



TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN SERBIA

Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis for Period 2021-2023

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List of Abbreviations

AT	Anti-trafficking
CEDOW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
CPTV/Center	Center for the protection of the trafficking victims
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Center for Social Work
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
GRETA	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migrations
KII	Key informants' interviews
KI	Key informants
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAP/NPA	National Action Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
j/TIP Report	US Department of State - Trafficking in Persons Report
UASC(s)	Unaccompanied and Separated Child/Children
UNHCR	United Nations the High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VTs/VoTs	Victims of Trafficking

Glossary

Child: The Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 1) states that a child is “every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. Throughout the text, the word ‘child’ will refer to every human being under the age of eighteen.

Child victim of trafficking¹: Children whose status as a victim of trafficking has been formally recognized by a competent authority, and children who are presumed victims of trafficking.

Exploitation: The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and other international instruments referring to trafficking of persons state that “Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. Legislators can identify additional forms of exploitation as purposes of trafficking.”²

Human trafficking³: Serious crime that abuses people’s fundamental rights and dignity. It involves the criminal exploitation of vulnerable people for the sole purpose of economic gain. It is often transnational in character and its victims are of all genders and ages.

(International) migrant: Someone who changes his/hers/their country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status⁴. This report uses the term ‘migrant’ to refer to any person on the move, including refugees and asylum seekers.

Presumed (or potential) victim of trafficking: A ‘presumed’ or ‘potential’ or ‘suspected’ victim of trafficking is a person for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe that she/he/they may be a victim of trafficking in human beings as defined below, but has not yet been formally recognized by the authorities. Presumed or potential victims should be entitled to the full range of protection services and procedural guarantees offered to recognized victims until their status is clarified.⁵

Trafficking in Human Beings: Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) is defined as “[...] the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”⁶.

Unaccompanied children⁷: Children without parental care who are outside their country of residence, or child victims in emergency situations who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is

¹This term is used by referring to [Glossary of Migration - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#).

² This term is used by referring to [Monitoring and Evaluation of anti-trafficking policies](#): A handbook for victims’ advocates; Produced with the assistance of the European Union, Belgrade 2016.

³This term is used by referring to [Glossary of Trafficking in Human Beings | Crime areas | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁴ This term is used by referring to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available at link: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions#:~:text=key%20refugee%20definitions-,Migrant,for%20migration%20or%20legal%20status>

⁵ This term is used by referring to [Monitoring and Evaluation of anti-trafficking policies](#): A handbook for victims’ advocates; Produced with the assistance of the European Union, Belgrade 2016.

⁶ United Nations. (2000). [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#).

⁷ The term is used by referring to OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings: Establishing National Focal Points to Protect Child Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/a/472305.pdf>.

responsible for doing so. Children who are internally displaced within their own country and have lost contact with their own families are also referred to as 'unaccompanied children'.

Victim of trafficking in human beings⁸ (VoT): Any person who is subject to trafficking in human beings as defined in Article 3 of Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Civil Society Organization: Although a variety of definitions define CSOs as all relevant non-governmental institutions, such as companies, charities, foundations, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, etc. in this report, the term CSO is used as a synonym for the non-profitable and non-governmental organizations working on THB prevention and response.

⁸ The term is used by referring to OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings: Establishing National Focal Points to Protect Child Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/a/472305.pdf>.

Executive Summary

This assessment was conducted using a combination of in-depth interviews, data analysis, and a knowledge/desk review. Interviews with experts, stakeholders, and professionals played a crucial role in gathering insights and understanding the challenges and progress in Serbia's fight against human trafficking in the period of 2021 to 2023. Additionally, data analysis and knowledge reviews allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the situation and the identification of key areas for improvement.

In this comprehensive assessment, Serbia's efforts to combat human trafficking over the past two decades have been examined through the **three P paradigm** of **protection, prevention, prosecution**, and in the context of **fostering partnerships for a holistic response to human trafficking**.

While significant progress has been made in establishing a legal framework, fostering cross-sectoral cooperation, and advancing regional collaboration, there are still persistent challenges. These include the need for greater cross-sectoral cooperation, role formalization, resource allocation, enhanced compensation for victims, and specific procedures for child trafficking victims. Despite the progress, there is room for improvement in providing better services and support for both professionals and victims.

This assessment underscores the importance of ongoing dedication and further enhancements to address the complex challenges that persist. It highlights the need for mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders and the importance of proactive victim identification efforts. It also emphasizes the need for adequate compensation schemes, consistent support for victims in court proceedings, and specific procedures for child trafficking victims. Finally, the assessment points out that financial resources, training, and professional capacity building are critical for professionals in the National Referral Mechanism.

Special thanks are extended to all the professionals, experts, and stakeholders who generously shared their expertise and insights throughout the assessment process, as well as to Gordana Ivković-Grujić, Božidar Dimić, Vlada Šahović, Marina Solecki and Bojan Velez for their invaluable technical support during this assessment.

Methodology

The methodological approach used for the purpose of this study included the descriptive and correlation techniques. The assessment analysis encompassed four key phases:

1. Desk review, which entailed gathering and analyzing documents from diverse relevant sources.
2. Crafting the instrument – questionnaire for interviews with key stakeholders.
3. Conducting interviews with identified stakeholders through face-to-face meetings and online communication platforms.
4. Analyzing and cross-referencing data from all sources to formulate conclusions and recommendations.

The research methodology for preparation of this report involved:

a. Desk Review – Bibliometric review of:

- All available sources of information concerning the problem of trafficking in human beings in Serbia as well as the broader social context.
- Materials of the relevant institutions and organizations, laws and by-laws related to the human trafficking problem, as well as,
- The most important reports of the international organizations in the field of suppressing trafficking in humans, such as the [GRETA](#)⁹ and [TIP](#)¹⁰ reports.

b. Data Collection and Analysis

Statistical data on THB in the Republic of Serbia, provided by the Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV). For data processing, basic statistical techniques were used, such as: descriptive statistics, and correlation analyses with data visualization.

c. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The interviews were conducted with the representatives (key informants – KI) of the most important institutions and organizations dealing with combatting the trafficking in persons and supporting the victims on the national level, such as Government institutions, Civil Society Organizations (shelters and reintegration programs, Helpline) and International Organizations. A total of eight Key Informant Interviews were conducted as well as one briefing (the KI provided their inputs in writing). The list of KIs is available in table 1.

Table 1: Representatives of the organizations, institutions and international organizations participated in the assessment.

#	Organization/institution	Name, gender and title of the KI	Type of activity	Date of interview
1	Center for Protection of Trafficking Victims	Aleksandra Ljubojević (f), director; Miroslav Jovanović (m), case-managers supervisor	Interview – in person	September 26, 2023 13.00h
2	CSO ASTRA	Marija Anđelković (f), CEO Jasmina Krunic (f), analyst	Interview – in person	September 19, 2023 11.00h
3	CSO Atina	/	Writing inputs	September 27, 2023

⁹ Council of Europe GRETA. (2023). *Evaluation Report Serbia* (GRETA(2023)09).

¹⁰ 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Serbia, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, US Department of State. 2023.

4	CSO Group 484	Miroslava Jelačić (f), co-director	Interview – online and writing inputs	September 22, 2023 13.00h
5	Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration	Jelena Šurlan (f), manager	Interview – in person	September 27, 2023 10.00h
6	International Rescue Committee - IRC	Vlada Šahović (m), Protection and Legal Advisor	Interview – online	September 25, 2023 10.00h
7	Republican Prosecutor Office	Tamara Mirović (f), prosecutor	Interview – online	September 28, 2023 10.00h
8	Ministry of Interior, Police Academy	Milan Žarković (m), professor	Interview – online	September 20, 2023 18.00h
9	National AT Coordinator Office ¹¹	Assistant of the coordinator	Unofficial phone calls	September 20 - 25, 2023

¹¹ During the final iteration of the assessment, the author was informed by the MoI that IRC had obtained permission to conduct interviews with the representatives of the AT Coordinator's office. To ensure the assessment met its planned deadline, an open channel of communication was established, allowing IRC team to reach out to the AT Coordinator if any additional information was required.

Introduction

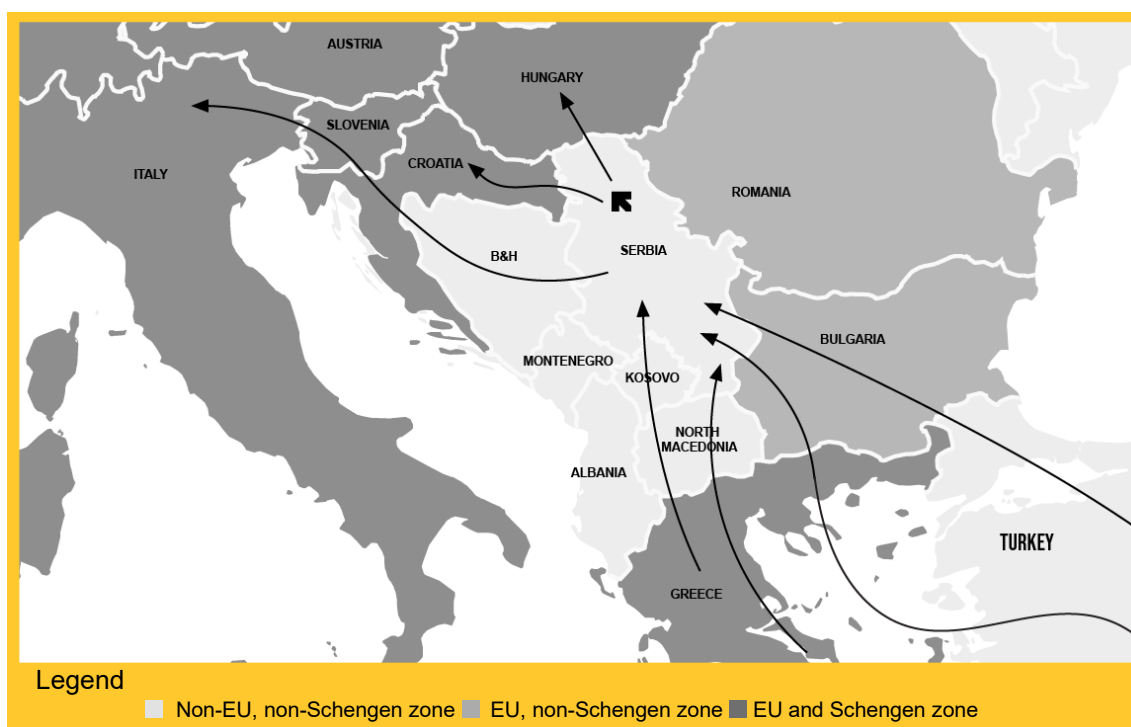
Socio-Political and Economic Situation in Serbia (2021-2023)

The history of the Republic of Serbia from 1990 to the present, has been a profoundly intricate and turbulent, marked by complex and ever-evolving circumstances. Spanning from the era of Slobodan Milošević regime, through a brief period of democratic progress after Milošević's government overthrowing on [the October 5th, 2000](#), to the contemporary leadership of Aleksandar Vučić, past 32 years have been characterized by political transitions, economic challenges and inflations, wars, external sanctions, post-conflict recovery, and often contentious relations with its neighbors, all contributing to the nation's ongoing development while continuing to redefine its path in the evolving global context.

