identification, and equip key stakeholders with the knowledge needed to prevent exploitation.

OVERVIEW OF DATA²

During the 2025 reporting period, the NHTH recorded a total of 3,718 contacts, including phone calls, online reports submitted via SMS, website and email, as well as reports received through the NHTH Chatbot. Of these, 62.3% were related to human trafficking cases, which is a 19.1% increase compared to 2024. In addition to responding to trafficking reports, the NHTH received 31 job vetting requests aimed at preventing exploitation linked to fraudulent employment opportunities, with 38.7% of these identifying a suspicious job. This highlights the hotline's ongoing commitment to both direct intervention and proactive prevention.



CALLER DEMOGRAPHICS

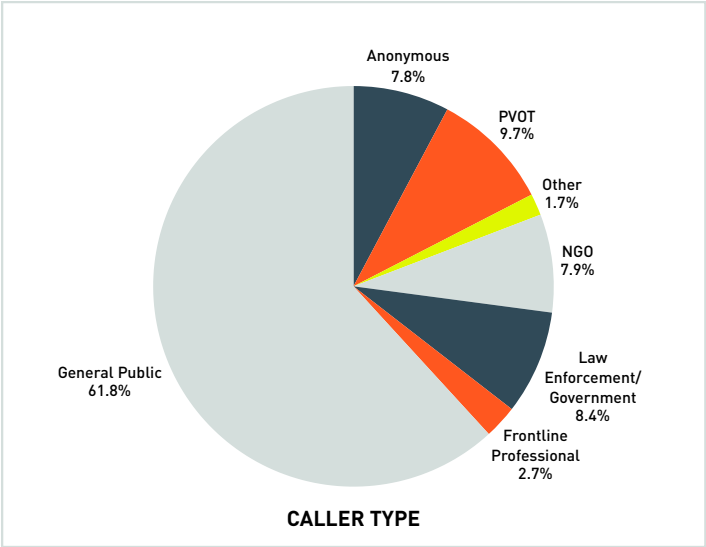
In 2025, community members made the most contacts to the NHTH, accounting for 61.8% of all reports. This shows strong public awareness and engagement in identifying and reporting exploitation. Notably, 9.7% of contacts were made directly by victims, demonstrating improved accessibility to support services. This accessibility has been further enhanced by the introduction of a chatbot reporting tool launched in 2024. The chatbot is particularly valuable for victims who may not be in a position to make a phone call, allowing them to seek help safely and communicate more freely when verbal contact is not possible. It has also allowed live location sharing, which has enabled the NHTH to respond much more efficiently in time-sensitive situations. Additionally, 8.4% of reports came from law enforcement, consistent with 2024, which highlights ongoing and active collaboration with investigative authorities.

A total of 2.7% of reports were received from frontline professionals, 82.3% of which originated from medical settings. This reflects the impact of A21's professional training initiatives. In 2025, A21 trained 416 frontline professionals, including 171 from the healthcare sector, strengthening victim identification for those on the frontlines, but particularly within medical settings.

“Combatting trafficking in persons requires collaboration, trust, and unwavering commitment. The National Human Trafficking Hotline embodies all three. Their professionalism, responsiveness, and shared dedication to protecting vulnerable persons make them an invaluable partner in our work in the Western Cape.”

Lt. Col. Speed - Provincial DPCI Coordinator for Trafficking in Persons in the Western Cape

This impact is clearly illustrated in a 2025 case, when a doctor at a local clinic contacted the National Human Trafficking Hotline after a young woman presented seeking assistance. Drawing on the training received from A21, the doctor recognised key indicators of trafficking and called the NHTH for assistance. Services were arranged, and within the same day, the victim was safe within a shelter, able to access essential services. This case highlights the success of A21’s training initiatives, which demonstrate how equipping frontline professionals with the right knowledge can lead directly to victim identification, protection, and restoration.