Against this backdrop, Serbia has been navigating in a complex socio-political and economic landscape between 2021 and 2023. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation in Serbia regarding human trafficking, efforts to combat it, and support the victims, it is essential to consider the broader context within the country during this period. This entails providing an overview of significant developments and challenges across relevant domains, as well as insights into the evolving situation in the country.

Political Landscape

Serbia is situated in the middle of the so-called refugee-migrant [Balkan route](#), and surrounded on the north, northwest and east by EU countries, including those in the Schengen area.



Political map of Western Balkans and 'Western Balkans migration route'

In 2023, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), led by Aleksandar Vučić, maintained its dominant position in Serbia's political scene. Following his re-election as President in 2022,

Vučić's party maintained control over key political institutions on all levels in Serbia. This dominance raised concerns on the state of democracy and political pluralism in Serbia¹²¹³.

A variety of protests against the government persisted in 2023, albeit with varying intensity. Opposition groups and civil society organizations continued to voice concerns about issues such as media freedom, electoral fairness, violence on all social levels, and the state of the judiciary sector. These protests highlighted the deep-seated political divisions within Serbian society, mirroring the protests against the government and further polarization.¹⁴

Serbia's pursuit of European Union (EU) membership remained a central foreign policy objective. In past period, progress was made in several areas, including the environment, competition policy, and public procurement, as accession negotiations continued. However, challenges persisted, particularly in areas related to the rule of law, corruption, and the normalization of relations with Kosovo.¹⁵ As of 2023, Serbia continues to navigate a delicate balance between political stability, democratic concerns, economic growth, and its aspiration to join the EU, particularly in the wider context of escalation of war in Ukraine. The outcome of these dynamics will have profound implications for Serbia's future trajectory and its place in the international community or in isolation.

Given the context, some questions have been raised concerning the existing visa-free agreements and their implications for Serbia's EU membership aspirations. Throughout its history, Serbia has entered into visa-free agreements with various countries, including Burundi, India, Tunisia, and Cuba¹⁶. These agreements have played a role in shaping Serbia's immigration landscape and fostering international and diplomatic relations (mostly from the inherited history of Non-Alignment Movement as well as to the countries who did not recognize Kosovo's self-declaration of independence in 2008). Namely, in its [2022 Progress Report](#), the European Commission noted that Serbia has taken measures to prevent visa-free system abuse within the EU. It was stressed that Serbia did not significantly align its visa policy with the EU's recommendations, especially concerning countries with migration and security concerns. [The Commission's report from August 2021](#) advised Serbia to enhance alignment with the EU's lists of visa-required third countries, especially for those countries that pose irregular migration or security risks to the EU. Soon after, certain visa-free agreements were ceased. This change was prompted by EU standards and a significant increase in irregular entries of citizens from [Burundi](#), [India and Guinea Bissau](#), and [Tunisia](#), which compelled Serbia to reintroduce the visa regime with these nations.

The influence of politics extends into various aspects of state functioning and citizens' lives. This political context also affected the functioning of actors within the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, primarily due to the involvement of state bodies and institutions at the national and local levels. Notably, the focus on elections and the subsequent post-election period led to delays in the constitution and consolidation of these state bodies and institutions.

Socio-Economic Context

In terms of the economy, Serbia exhibit resilience despite global economic challenges. The country's economic growth remained slightly positive, driven by sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and foreign direct investments (FDI). Serbia continued to attract foreign direct investment in 2023, with a particular focus on infrastructure projects and technology-related

¹² Freedom House. (2023). [Serbia: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report](#)

¹³ Freedom House. (2022). [Serbia: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report](#)

¹⁴ Tepavac T. (2023) [The Long Summer of 2023: Why do we need to talk about the protests in Serbia?](#); The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

¹⁵ EU Commission. Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations. (2022). [Serbia 2022 Report](#).

¹⁶ Kovačević, N. (15/05/23). [Access Procedure and Registration in Serbia](#). AIDA ECRE.

industries. At the same time, Serbia is facing challenges like high food and energy prices, persistent high inflation, and uncertainty, as well as weak trading partner growth. In addition, Serbia faced ongoing fiscal challenges. The high public debt-to-GDP ratio management of public finances remained a concern.¹⁷¹⁸

The recent period has been marked by Chinese investments, including the completion of the Belgrade-Budapest railway, illustrated China efforts to strengthen economic ties with non-Western partners, and the global economic influence of China and its [Belt and Road Initiative](#). According to the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), China invested €32 billion in the region in 2009-2021. In Serbia alone, Chinese investments reached €10.3 billion¹⁹. The latest data from 2022 shows that the investment from China, totaling €1.4 billion, almost reached the level of the combined FDI from all 27 EU members at €1.46 billion.²⁰

Serbia's Human Development Index - HDI value for 2019 is 0.806— which puts Serbia in the remarkably high human development category—positioning it at 64 out of 189 countries and territories. However, the Human inequality coefficient is equal to 12.1 percent.²¹

The socio-political context in Serbia has been turbulent in recent years and this was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some additional relevant economic indicators:

- The minimum wage in Serbia is around 300€ and is received by about 350,000 workers, which is about 15 percent of all employees. (source UGS "Independence" and NGO A11)
- The minimum consumer basket in July 2023 was 52,063.5 RSD (442EUR) which is 26% higher than the net minimum wage for the same month - 38,640 RSD (328 EUR).
- 20 percent of the richest have ten times the equivalent income (household income distributed to household members) than 20 percent of the poorest. (Eurostat, 2018).
- According to the Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index, Serbia is at the bottom of Europe and 84th on the list of 154 countries in the world.
- 66% of households in Serbia are financially burdened with housing costs (Eurostat, 2018).
- In 2019, there were 226,897 social assistance beneficiaries in Serbia.
- The nominal amount of financial social assistance for an individual in Serbia is RSD 8,626.00 (70€).

These economic challenges have had significant consequences on vulnerable populations, impacting their overall health and well-being. The economic repercussions and widespread poverty, coupled with limited opportunities for a dignified life, have created conditions in which certain vulnerable groups, notably the Roma population, migrants, women, and children, find themselves preyed upon by human traffickers. Regrettably, certain sectors responsible for addressing this pressing issue have been slow to recognize and respond to the problem on time.

Furthermore, the reduction in funding allocated to support services for trafficking victims, including the closure of the CPTV shelter, has compounded the challenges. Tragically, many victims have fallen out of the support system, exacerbated by the overall economic hardship experienced by citizens. Consequently, this dire situation has increased the risk of re-trafficking

¹⁷ US Department of State. (2023). [2023 Investment Climate Statements: Serbia](#).

¹⁸ International Monetary Fund. (2023). [Serbia: Staff Concluding Statement of the First Review Under the Stand-By Arrangement and the 2023 Article IV Mission](#).

¹⁹ Stojkovski B. et al. (2021). [China in the Balkans: Controversy and Cost](#). Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN).

²⁰ Vladislavljev S. (2023). [How Did China Become the Largest Investor in Serbia?](#) China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE).

²¹ Country profile, methodology and explanatory report available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SRB> (retrieved March 29, 2022)

for sexual exploitation. While officially, only five such cases have been recorded, reputable CSOs suspect that the actual number may be significantly higher.

Position of the civil society in Serbia

Civil society in Serbia has seen no recent improvements in its relationship with the government authorities. On the contrary, control of the regime has increased, potentially limiting freedom of expression. The government of Serbia adopted [the Action Plan 2022-2023](#)²² for implementing the Strategy to establish an encouraging atmosphere for civil society development, yet with no consultations and with minimal engagement from civil society in this process. Although there were a few attempts to engage civil society, the CSOs' involvement in consultative processes and public debates is limited, and suggestions from civil society often go unheeded.

One of the key issues is the lack of state funding for civil society, especially licensed support services. To address these challenges, Serbia needs an effective dialogue between the state and civil sector. Update the NRM by formalizing cooperation with NGOs and delegating specific roles and responsibilities to government agencies.

Establish transparent standards and procedures for NGOs to obtain licenses for providing support services.

Allocate adequate funding to NGOs providing victim support services.

2023 JTIP Report Recommendations

²² "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 23/22

Trafficking in Human Beings - Context Analyses and Desk Research

For many years human trafficking in Serbia has been mostly internal, meaning that Victims of human trafficking were domestic persons, while exploitation also took place in Serbia. Serbia stays to a lesser extent a country of origin for Serbians trafficked abroad, and in some cases a country of transit and destination for foreign victims of trafficking. Among identified cases of internal human trafficking, the most usual form is still sexual exploitation, and to a lesser extent labor exploitation, while mixed forms of exploitation (sexual, for criminal purposes or labor) and forced marriage are the most prevalent types of exploitation of Serbians trafficked abroad.

The US State Department, in its 2001 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report classified the Republic of Serbia into Tier 3, assessing that it did not fulfill minimum standards in combating human trafficking. One year later, Serbia passed into Tier 2, but already in the 2004 TIP Report, it was put in Tier 2 Watch List. **After a prolonged period during which Serbia held a Tier 2 status, it has transited again on the Tier 2 Watchlist for the last two years (2022-2023).**

Some of the milestones in Serbia's efforts to suppress THB over the past 20+ years

Ratification of International Agreements

Serbia signed and ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols in 2001²³.

The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CoE AT Convention) was ratified on April 14, 2009²⁴.

Legislation and Legal Framework

Human trafficking was criminalized for the first time in the Criminal Law of Serbia in Article 111b in April 2003²⁵.

The criminal offense of human trafficking was further developed in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia in 2005, and its amendments in 2009, specifically in Articles 388 and 389²⁶.

Coordinating Bodies

In 2001, the first national coordinator for combating THB was appointed within the Ministry of Interior (Mol). Soon after, the National Team for Combating THB was established as a forum for cooperation between governmental, non-governmental, and international actors.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Suppressing THB was established in 2017 within the Police Directorate of the Mol. The National AT Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the efforts of all relevant AT stakeholders.

The first Anti Trafficking Council (AT Council) was established by the Government in mid-December 2004²⁷. In accordance with the new Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of trafficking in human beings from 2017, AT Council was formed by the Government of Serbia (GoS) during the same year, as its advisory body with the mandate to coordinate national and

²³ The Law ratifying the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocols Thereto, Official Journal FRY – International Treaties, no. 6/2001.

²⁴ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 19/2009.

²⁵ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 39/2003 and 67/2003.

²⁶ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 85/2005, 88/2005 - correction., 107/2005 - correction, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 and 35/2019).

²⁷ Government's decision to set up the Anti Trafficking Council no 02-6783/2004-1, 14 October 2004.

international activities in the fight against THB, review relevant international reports and suggest measures to be taken to comply with their recommendations.

Victim Assistance Initiatives

The Agency for Coordination of Protection of VoTs was established in March 2004 to act as a coordination center in organizing assistance and protection for trafficked victims in Serbia. Prior to its establishment, this support was provided exclusively by CSOs.²⁸

To address the issues in the Agency's operations, to enhance efficiency, and to improve the identification and support of VoTs, the Center for the Protection of Trafficking Victims (CPTV) was established in April 2012. Alongside the imperative for better regulation of the Agency's functions, this initiative was in harmony with the comprehensive reform of the social system in Serbia. The establishment of CPTV was prompted by the adoption of the Regulation on the Network of Social Protection.

The Guidelines for Standard Operating Procedures in the Treatment of Trafficking Victims was adopted for the first time in 2008. The second and the currently valid version of SOPs was adopted in January 2019.

Strategic Documents

The National AT Strategy was adopted in December 2006. Following this, the National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings for the period 2009-2011 was accepted in May 2009. Later, the second Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, and victim protection for the period 2017-2022, accompanied by an Action Plan for the period of 2017-2018, was endorsed by the Government on August 4, 2017. Subsequently, the Action Plan for the period 2019-2020 was adopted on July 12, 2019.

National Rapporteur

In November 2021, Serbia enacted a new Law on the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman)²⁹, appointing a National Rapporteur³⁰ to monitor AT activities of state institutions and the implementation of national legislation requirements, as stipulated in Article 29 of the CoE AT Convention. The Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) and his appointed deputy will be acting as the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings.

Data on Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-August 31, 2023)

From 2021 until August 31, 2023, a total of 146 victims of trafficking were identified (23 men, 62 women, 12 boys, and 49 girls). Observed by year: in 2021 – 46, in 2022 – 62, and in 2023 – 38 identified victims in total (please see Graph 1). In the last three years, transgender individuals have not been identified as victims of human trafficking.

During the period covered by this report, the number of identified adults was higher (60-63%) than minors (37%-41.5%), except for 2023, when the number of identified adult and child victims of human trafficking was equal, as of August 2023. Girls were the most common victims of sexual exploitation and forced marriages, while boys fell victim to multiple forms of exploitation, including labor exploitation.

The percentage of identified trafficked women consistently remained at a high level. In 2021, 80% of all identified victims of trafficking were female. In 2022, a similar pattern persisted with

²⁸ The establishment of the Agency in 2004 was preceded by a less successful attempt, and that initiative did not have its conclusion.

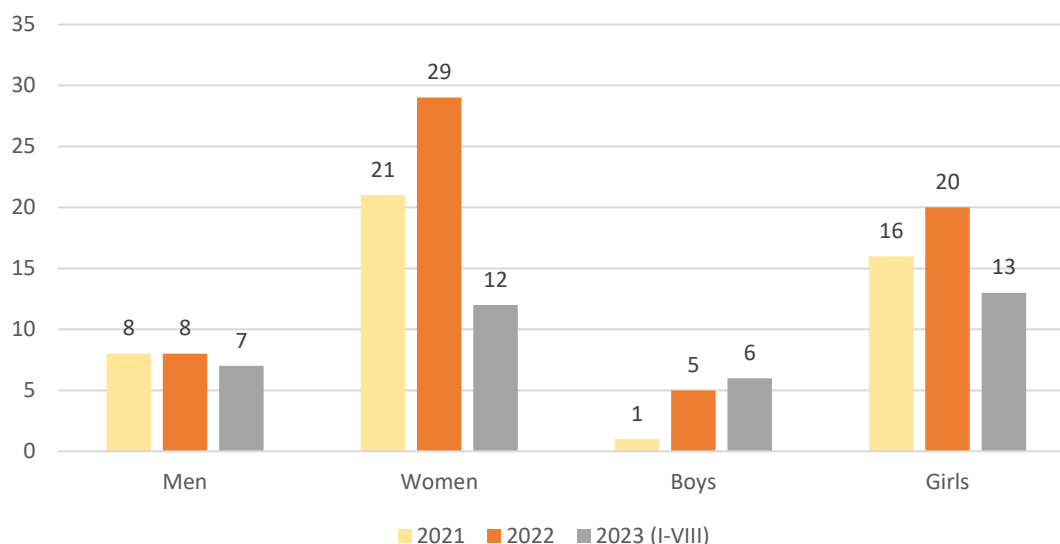
²⁹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 105/2021.

³⁰ According to the EU Directive of 2011 on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, EU Member States are obliged to establish the institute of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings or a similar mechanism.

79% being female survivors. During the first eight months of 2023, the proportion of identified women and girls who are victims of trafficking has slightly decreased, now accounting for around 67%. Generally, over the past twenty years, this percentage has fluctuated between 65% and 95%.

Finally, the number of migrants among identified victims of trafficking is still low.

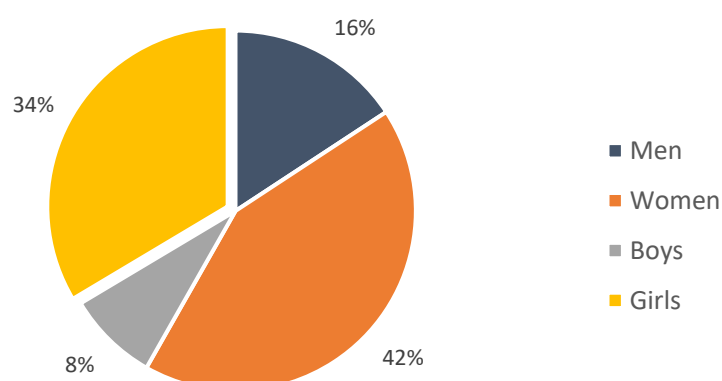
Graph 1: Formally identified VoTs in Serbia 2021 – August 31, 2023



Source: Center for the protection of trafficking victims, September 2023

During the period covered in this assessment, 61(41.5%) of all identified victims were children. As it was mentioned above, during 2023 (January – August), an equal number of children and adults were identified as victims of human trafficking. At the end of the year, it will be possible to conduct a proper statistical analysis, given that the identification procedures are ongoing for a certain number of presumed victims referred to CPTV, both adults and children. As for the gender of the trafficked children - most victims were girls – 49 (80%) out of 61 (graph 2).

Graph 2: Gender of VoTs identified in Serbia 2021 – August 31, 2023



Source: Center for the protection of trafficking victims, September 2023

The forms of exploitation of trafficked persons in Serbia for the period 2021-2023 are presented in graph 3. According to the official data³¹, the most prevalent form of trafficking is sexual exploitation. This is followed by labor exploitation and mixed forms of exploitation³², as well as forced marriages. When analyzing cases of multiple exploitation, one of the forms that is almost always present is sexual exploitation. This is especially the case when the victims are women and girls.

The findings of GRETA, outlined in the report by the former Secretary General of the Council of Europe, "Ready for Future Challenges - Reinforcing the Council of Europe" identified labor trafficking as one of the major challenges facing Europe.

The number of labor exploitation cases has been identified in a larger number among adults. However, during the year 2021, mostly children were subjected to labor exploitation.

Some KIs, particularly those from CSOs, share the perspective that the number of labor exploitation cases is likely higher, emphasizing the considerable challenges in identification. Unfortunately, there is a clear absence of political will to address potential human trafficking cases within companies that operate as foreign direct investments in Serbia. This issue is particularly pronounced in the context of Chinese companies like Linglong in Zrenjanin, ZiDjin in Bor, and others.

According to [ASTRA report](#)³³, in 2021 Chinese company [Linglong International Europe Ltd.](#) hired contractor China Energy Engineering Group Tianjin Electric Power Construction for a car tire factory in Zrenjanin, Serbia. They recruited workers from Vietnam through various agencies, resulting in an estimated 600 to 1,200 Vietnamese laborers arriving in Serbia without any prior contact or contracts with the Chinese company. Concerning reports emerged in Zrenjanin in fall 2021, including [unusual animal traps](#). Soon after, [independent investigative journalists](#) visited the site, revealing worker conditions that trigger a strong response from local and national CSOs, media, and activists.

Appalled by the workers' dire circumstances and the absence of basic necessities, activists and CSOs collected goods and provided assistance. CSOs investigations unveiled restricted freedom of movement, missing passports, excessive work hours, inadequate protective gear, and abusive Chinese managers. Organizations focused on anti-trafficking, human, and labor rights sent an official report to Serbian authorities in November 2021. Parallely, they offered direct support, organized field visits, and maintained communication with the workers. In response, the only significant action regarding this issue, the company and authorities moved some of the workers from unsafe barracks to slightly better accommodation. Many Vietnamese workers returned home around the [Tet holiday](#) in February 2022. Workers who left either waited for the employer to buy tickets or they purchased them. The workers that ASTRA was in contact with reported that no new Vietnamese workers replaced those who left.

In 2022, Linglong faced protests by Serbian workers over harsh conditions and mistreatment. Some workers spoke out anonymously, fearing for their and their family safety. Furthermore, Chinese workers, who had previously stayed quiet, initiated a strike in June 2022 due to unpaid wages and inadequate provisions. Soon, according to unconfirmed reports from the workers (now mostly Serbian) the situation in the company grew chaotic with work delays and financial issues.

³¹ Center for the protection of trafficking victims (CPTV) runs official statistics on victims' identification.

³² The term *multiple exploitations* is used by CPTV synonymously as an expression of mixed forms of exploitation (often used by UNODC and other relevant global actors).

³³ ASTRA. Would You Really Buy This? (2022).

Serbian authorities were unresponsive.

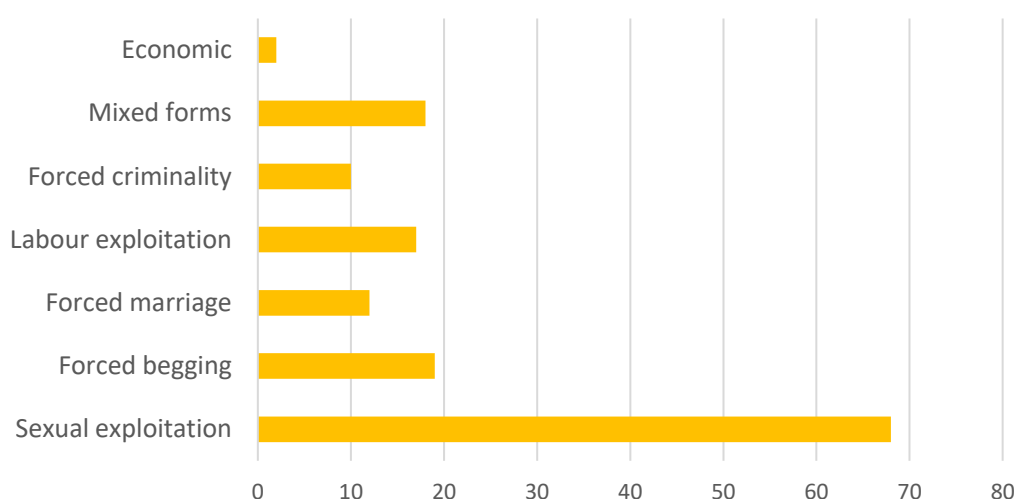
2023 TIP Report:

In 2021, the CPTV did not provide information on, nor notified all relevant stakeholders of whether it interviewed the Vietnamese workers in the PRC-owned factory or conducted an official victim assessment in this case.