VICTIM DEMOGRPAHICS³

The NHTH directly identified and/or assisted 42 trafficking victims. Following identification through the screening process, the hotline immediately notifies the appropriate authorities and facilitates referrals to available support services. In the Western Cape, A21 Aftercare Services, alongside partner NGOs and government departments, delivers critical aftercare assistance. In 2025, A21 played a significant role in this response, directly supporting 22 survivors with essential services and resources to aid in their recovery and restoration.

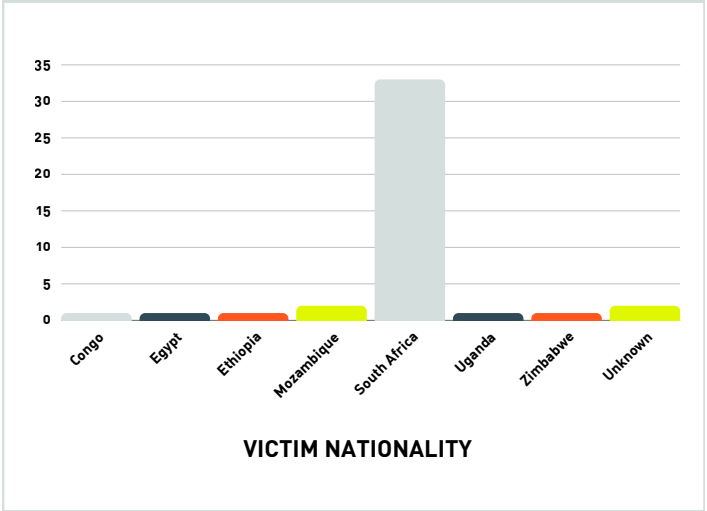
AGE AND GENDER

The majority of reports to the NHTH involved adults [88.1%], with minors accounting for 11.9%. Although children represent a smaller demographic overall, reports involving minors increased significantly by 230.6% compared to 2024. This sharp rise is likely influenced by the increase in Online Child Sexual Exploitation Cases (OCSE) reported. The NHTH noted a 66% increase in cases relating to OCSE following A21’s annual Global Freedom Summit (GFS)⁴, which helped shine a spotlight on this concerning trend and may have encouraged this increased reporting.

In terms of gender, females accounted for 83.3% of all reports, compared to 16.7% for males. There has been a steep increase (203.6%) in cases involving males compared to 2024. While men still represent a smaller proportion of overall reported cases, this sharp rise signals both a shifting pattern of exploitation and increased reporting of male victims, particularly in the context of labour trafficking, which has historically been underreported. The increase is closely linked to the growing number of men trafficked to Southeast Asia in 2025. This trend underscores the expanding recognition of trafficking beyond sexual exploitation, including forced labour and criminality. The higher percentage of female victims remains largely linked to the volume of sex trafficking cases reported in 2025, as women and girls continue to be targeted for exploitation within the commercial sex industry.

VICTIM NATIONALITY

In 2025, South Africans made up the majority of cases identified and/or assisted by the NHTH, amounting to 78.6%, a 13.7% increase from the previous reporting year. This is likely due to the large number of South African nationals who were recruited to and exploited in Southeast Asia. 16.7% of reports involve other nationalities, including Congolese, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Ugandan, Zimbabwean and Mozambican. Notably, these cases share a common pattern: recruitment through false promises of employment or better opportunities in South Africa. This trend suggests that individuals are lured by deceptive offers. Such recruitment tactics are often linked to existing vulnerabilities in their home countries, including economic hardship, unemployment, and limited access to opportunities.