This situation raises concerns about the well-being of domestic and foreign workers and underscores the pressing need for stronger oversight and enforcement measures to protect the rights and welfare of those exploited by these companies.

Finally, forced marriages are more often identified among children, to be precise - girls. Although it is a more common form of child trafficking, forced marriages have been identified in three cases of adult women.

Graph 3: Forms of THB and age of the victims in Serbia 2021 – August 31, 2023



Source: Center for the protection of trafficking victims, September 2023

The cases of trafficking for the purpose of organ removal and for the pornographic purposes have not been registered in the official statistics during the period covered by this report. While no officially identified victims of these types of exploitation have been reported, there is a potential concern that specific cases have remained under the radar or have not been officially documented.

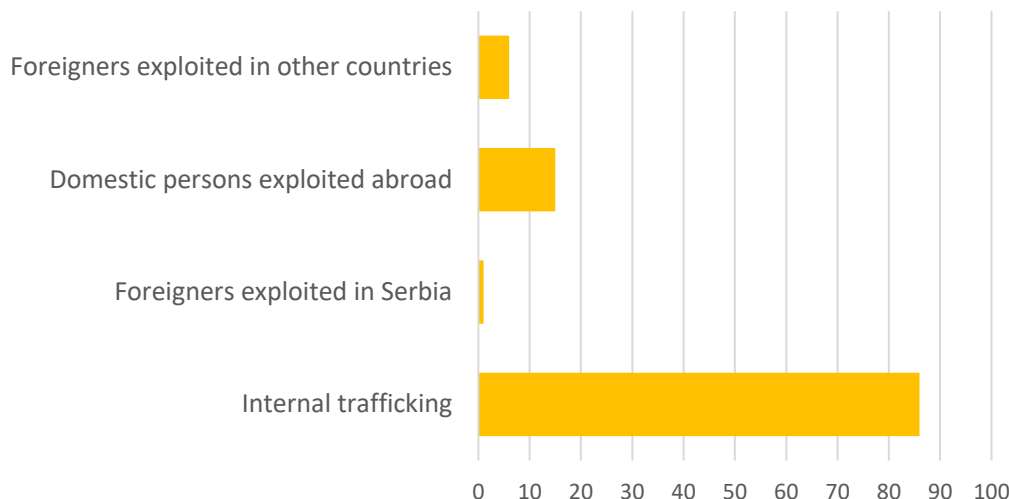
This is especially relevant in cases of trafficking for pornographic purposes. For instance, in the 2022 the [Office of the Public Prosecutor](#) reported on the suppression of crime and the protection of constitutionality and legality³⁴. It is mentioned that one criminal report was filed for the offense of 'Abuse of Computer Networks or other Technical Means of Communication for Committing Criminal Offenses against the Sexual Freedom of Minors' (Article 185b of [the Criminal Code](#)³⁵). Notably, this data does not appear in the official statistics pertaining to human trafficking and child exploitation.

³⁴ Rad javnih tužilaštava na suzbijanju kriminaliteta i zaštiti ustavnosti i zakonitosti u 2022. godini. (2023). Office of the Public Prosecutor.

³⁵ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 85/2005, 88/2005 - amend 107/2005 - amend, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 and 35/2019.

Like in the previous years, most of the trafficked persons identified – 86 (80%), were domestic persons exploited in Serbia (internally). The ratio of domestic and foreign persons trafficked in Serbia, as well as domestic persons exploited abroad³⁶, is presented in graph 4.³⁷

Graph 4: Origin of identified THB victims in Serbia 2021 – August 31, 2022



Source: Center for the protection of trafficking victims, September 2023

According to the [2021 US State Department TIP report](#), thousands of migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia transiting through or left stranded in Serbia are vulnerable to trafficking within Serbia. Regrettably, the identification of trafficking victims among migrants and refugees remains low. In total, ten persons among migrant and refugee populations have been identified as victims of trafficking over the past three years, according to data received from the CPTV for the purpose of this assessment:

- In 2021, there was one THB case of unaccompanied girl from Eritrea.
- In 2022, this increased to five (two female VoTs from Cameroon and three victims from Uganda, DR Congo, and Tunisia).
- In 2023, there were four THB cases in total (additional data is not available) as of August 2023.

One explanation provided to GRETA experts³⁸ by the CPVT is that this is partly due to the difficulty in interviewing presumed victims among population of migrants and refugees. Many of them are on the move and may leave the country within a short period, making it challenging to conduct comprehensive interviews.

For the [2022 report](#), CPTV changed the way data is presented and conducted additional analysis. In the context of sexual exploitation of VoTs, the majority are girls (13 out of 14 victims) with an average age of 14 years.

The data reveals that in 88% of cases, the exploiter was previously known to the victim. These individuals include friends, acquaintances, parents, relatives, partners, or employers. In only 12% of cases, exploitation is carried out by someone unknown to the victim.

³⁶ According to [ASTRA's 2022 Annual Report](#), among preventive and educational calls on the ASTRA SOS Helpline, Israel stands out as the destination country most inquired about by clients in 2022. In the context of the conflicts in Israel and Palestine, this data deserves additional attention from relevant institutions in Serbia to ensure the timely repatriation of at-risk workers from Serbia.

³⁷ Data regarding the origin of the VoTs for the year 2023 is not yet available.

³⁸ Council of Europe GRETA. (2023). [Evaluation Report Serbia](#) (GRETA(2023)09).

The *misuse of information technology* for human trafficking is becoming increasingly common. According to [CPTV 2022 report](#), in 25% of cases, traffickers use these means to recruit, coerce, control victims, or offer their services. This is particularly prevalent in cases of sexual exploitation, accounting for as much as 51%.

The CSO [Atina study](#)³⁹, covering the experiences of 178 girls and women in Serbia from 2015 to 2020, reveals a disturbing surge in digital violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. VoTs in the digital sphere often face violence from unknown individuals or online acquaintances. Cyberstalking, the most common form of digital violence, affects mainly acquaintances, family members, and partners. Even 65% of respondents encountered digital threats to coerce them into altering or withdrawing legal statements. Digital violence now serves as a crucial tool for coercion, threats, humiliation, unauthorized recordings, and explicit material distribution, even involving minors. Atina's research underscores that 40% of digital abuses originate from unknown individuals, while 20% come from acquaintances. Cyberstalking affects 55% of respondents. Furthermore, 63% faced unauthorized recording and dissemination of explicit content. Approximately 30% of VoTs were recruited online, often leading to further exploitation. Most recruitment (51%) occurred through individuals known to the victims, employing methods such as false advertisements, deceptive job offers, and financial assistance. This often resulted in financial gain for the perpetrators. The report also reveals that 29% of respondents were blackmailed with threats of exposing explicit content or personal information to their families, while 21% faced threats of public disclosure on various websites.

In [Atina's 2022 analysis](#)⁴⁰, the focus was primarily on the general population of high school girls from senior year. As much as 78% of respondents believe they are not as safe in the digital space. More than half of the girls (53.2%) reported experiencing digital violence, and a similar percentage knew a peer who had experienced it. Also, 53.2% of the respondents stated that girls cannot be blamed for the violence they experience, regardless of the content they share online. On the other hand, a quarter of the respondents felt that girls have a responsibility to choose the content they post online. Only about 10% of the respondents would decide to report digital violence. KIs have highlighted that most VoTs are recruited during the job-seeking process.

An interesting data from [ASTRA and SeConS' 2021 study](#)⁴¹, states that the primary channels for research participants to secure employment were through personal connections, such as relatives or friends from Serbia or abroad (84.6%). Internet platforms were the next most common channel (8%), while formal institutions like the National Employment Service were used by less than 1% of respondents from the general population.

In practice, according to ASTRA [SOS Helpline](#)⁴², the situation has somewhat reversed for their clients. Namely, job offers were most frequently found through advertisements posted on social networks and specialized websites, and to a slightly lesser extent through recommendations from acquaintances.

³⁹ Atina. (2020). Behind the screens: Analysis of human trafficking victims' abuse in digital surroundings.

⁴⁰ Atina. (2022). *In Front of the Screens*: Research on Gender-Based Violence in the Digital Environment. (available in Serbian)

⁴¹ ASTRA. (2022). Trgovina ljudima u Srbiji presek stanja u kontekstu 21. veka. (available in Serbian)

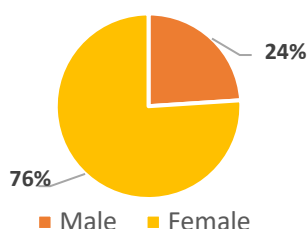
⁴² ASTRA. (2023). Annual Report 2022.

Gender Aspect of Trafficking in Human Beings

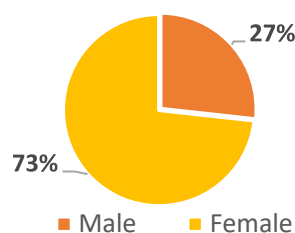
According to the European Parliamentary Research Service (2016), the gender dimension of THB is essential to ensure adequate support for the victims as well as effective prevention⁴³.

Trafficking is described as a gendered phenomenon⁴⁴. The majority of identified cases still tend to be related to trafficking for sexual exploitation, where the victims are predominantly women and girls.

Graph 5: Gender of VoTs in Serbia 2021 – August 2023



Graph 6: Gender of VoTs in Serbia 2018 – 2020



Source: CPTV annual reports 2018-2022 and semi-annual report for 2023

Among the trafficked women, a significant 78% had previous experience of violence. None of them had a permanent job immediately before the exploitation, and all of them had experience in irregular, seasonal, and generally insecure jobs.

ASTRA. (2023). *Annual Report 2022*.

Men continue to be the largest proportion of formally identified victims of trafficking for labor exploitation, however, the number of women identified as VoTs of this type of exploitation has risen since 2016.

As for labor exploitation, some of the industries that are considered with the highest risk for women are agriculture, textiles and footwear production, tourism and hospitality, etc. Many of them are operating in a grey area, including [elderly and child-care services](#). And in cases when they are formally employed, the vast majority of women work for minimum wages, and the most vulnerable are employed in the so-called 'screwdriver industry', including manual jobs like manufacturing, gluing/assembling, etc.

No transgender victim of THB has been identified in this period⁴⁵. The data shows that among the identified trafficked persons, even in the period before 2021, transgender individuals have not been identified. However, professionals with extensive experience in the field reasonably conclude that the hidden or unreported cases are certainly present when it comes to the trafficking of transgender individuals. This should be another area of intervention, including professional education, awareness-raising, and outreach work through collaboration with LGBTQI+ organizations.

As for the service provision, the needs are assessed, and services are offered rather based on the type of exploitation survived than the individual needs of identified adults and/or

⁴³ European Parliamentary Research Service. (2016). Trafficking in Human Beings from a Gender Perspective: Directive 2011/36/EU - European Implementation Assessment.

⁴⁴ Voronova, S., Radjenovic, A., (2016). The gender dimension of human trafficking, EPRS Briefing, European Parliament.

⁴⁵ "There are some cases of transgender persons trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but this aspect is not sufficiently taken into account in assistance projects." Council of Europe. Gender mainstreaming in thematic areas: [Gender equality and trafficking in human beings](#).

children⁴⁶. There is still no solution on urgent accommodation for men, but also the emergency state shelter for trafficked women was not operational from September 2020 till the beginning of 2023⁴⁷, while victims support still hugely relies on NGO funds and foreign donors.

Preliminary and Formal Identification. Victim Assistance.

The Republic of Serbia has established a robust framework to combat human trafficking, including legislative measures and institutions. Notably, it pioneered the development of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)⁴⁸ as early as the 2000s⁴⁹. Over time, the Serbian NRM has evolved into a centralized system for identifying and supporting victims, that includes the Office of the National Anti-trafficking Coordinator, the Centre for the Protection of Trafficking Victims, Standard Operating Procedures for Victims (SOPs), and specialized anti-trafficking organizations. In Serbia, the system of VoTs identification is not linked to criminal investigations, the prosecution of traffickers, or the results of court proceedings. Instead, victims are regarded as individuals in need of social welfare assistance, and the relevant regulations are outlined in the Social Protection Law and related guidelines.

As a key actor of the National Referral Mechanism, the CPTV was created to conduct the process of identification of victims and to provide them with emergency assistance. The CPTV is the sole authority mandated to formally identify VoTs. It was established by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2012 as a governmental institution in the social protection system. It is divided into two units: the protection agency and the emergency reception center. CPTV is independent in its operation, which means that it is not required to consider the assessment of other competent institutions. In cases of identified victims, the CPTV informs other relevant actors in the protection system, and/or refers victims to relevant instances.

According to Article 9 of the CPTV Statute, the agency is established to: “...*assess the situation, needs, strengths and risks of human trafficking, and based on the set indicators which point out that a person is a victim, conducts the identification within the legal framework in the field of registered activity. All of this is done to provide appropriate help and support for victims, and to assess other important people in the victim’s environment.*” So, namely, one of the main tasks of the CPTV includes identification of trafficking in human beings (THB) victims⁵⁰.

After the preliminary identification is done by the range of actors listed above, and when the CPTV receives information of a case of presumed victim, its’ representatives are obliged to directly contact this person and initiate an admission assessment and with it a procedure of formal identification.

In most cases, reports originate from the police authorities⁵¹ and / or the social protection system, but cases are also referred by civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations. Specialist anti-trafficking CSOs contribute to the identification of victims (most often ASTRA and Atina) through their ongoing work with groups at risk, SOS Help line, field assessments mobile teams, etc.

⁴⁶ Ivana Radović. (March 2020). *Gender Analysis of Combating Human Trafficking in Serbia*, Council of Europe, Belgrade. Project: Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings in Serbia (HF 26) - [Horizontal Facility in Serbia - phase 2](#)

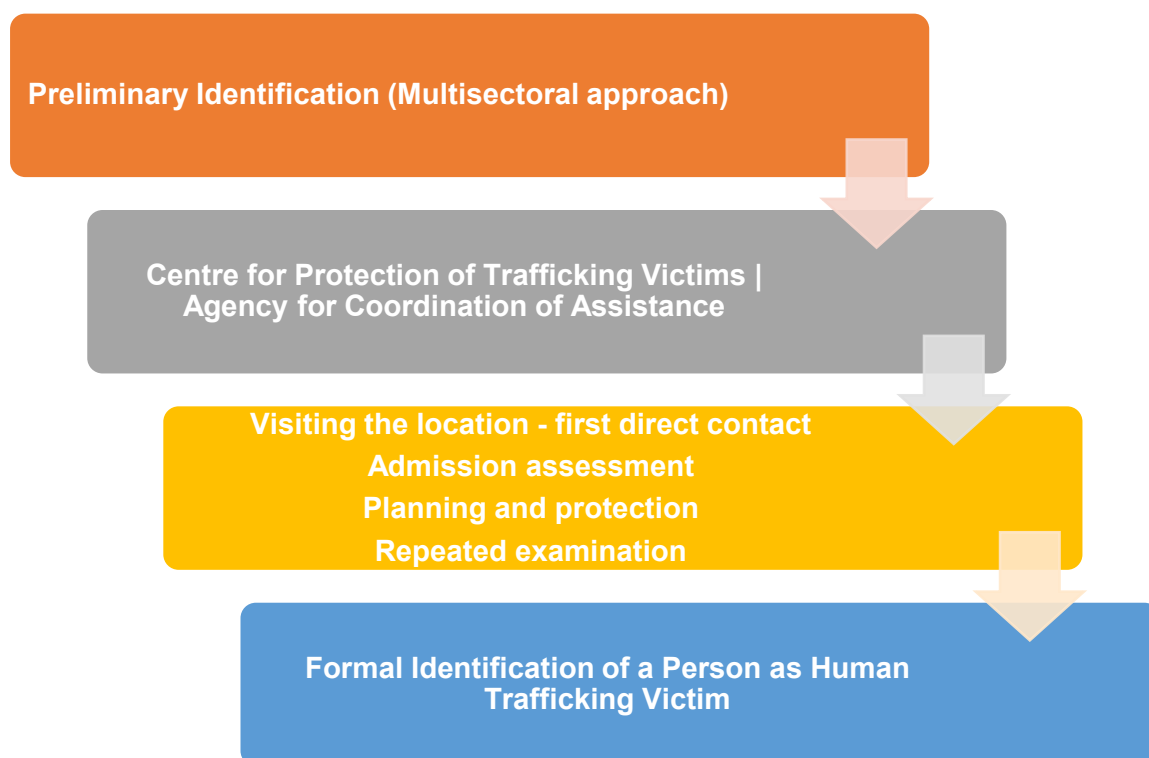
⁴⁷ The VoTs were accommodated in the CSO Atina shelter – assisted housing.

⁴⁸ OSCE ODIHR. (2004). *National Referral Mechanisms: Joining Efforts to Protect the rights of Trafficked Persons. A Practical Handbook*.

⁴⁹ Liliana Sorrentino. (2019). *Assessment of the national referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking in the republic of Serbia*. ASTRA.

⁵⁰ The CPTV’s beneficiaries are all groups of THB victims regardless their gender, age, nationality, types of exploitation etc.

⁵¹ According to the CPTV Statistical report for 2022, the number of detected cases of human trafficking by the Ministry of Interior dropped drastically by a third.

Chart 1: Steps in Preliminary and Formal Identification of VoTs

Besides identification, according to the CPTV Statute, Agency is responsible for the overall coordination of all parties at the national level and activities related to the protection of rights and interests of trafficking victims, including risks and needs assessment, provision of emergency shelter to the victims of trafficking, developing and monitoring implementation of individual protection service plans, referrals to other specialized services, coordination of activities related to the preparation of victims to participate in proceedings, and managing databases on VoTs.

The framework for the operation of the National Referral Mechanism is outlined in the document titled [Standard Operating Procedures for the Treatment of Victims of Trafficking](#) (SOPs). This document, adopted in January 2019, aims to enhance collaboration among all relevant stakeholders at local, national, regional, and international levels to protect the human rights of trafficking victims. These procedures encompass various activities, including the identification, referral, support, and protection of trafficked victims, offering assistance and support during criminal proceedings and property claims realization, as well as facilitating the voluntary return of victim.

Although the plan was to update the SOPs annually, to keep up with all the changes in the field, this has not been done by the conclusion of this assessment. Despite the preparation of a new version in 2020, which was set to be adopted at that time, the SOPs has not been updated annually as originally planned.⁵²

⁵² Other relevant document is Standard Operating Procedures of the Republic of Serbia for the Prevention and Protection of Refugees and Migrants from Gender-Based Violence, adopted at the end of 2019, as well as List for faster screening of human trafficking risk among refugee children and migrants in mixed migration.

Gaps and Challenges

Identification

A significant number of presumed trafficking victims are denied formal identification due to systemic screening challenges and shortcomings. This impedes victims' protection, worsened by the lack of review options and other contributing factors. The primary points of contact with trafficked persons include law enforcement, local Social Work Centers (CSWs), and civil society organizations. These initial responders have the responsibility of directing presumed victims to the CPTV, which handles a substantial number of referrals and cases with minimal personnel and financial resources. To illustrate their demanding workload, the number of CPTV professional staff members varies from four to six, depending on the year, budget, and the contributions through various internationally funded projects, which cover the entire territory of Serbia.

Therefore, the CPTV should prioritize its core responsibilities in improving victim identification and coordinating support, which are in line with its mandate, rather than getting involved in direct assistance, which falls outside its scope. By working outside of their much-needed initial scope of work, they impede with the domain of other institutions, unintentionally contributing to the shrinking of civil society space.⁵³

Likewise, a significant challenge with the current NRM lies in its overly formalized and centralized victim identification process with excessively high threshold and criteria. This restricts victims' access to their rightful international law protections. To be recognized as a victim, one must undergo rigid formal approval by the CPTV, even though such formal and inflexible recognition is not mandated by the international standards⁵⁴. Besides, the victim identification process lacks a multi-agency approach, neglecting involvement from various sectors, including civil society. This way, the perspectives of other actors are excluded, as well as the ability to promptly spot and address discrepancies/mistakes during the identification process.

Each Party shall provide its competent authorities with persons who are trained and qualified in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, in identifying and helping victims, including children, and shall ensure that the different authorities collaborate with each other as well as with relevant support organisations, so that victims can be identified in a procedure duly taking into account the special situation of women and child victims.

Article 10 of the Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Convention

Certain types of exploitation, especially forced criminality, labor, domestic servitude, are challenging to detect due to factors like lack of awareness, knowledge, and insufficient proactive efforts in the field, especially with vulnerable populations like the Roma, migrants, and Serbian citizens returned under readmission agreements, etc.

Victim Assistance

According to the SOPs, the CPTV provides assistance to presumed victims, offering support during the identification process. Those granted victim status receive extended support. Victims are provided with emergency assistance, including material aid, basic medical services, accommodation, and legal representation in criminal proceedings. Nevertheless,

⁵³ Article 6 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. (2000). United Nations Treaty Series, or Article 10 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. (2005). Council of Europe Treaty Series, No. 197.

⁵⁴ Liliana Sorrentino. (2019). *Assessment of the national referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking In the republic of Serbia*. ASTRA.

these services often have limitations, such as the absence of psychosocial support and limited legal assistance. Male victims face additional challenges as there is no shelter or similar safe accommodation available for them.