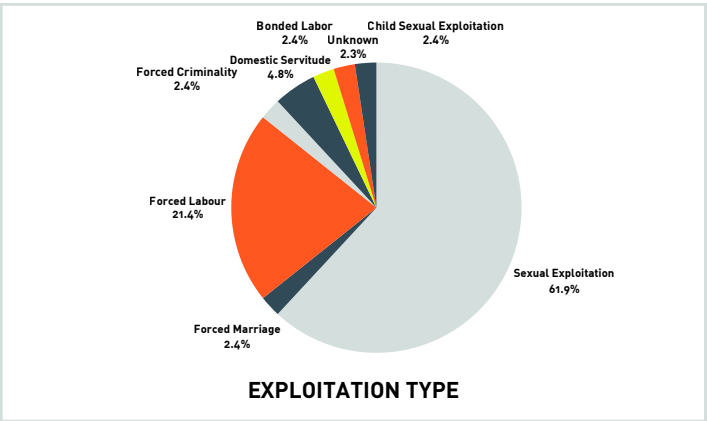


EXPLOITATION TYPE

The majority of reported cases in 2025 related to sexual exploitation, which accounted for 61.9% of all hotline reports, making it the most prevalent form of exploitation identified. This is based on the large number of females recruited through false job opportunities from provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, to be sexually exploited in the Brooklyn area in the Western Cape.

Forced labour followed as the second most reported category at 21.4%, highlighting the continued vulnerability of individuals to labour-related abuse. However, it is important to note that in South Africa, there have been additional labour trafficking cases that were not necessarily reported through the hotline throughout the year, including the ongoing large-scale sweatshop operations in Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal,⁵ and the Zama Zama mining-related exploitation cases.⁶ These incidents suggest that the prevalence of labour trafficking may be higher than reflected in hotline data alone, pointing to potential underreporting and the need for strengthened victim identification and reporting. With increased media exposure and targeted training in the labour sector, the NHTH expects to see a rise in labour trafficking cases reported.

The NHTH also received a report of a forced marriage case, a form of exploitation that was not recorded in the previous year. The case involved a minor who was reportedly sold by her family in Ethiopia and compelled to marry a man in South Africa, where she was subjected to ongoing exploitation.

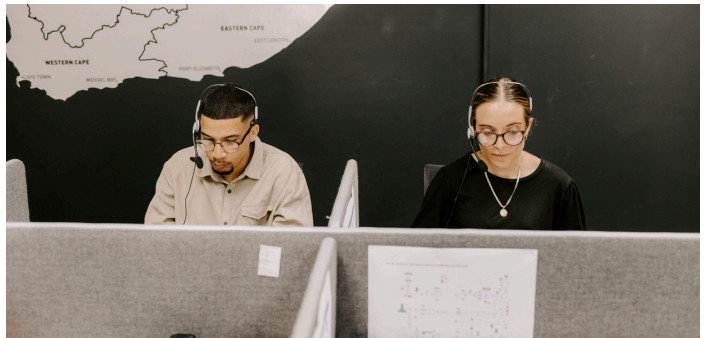
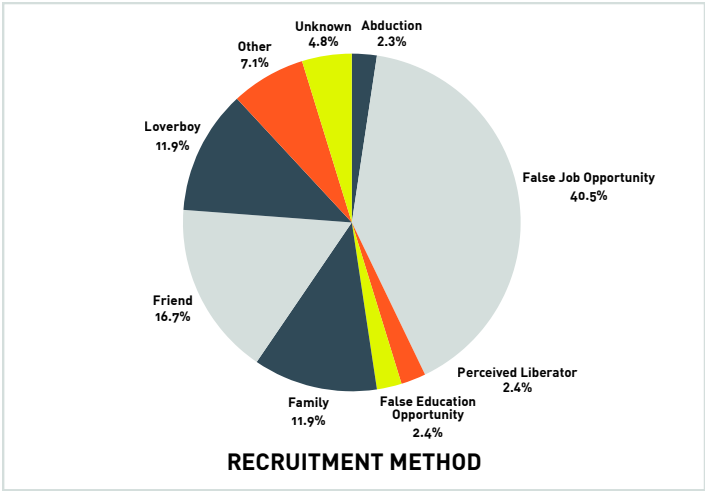


RECRUITMENT METHODS

False job opportunities accounted for the majority (40.5%) of cases reported to the NHTH, continuing a significant trend driven by economic instability and widespread job losses that left many South Africans vulnerable to traffickers’ schemes. In 2025, a proportion of these cases were linked to scam centres in Southeast Asia, where victims were recruited under the guise of legitimate overseas employment. Similarly, female victims were recruited through deceptive job offers and later exploited within the commercial sex industry in Brooklyn, Cape Town.