The CPTV refers cases to CSWs for local services and health institutions for basic medical care and psychosocial support. However, local CSWs are resource-constrained and offer a limited range of direct victim support. CPTV also makes referrals to civil society organizations like Atina or ASTRA for accommodation and reintegration programs. Unfortunately, referrals to specialized CSOs' services are limited, even though some of these services are licensed. Their expertise and capacities are underutilized, or this is done ad hoc and based on assessments by the CPTV that are not transparent enough for CSOs. CSOs primarily rely on donor funding, highlighting the need for public funding to support and expand victim assistance programs.

The additional problem is the leakage of information from the ongoing investigations (from police) to the media, which is unfortunately common in such cases. This raises significant concerns and leads to a complete absence of measures to protect victim confidentiality. An alarming example of this was the Ministry of Interior's release of information about a trafficker who happened to be the victim's father, which subsequently allowed the media to readily identify the victim⁵⁵.

While the Law on Health stipulates that healthcare for victims of human trafficking is free of charge, in practice, the beneficiaries of health insurance continuously encounter problems due to the lack of knowledge of healthcare staff about regulations and procedures when working with victims. This lack of understanding compounds additional trauma and distress experienced by victims of trafficking.

The child victim identification and protection rely on the child protection system, primarily managed by local Centers for Social Work (CSWs). In all cases related to trafficking in children, they are obliged to cooperate with CPTV. However, CSWs face limitations in resources and capacity for comprehensive individual assessments and specialized care services. For instance, temporary guardians might be responsible for an excessive number of children, surpassing child protection minimum standards⁵⁶. Additionally, there are additional worries on the risk of abuse and exploitation for migrant and refugee children and their access to the protection and support system, especially for unaccompanied or separated children. Specialized support programs and accommodation for child victims are chronically lacking. The practical implementation of the UNCRC guidelines of best interest of a child, which are incorporated in Serbian legislation, underline the need for determination process and identifying durable solutions for each child victim, which poses another challenge.⁵⁷

The Social Protection Law⁵⁸ (Article 36) stipulates that the beneficiary has the right to a free choice of services. According to the SOPs, victims should be informed about the services available and choose, according to their own will and their best interest, service/service provider they want to use. However, beneficiaries at state shelters lack the freedom to use mobile phones freely or leave the shelter unaccompanied. These restrictions have led many beneficiaries to leave the state shelter at their own risk. Additionally, taking into account the support capacities for child VoTs, it is needed to mention that some essential services are lacking, they are not sufficiently effective, or their geographical distribution is uneven as they are primarily centralized in the largest urban areas. For instance, social inclusion services must

⁵⁵ CSO Atina's input for EC 2023 Serbia's Progress Report

⁵⁶ Liliana Sorrentino. (2019). *Assessment of the national referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking In the republic of Serbia*. ASTRA.

⁵⁷ Communication with Kis, September 2023.

⁵⁸ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2011 and 117/2022 - the decision of the Constitutional Court. The Law on Social Protection, which was passed in April 2011 within the reform of the social protection system, clearly specifies trafficked persons as direct beneficiaries of social protection services for the first time (Article 41 – Beneficiaries).

be further strengthened. According to data from the National Employment Service (NES), in the period 2017-2021, only nine victims of human trafficking (3.4% of all identified victims)⁵⁹ were included in the active employment measures provided by this institution. The operation of the state urgent shelter has been very unstable, and over the past four years, it has been closed multiple times for various reasons. Each time the shelter ceases operation, all beneficiaries are transferred to a licensed assisted housing service run by CSO Atina. However, the state has not allocated any funds to support Atina's assisted housing service. After a pause lasting more than a year, the state shelter was reopened in early 2022. Nevertheless, in January 2023, the state shelter was closed again, this time for reconstruction reasons, and the VoTs were accommodated in the CSO Atina shelter – assisted housing. However, once more this transition occurred without adequate state financial support for Atina.

As visible above, institutional collaboration with CSOs is often merely declarative, while in reality, it is highly opportunistic, and in practice, there is still a lot of mistrust.

Prevention and Cooperation

Cooperation. Institutional Framework. Relevant National Anti-Trafficking Bodies

The Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of trafficking in human beings, Especially Women and Children, and Victim Protection for the period 2017-2022 (Strategy), accompanied by an Action Plan for the period of 2017-2018, was adopted by the GoS on August 4th, 2017⁶⁰. To implement the second phase of the Strategy, in 2019, Serbia adopted the second action plan for 2019-2020. Despite being in the last quarter of 2023, this was the last adopted action plan.

The Republican Team for Suppressing Human Trafficking was formed in 2001, subsequently replaced by the National Council for Suppressing the Human Trafficking (Council)⁶¹, formed by the Government of Serbia in 2017 as its advisory body. Its mandate is to coordinate activities in the fight against human trafficking, review relevant international reports, and suggest measures to be taken to comply with the recommendations of these reports, as well as to monitor and evaluate the implementation of anti-trafficking strategies and action plans. The Council is presided by the Minister of Internal Affairs, and includes the Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development, Minister of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Minister of Health, and Minister of Justice.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Suppressing Human Trafficking (NC) was set up in 2017, housed within the Police Directorate of the Ministry of Interior. The NC is mandated to coordinate efforts of all relevant stakeholders in combating trafficking in human beings in Serbia.

The Division for Combating Human Trafficking and Smuggling operates within the Department for Combating the Organized Crime of the Criminal Police Directorate. In 2019, the competences for dealing with cases of trafficking in human beings from the Border Police Directorate were transferred to the Criminal Police Directorate by the new Rulebook on Internal Organization and Systematization of Workplaces in the Ministry of the Interior.

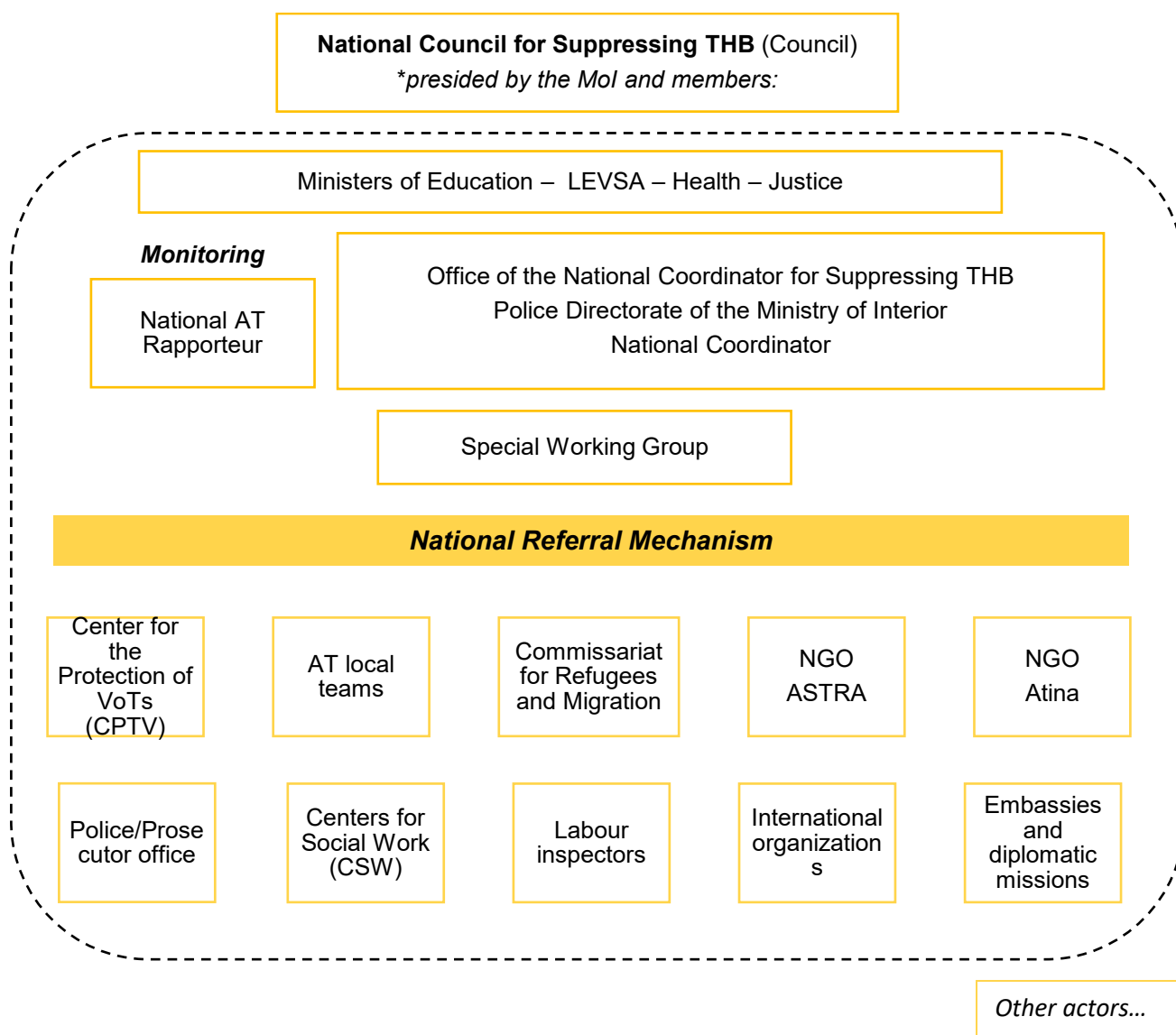
Within the higher prosecutor's offices, specialized prosecutors have been appointed as contact persons for THB cases (see organogram below).

Chart 2: Organogram of Serbian Anti-Trafficking Actors

⁵⁹ This information is sourced from CSO Atina's input for the 2023 Serbia Progress Report by the European Commission.

⁶⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 77/2017.

⁶¹ Decision on the Establishment of the Council for Suppressing Human Trafficking, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia* No. 92/2017.



In 2018, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Public Prosecutor's Office signed *the Protocol on Cooperation in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings*; and the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration signed the *Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of combating trafficking in human beings*. In January 2020, the Ministry of Interior signed the *Memorandum of Cooperation* with the specialized AT CSOs - Atina and ASTRA.

To execute the decisions of the Council, as well as to monitor their implementation, the Special Working Group, consisting of representatives of other relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations was formed in 2017. It is accountable to the Council and has the mandate to implement and monitor implementation of the national strategy and action plans. The National Coordinator for Suppressing Human Trafficking leads this Special Working Group and reports to the Council.

As it was recognized that for development of a successful response to human trafficking, it is also necessary to collaborate with local communities and to upgrade their capacities to effectively operate in the field, local anti-trafficking teams (AT) were established in 17 local self-government units (municipalities). Local AT teams consist of professionals from relevant local institutions: police, prosecutors' office, health and social care institutions, media, local government, educational institutions and civil society organizations. The main task of these

teams is to effectively participate in the prevention of human trafficking, to implement and monitor the local strategy and action plans.

Other actors

Commissariat for Refugees and Migration - KIRS⁶². The Commissariat for Refugees, as a separate organization within the public system, was established in 1992. With the adoption of the Law on migration management ("RS Official Gazette", No. 107/12), the Commissariat for Refugees continues to work as the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. Commissariat performs tasks related to: collecting, integrating and analyzing data and indicators for migration management; reporting on immigration and emigration; development and regular updating of the migration profile of the Republic of Serbia to establish a unified system for collecting, organizing and sharing information; establishing cooperation with the members of European migration network; training of persons engaged in activities relevant to migration management; ensuring the availability of information relevant to migration issues, as well as other duties specified by law. Also, KIRS performs professional, administrative, and technical affairs of the Commission for Missing Persons, which was established by the Government. Finally, the Commissariat initiates the search for international assistance from the institutions of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Civil Society Organizations

ASTRA - offers assistance to all categories of victims – women, children, and men regardless of the type of exploitation they survived. ASTRA SOS Hotline is still the only Anti-Trafficking hotline in Serbia specialized for direct assistance to victims and their families, as well as for prevention of human trafficking - support to families and/or friends during the searches for missing – (potentially) trafficked persons, process of identification, recovery, and reintegration. Types of services available to ASTRA's clients and (potential) trafficking victims include information provision on available assistance and support programs in Serbia and abroad, legal assistance, as well as legal representation in court proceedings; psychological counseling and/or psychotherapy; medical assistance; support and accompaniment through institutional procedures; long-term assistance in the process of (re)integration and social inclusion (ASTRA Day Center); transportation; assistance in the process of voluntary return to the country of origin; interpretation, etc.

Atina - Through its Transition house, in last 20 years, NGO Atina has been providing support to recovery of hundreds of women and girls victims of human trafficking, including refugees and migrants, using a tailor-made approach. Through the Reintegration Center and Field Support Team programs, Atina provides these women and girls with assistance in rebuilding their lives. Furthermore, dozens of women and girls who expressed the need have been supported to achieve economic independence through the Bagel Bejgl Shop – the Atina's social enterprise which produces and sells bagel pastry. Besides providing safe accommodation, Atina also provides case management, cultural mediation, psychological support, as well as other services necessary for the recovery, successful and sustainable reintegration for victims of human trafficking.

Prevention

Within the AT system in Serbia, preventive efforts are primarily understood as educating various stakeholders to recognize potential/presumed victims and provide appropriate referrals, as well as raising public awareness through media campaigns. Although the latest AT Strategy mentions the empowerment of particularly vulnerable groups and economic

⁶² Acronym in Serbian language/SCRM in English language

empowerment programs, that is addressing the root causes of human trafficking, these efforts are limited or minimal due to the lack of political will within the relevant ministries. For instance, the development of an early warning system for potential human trafficking cases, including risk assessments, was initially planned within the action plan for 2017-2019. However, it was not implemented and was subsequently carried over to the action plan for 2020-2021. Unfortunately, even during this period, it remained unimplemented.

Analyzing the prevention of human trafficking in Serbia within the theoretical framework that encompasses three levels of prevention, it can be evaluated how activities in Serbia align with this framework and contribute to the practical prevention of human trafficking:

- **Primary Prevention:** This level focuses on reducing the occurrence of human trafficking. For instance, activities include educating various stakeholders to recognize potential victims, developing indicators for preliminary identification, and raising public awareness through media campaigns. Distributing informative leaflets is one of the ways to achieve this goal. By educating people about the signs and risks associated with human trafficking, the aim is to deter individuals from becoming victims. As mentioned above, at this level of prevention, the most has been accomplished, or at least those activities were aimed at primary prevention, but their effect has not been measured or it is unknown. Efforts to address the root causes, such as poverty, inequality, social vulnerability, and other push factors that make individuals vulnerable to trafficking, are also considered part of primary prevention. Unfortunately, here minimal has been done, often with the explanation by the stakeholders that working on the causes of human trafficking is far beyond their capabilities and that it goes beyond their mandates.
- **Secondary Prevention:** This level focuses on identifying potential victims and providing timely interventions to prevent their victimization. It can be linked to the development of an early warning system for potential human trafficking cases, including risk assessments. Leaflets can serve as a tool to disseminate information. This system helps identify individuals at risk and intervenes to prevent them from falling into the hands of traffickers. Similarly, here-on this stage, the progress has been limited or insufficient. As mentioned earlier, even though the relevant ministry committed in the Strategy to develop risk assessments, this has not been initiated from 2017 to date. Activities conducted here primarily revolve around creating and distributing leaflets and other educational materials, often utilizing social media and various online platforms for this purpose.
- **Tertiary prevention** addresses the consequences and impacts of human trafficking and provides support and recovery to victims. Comprehensive victim support is an essential part of this level of prevention. Additionally, economic empowerment programs and efforts to address the root causes of trafficking help survivors reintegrate into society and reduce the risk of re-victimization. Activities here aim to address the broader societal factors that sustain trafficking, such as the demand for exploitative labor or sexual services.

Human trafficking in Serbia – overview of the situation in the context of the 21st century - Survey research on the representative sample of 850 respondents from general population in total in Serbia general research findings⁶³:

- The average grade of the respondents from the general population awarded to their own knowledge about human trafficking risks is 5.2 (out of 10).

⁶³ ASTRA. 2022. Human trafficking in Serbia – overview of the situation in the context of the 21st century

- Men in the sample assessed their knowledge about THB risk with slightly lower grades compared to women.
- One in four respondents aged 18 to 25 believe they are not aware of the risks of THB, while one in three respondents with no education or only completed primary school holds this view.
- Members of the Roma population significantly more often responded that they were not aware of the risks of trafficking – one in five respondents.

Gaps and Challenges

From 2021, there has been a notable decline in the institutional AT framework. According to relevant reports⁶⁴ and KIIs mostly from CSOs, the decline is evident in several key aspects:

- The National Strategy, adopted in 2017, expired in 2022. A debate was initiated to create the third Action Plan for the Strategy, covering the 2021-2022 period, which regrettably lacked transparency, and many valuable proposals from the civil sector were not considered. At the end, the Action Plan was never adopted although the process was monitored and financially and technically supported by the relevant international organizations that have been present in Serbia for several decades. The process of formulating the new AT Strategy and Action Plan began only in the summer of 2023. While it is still in its initial stages, KIIs from CSOs have already raised concerns. Namely, the authorities have decided to develop an AT Program rather than a Strategy document. Regrettably, the program document itself places a lower level of obligation on the state of Serbia. To be precise, according to [the Law on the planning system of the Republic of Serbia](#)⁶⁵ – Article 14, program *shall be a public policy document of a narrower scope than a strategy which, as a rule, shall elaborate a specific objective of a strategy or other planning document. As a rule, the program shall be adopted for a period of up to three years, while a strategy shall be set for a period from five to seven years, with a view to achieving long-term goals, etc.*
- The Special Group for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy was disbanded mid-2021, and the new one for the monitoring of the implementation of the program should be (re)established once the program document will be adopted. In August 2021, a competitive open call was conducted to admit several additional civil society organizations into the Special Working Group. However, despite accepting three new organizations, the working group has never been reconvened. Also, the former national AT coordinator retired in 2022, and a replacement has been appointed only in 2023.
- Although the National AT Rapporteur is an independent body that should deal with reporting on achievements and results in the AT field, assessing the impact of official policies, and offering recommendations for their enhancement, their performance remains uncertain. To date, no official reports from this institution have been published. However, as per the 2022 Annual Report, the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) in the role of National AT Rapporteur actively participated in the preliminary identification of five child VoTs. This identification was subsequently confirmed by the CPTV. This had a positive outcome as it ensured that these five children received the necessary support. Besides this positive aspect, it does prompt questions regarding potential oversights in the prior preliminary identification process by other responsible institutions. It also raises the question of whether or when the National AT Rapporteur,

⁶⁴ GRETA Report 2023 and TIP Report 2023

⁶⁵ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", no. 30/2018,

will also engage in monitoring AT activities of state institutions and taking action, accordingly, including issuing specific recommendations.⁶⁶

For the purpose of developing a new AT Strategic Plan, an [External evaluation](#) of the Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, and Victim Protection for the period 2017-2022 was conducted at the beginning of 2023. This evaluation emphasized an important challenge in cooperation, particularly the fragility and the lack of ownership among the representatives of the institutions. While there is an established institutional framework for collaboration, the mechanism of cooperation may not necessarily be functional in the sense that collaboration will continue if there are changes within one sub-system. Additionally, collaboration is often imposed, meaning that certain ministries are designated as participants and are required to be involved, even though they may not fundamentally understand the need for cooperation, specific activity, objective etc.

As for prevention, although activities related to primary prevention are more widely implemented compared to other forms of prevention, they usually lack a systematic approach. Namely, at the outset of the strategic cycle in 2017, an impact analysis of previously conducted educational programs was initially planned, but unfortunately, it was not conducted. In addition to the fact that this activity remained unimplemented, it also prevented the establishment of a systematic approach for future educational initiatives.

Secondly, KIs have indicated that during the last three years, training sessions on THB were held for employees within the social protection system, education, healthcare, labor and market inspection, media, CSOs, and the professionals from migrants, refugee, and asylum centers. Unfortunately, apart from training evaluations, no additional meta-analyses exist.

Also, staff turnover is a significant challenge when it comes to education, as employees in the state institutions experience frequent changes, where is traditionally no adequate mechanism of the institutional memory.

Investigation and Prosecution

Legislation

Serbia is a signatory of a number of international conventions with relevance to trafficking in human beings, including: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, as well as the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, etc.⁶⁷

The improvement of the anti-trafficking (AT) system is not only an obligation deriving from international acts ratified by the Government of Serbia, but also from Serbia's aspiration to become a full member of the European Union. Having in mind that Serbia officially opened the accession negotiations with the Union, including the two most relevant chapters for suppressing human trafficking (23 – *Judiciary and fundamental rights*, and 24 – *Freedom, security, justice*), Serbia must upgrade further its legal AT framework, institutional capacities,

⁶⁶ The report states that the Ombudsman addressed a total of 10 cases/complaints from citizens concerning human trafficking, which accounts for 0.28% of all the cases the Ombudsman handled in 2022.

⁶⁷ Just to name a few: UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse; the ILO Forced Labour Convention (No. 29); the Abolition of Forced labor Convention (No. 105); the ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (No. 143) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), etc. In September 2023, the Serbian National Assembly adopted the Draft Law on the Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, thereby incorporating this treaty into the legal framework of the Republic of Serbia.

and practice, first and foremost in accordance with the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36 / EU.

Domestic legislation contains provisions relevant for trafficking in human beings in the following documents: the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia⁶⁸, the Criminal Code⁶⁹, the Criminal Procedure Code⁷⁰, the Law on Public Order and Peace⁷¹, the Social Protection Law⁷², the Healthcare Law⁷³, the Law on Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime⁷⁴, the Law on Juvenile Criminal Offenders and Criminal Justice Protection of Juveniles⁷⁵, the Law on the Protection Program for Participants in Criminal Proceedings⁷⁶, the Law on Personal Data Protection⁷⁷, Law on Prohibition of Discrimination⁷⁸, Law on Migration Management Official⁷⁹, Law on Foreigners⁸⁰, Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection⁸¹, etc.