This pattern reflects broader labour market pressures in South Africa, where unemployment remained high throughout 2025, reaching 31.9% in Q3.⁷ Economic desperation, both domestically and in surrounding countries, increases vulnerability to traffickers’ deceptive employment schemes, as individuals seek opportunities that promise stability but often lead to exploitation.

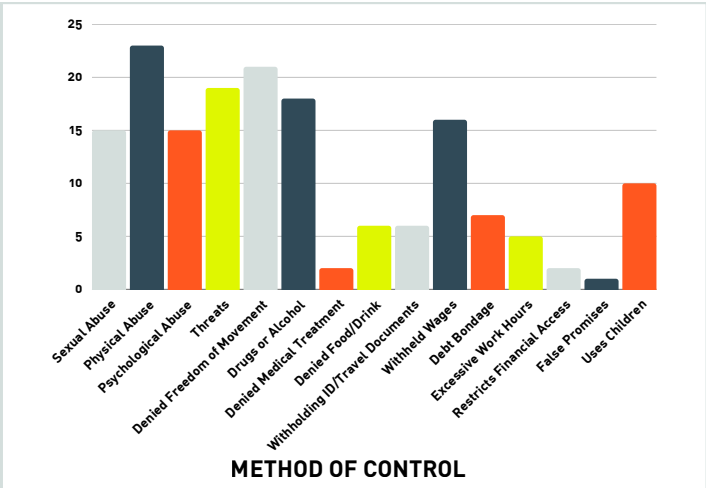
Family members were identified as recruiters in 11.9% of cases, reflecting a 561.1% increase compared to 2024. One reported case involved a minor from Gauteng who contacted the hotline after being exploited by her older sister. The sister allegedly coerced her into engaging in sexual acts over a video call with an adult male, during which pornographic images were shared in exchange for money. This case highlights the deeply concerning rise in exploitation facilitated within familial settings.



METHODS OF CONTROL

Traffickers employ a range of control tactics to coerce victims into remaining in exploitative situations, and they often use multiple methods to maintain full control over an individual. In 2025, the most prevalent forms of control reported to the hotline included physical abuse present in 54.76% of cases, denied freedom of movement (50%), threats to the individual (42.86%), the use of drugs or alcohol (42.86%), and the withholding of wages (38.1%).

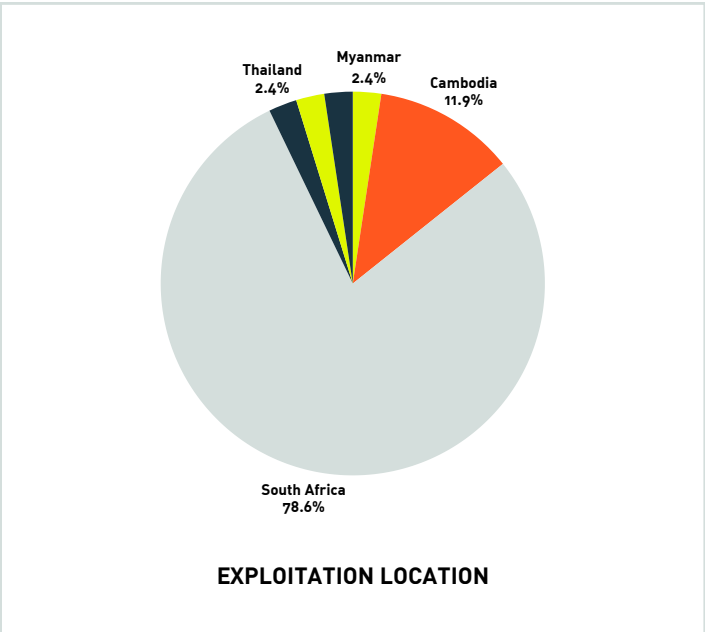
These patterns reflect the realities commonly observed in trafficking cases, particularly those involving sexual exploitation. Victims, most often women, are subjected to severe physical abuse that can result in serious injuries. They are frequently confined to the premises where they both work and reside, significantly limiting their ability to seek assistance. Attempts to resist or challenge these conditions are met with threats or punishment. In addition, victims are denied payment for their labour, a control tactic consistently present across trafficking cases. Traffickers also deliberately use drugs as a means of control, fostering dependency to prevent victims from leaving or, in some cases, to compel them to return after escape to satisfy the forced addiction.



EXPLOITATION LOCATION

South Africa functions as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, meaning that many traffickers operate within South Africa, targeting vulnerable individuals both locally and abroad. While the NHTH identified cases across several countries, exploitation occurred within South Africa in the overwhelming majority, accounting for 78.6% of reported cases, highlighting the high prevalence of victims being exploited locally within their own communities or being recruited from outside of South Africa.

South African nationals have also been targeted and recruited to other parts of the world, including Cyprus, where, in one case identified by the NHTH, a young girl had applied to work as an au pair, but on arrival was exploited by the host family. Other locations of exploitation include Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia, where, as previously noted in this report, South Africans have been recruited and forced to work in scam centres under harsh conditions.



ENDNOTES

1 These 57 victims were identified through operations targeting Southeast Asian scam centres, with support from the NHTH and partner organisations. While the hotline played a central coordinating and support role, it was not necessarily the entity that directly identified these victims through screening interviews. Victim demographic statistics cited elsewhere in this report are drawn from cases directly identified and assisted by the NHTH.

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

3 All demographic statistics in this section are drawn from victims directly identified and assisted by the NHTH. These individuals have been confirmed as victims of trafficking through screening interviews conducted by the hotline.

4 The Global Freedom Summit is a powerful event designed to raise awareness about human trafficking and equip communities to take action. This hybrid experience combines the accessibility of online events with the power of in-person gatherings. Through this format, we hope more people than ever before will have the opportunity to understand the reality of exploitation, protect themselves and their loved ones, and safeguard their communities.

5 Deplorable working conditions at textile and garment factories in South Africa - Industriall-Union (2025) industriall. Available at: https://www.industriall-union.org/deplorable-working-conditions-at-textile-and-garment-factories-in-south-africa/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 10 March 2026).

6 Uncovered: The Dark World of the Zama Zamas ENACT Africa. Available at: <https://enactafrica.org/research/policy-briefs/uncovered-the-dark-world-of-the-zama-zamas> (Accessed: 10 March 2026).

7 Statistics South Africa. Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 3: 2025 (Publication P0211), Statistics South Africa, Pretoria. Available at: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02113rdQuarter2025.pdf>



CASE STUDY: HIGHLIGHT

The hotline received an urgent call from a doctor regarding a female Potential Victim of Trafficking who had presented at a Clinic in Cape Town. The survivor had been lured to Cape Town from another Province by a friend under false pretences of better financial opportunities.

A Hotline call specialist spoke directly with the individual, who bravely disclosed her situation. She explained that she and her friend had travelled by bus to Cape Town, with the trafficker paying for their transport. Upon arrival, they were taken to a residence, where the true nature of the situation became clear.

They were subjected to strict control and exploitation. The women were forced to remain indoors during the day and were made to take drugs and alcohol daily. Each night, they were sent out onto the streets, and all money earned had to be handed over to the trafficker. Failure to meet a set quota resulted in physical abuse. Their movements were monitored, their phones confiscated, and they were given a small amount of money to cover their food each day. The trafficker also sexually exploited her, further deepening her trauma. She indicated that there were other women at the same location who were also believed to be under similar coercion.

Courageously, the individual remembered advice previously given by a nurse, that help was available at the clinic should she ever need it. Seizing a rare opportunity, she dressed as though she were going out to work and instead made her way to the Clinic, where she asked for assistance. The NHTH's response was swift and coordinated. Following screening and risk assessment, with the help of law enforcement, this woman was safely transported to a secure place of safety, where she was able to begin her restoration journey with holistic support.

This case highlights the critical importance of awareness among frontline healthcare workers, the effectiveness of the NHTH reporting mechanism, and the bravery of survivors who take the first step toward freedom. Through collaborative intervention and survivor-centred care, a cycle of exploitation was interrupted, and a pathway toward healing and restoration was established.



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

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