Criminal Code of Serbia

Human trafficking, Article 388

(1) Whoever by force or threat, deception or maintaining deception, abuse of authority, trust, dependency relationship, difficult circumstances of another, retaining identity papers or by giving or accepting money or other benefit, recruits, transports, transfers, sells, buys, acts as intermediary in sale, hides or holds another person aimed at exploiting such person's labor, forced labor, commission of offenses, prostitution, other forms of sexual exploitation, begging, pornography, establishing slavery or slavery-like relation, the removal of organs or body parts or service in armed conflicts, shall be punished by imprisonment of three to twelve years.

(2) When the offence specified in Paragraph 1 of this Article is committed against a minor, the offender shall be punished by the penalty prescribed for that offense even if there was no use of force, threat, or any of the other mentioned methods of perpetration.

(3) If the offence specified in Paragraph 1 of this Article is committed against a minor, the offender shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than five years.

(4) If the offence specified in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article resulted in grave bodily injury of a person, the offender shall be punished by imprisonment of five to fifteen years. If the offence specified in Paragraph 3 hereof resulted in grave bodily injury of a minor, the offender shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than five years.

(5) If the offence specified in Paragraphs 1 and 3 of this Article resulted in death of one or more persons, the offender shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than ten years.

(6) Whoever habitually engages in offences specified in Paragraphs 1 to 3 of this Article or if the offence is committed by a group, shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than five years.

⁶⁸ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", no. 98/2006, Article 26 - Prohibition of slavery, servitude and forced labour: No person may be kept in slavery or servitude. All forms of human trafficking are prohibited. Forced labour is prohibited. Sexual or financial exploitation of person in unfavorable position shall be deemed forced labour. Labour or service of persons serving sentence of imprisonment if their labour is based on the principle of voluntariness with financial compensation, labour, or service of military persons, nor labour or services during war or state of emergency in accordance with measures prescribed on the declaration of war or state of emergency, shall not be considered forced labour.

⁶⁹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 85/2005, 88/2005 - amend 107/2005 - amend, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 and 35/2019.

⁷⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 72/2011, 101/2011, 121/2012, 32/2013, 45/2013, 55/2014, 35/2019, 27/2021 - the decision of the Constitutional Court and 62/2021 - the decision of the Constitutional Court.

⁷¹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 6/2016 and 24/2018.

⁷² "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2011 and 117/2022 - the decision of the Constitutional Court. The Law on Social Protection, which was passed in April 2011 within the reform of the social protection system, clearly specifies trafficked persons as direct beneficiaries of social protection services for the first time (Article 41 – Beneficiaries).

⁷³ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 25/2019, 94/2016 and 35/2019.

⁷⁴ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 32/2013.

⁷⁵ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 85/2005.

⁷⁶ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 85/2005.

⁷⁷ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 87/2018.

⁷⁸ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 22/2009 and 52/2021.

⁷⁹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 107/2012.

⁸⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2018 and 31/2019.

⁸¹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2018.

(7) If the offence specified in Paragraphs 1 to 3 of this Article is committed by an organized group, the offender shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than ten years.

- (8) Whoever knew or could have known that a person is the victim of trafficking, but nevertheless made use of her/his position or facilitated another person to make use of her/his position for the purpose of exploitation referred to in Paragraph 1 of this Article, shall be punished by imprisonment of six months to five years.

Trafficking in minors for adoption, Article 389

(1) Whoever abducts a child under sixteen years of age for the purpose of adoption contrary to laws in force or whoever adopts such a child or mediates in such adoption or whoever for that purpose buys, sells or hands over another person under fourteen years of age or transports such a person, provides accommodation, or conceals such a person, shall be punished by imprisonment of one to five years.

(2) Whoever habitually engages in activities specified in paragraph 1 of this Article or if the offence is committed by a group shall be punished by imprisonment of minimum three years.

(3) If the offence referred to in paragraph 1 hereof has been perpetrated by an organized crime group, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum five years.

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia regulates several criminal offences, potentially related to human trafficking, out of which, for the purpose of this assessment, the most important are mediation in prostitution⁸² and forced marriages⁸³.

As for the *principle on non-punishment of VoTs* (non-prosecution or non-application of penalties to the victim) the Guidelines on Implementation of the Law on Foreigners include provisions that prevent the punishment of victims for crimes they were compelled to commit.⁸⁴ Also, a provision under Article 14(2) of the Criminal Code may be applied in this case. It regulates that there is no criminal offence without an unlawful act or culpability, notwithstanding the existence of all essential elements of a criminal offence. The Criminal Code in Article 21 excludes criminal offence for acts committed under irresistible force.⁸⁵ Apart from this, there is no explicit provision to regulate this issue in Serbian legislation.

In terms of the *reflection period*, Law on Foreigners stipulates for a recovery and reflection period during temporary residence granted to a victim. However, apart from the general provision related to the victim's right to be informed, this Law does not mention special information for the victim on the possibility of granting international protection⁸⁶.

Concerning *the right to compensation*, a victim of trafficking in human beings may obtain compensation in criminal or litigation proceedings. The Criminal Procedure Code, within the framework of Articles 252 to 259, provides regulations concerning compensation. It stipulates that claims for compensation related to both material and immaterial damages resulting from

⁸² Mediation in Prostitution, Article 184 (1) Whoever causes or induces another person to prostitution or participates in handing over a person to another for the purpose of prostitution, or who by means of media or otherwise promotes or advertises prostitution, shall be punished by imprisonment of six months to five years and a fine. (2) If the offence specified in paragraph 1 of this Article is committed against a minor, the offender shall be punished by imprisonment from one to ten years and a fine.

⁸³ Forced Marriage, Article 187a (1) Whoever by force or coercion forces another person to marriage shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to three years. (2) Whoever, for purpose of act referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article, takes another person abroad or encourages a person to go abroad for the purpose, shall be punished by imprisonment up to two years.

⁸⁴ "If a victim of trafficking in human beings has entered a country in an illegal way, the relevant authority should, before starting the prosecution, determine the facts and circumstances, which could exclude or reduce responsibility of a crime or misdemeanor of the victim of human trafficking (determining the elements of force, threat and coercion, or ultimate necessity or defense of necessity)".

⁸⁵ Beširević, V. (2019). Study on Compatibility of the Law of the Republic of Serbia with EU Acquis Communautaire in the Area of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. ASTRA.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

the perpetration of a criminal act shall be adjudicated during the criminal proceedings. An exception to this rule occurs when such inclusion would significantly prolong the proceedings.⁸⁷

The legislative framework regulating employment and the labor market with relevance to human trafficking and its prevention includes: the Law on Employment and on Unemployment Insurance⁸⁸, the Labor Law⁸⁹, the Law on Conditions for Posting of Employees Abroad⁹⁰, the Law on Safety and Health at Work⁹¹, Law on Employment of Foreigners⁹², etc.

Other relevant documents and by-laws:

- Guidelines for the improvement of judicial practice in proceedings for compensation of victims of serious crimes in criminal proceedings, 2019
- National Strategy for the Realization of the Rights of Victims and Witnesses of Criminal Offenses in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025 with the accompanying Action Plan, adopted on 30 July 2020.
- Strategy for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence for the period 2020 - 2023 with the accompanying action plan
- Instruction on the procedure to be followed by the employees of the Ministry of Interior in THB cases, 2021
- National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 88/09)
- Integrated Border Management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 9/17)
- National Strategy for Prevention and Protecting Children from Violence ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 122/08)
- Special Protocol on Activities of the Police Officers in Protection of Minors from Abuse and Neglect, Ministry of Interior, 2012
- [Guidelines for Treatment of Minors and Young Adults](#), Ministry of Interior RS, 2006, and others.

When it comes to foreign national victims of human trafficking, the following provisions of the Foreigners Act are of significance⁹³

The Foreigners Act

Article 40

Temporary residence is a residence permit for a foreign national in the Republic of Serbia granted to a foreigner who intends to stay in the Republic of Serbia for over 90 days, on the grounds of:

[...] (12) Status of presumed victim of trafficking in human beings.

Article 62

⁸⁷ For further information on legislation, investigations, and prosecutions of THB crimes in Serbia, you can refer to other relevant sources or publications such as the publications from reference number 73, as well as the report from reference number 81.

⁸⁸ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 36/2009, 88/2010, 38/2015, 113/2017, 113/2017 – and other laws, and 49/2021)

⁸⁹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2005, 61/2005, 54/2009, 32/2013, 75/2014 and 13/2017 – the decision of the Constitutional Court, and 95/2018 - authentic/official interpretation.

⁹⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 91/2015 and 50/2018

⁹¹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 35/2023)

⁹² "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 128/2014, 113/2017, 50/2018 and 31/2019

⁹³ Also, Article 17 of the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection states that *the asylum procedure considers the specific situation of persons who need special procedural or acceptance guarantees* (which is applicable to VoTs).

[...] (6) During the validity period of the temporary residence on these grounds, competent government authority for identification and coordination of human trafficking victims protection shall coordinate the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings, and cooperate with other institutions and organisations to provide safety and protection, appropriate and safe accommodation, psychological and material assistance, access to emergency medical services, access to education for minors, counselling and information-sharing about legal rights and rights available to him, in a language he understands.

Article 63

[...] (5) A foreigner that has been granted temporary residence as victim of trafficking in human beings, in addition to the rights referred to Article 62 of this Law, without being conditioned to testify, shall have the right to access the labour market, professional training and education, and

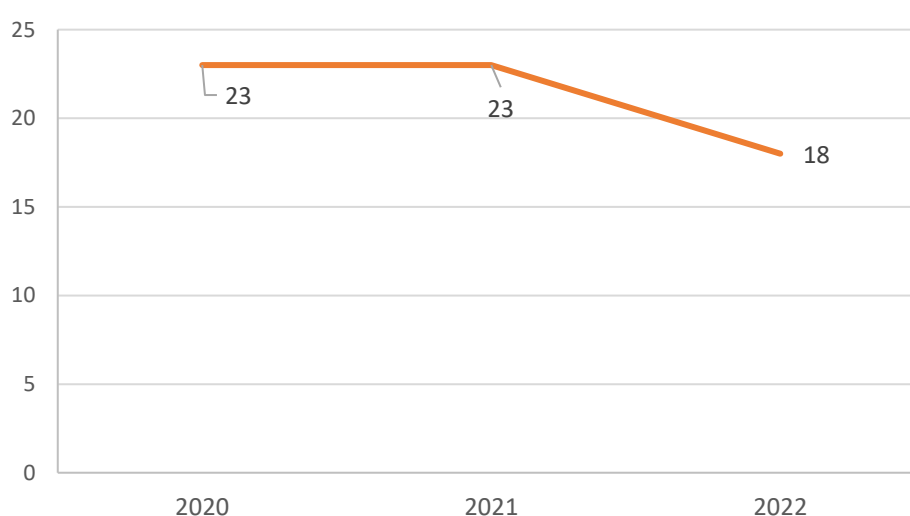
(6) A foreigner with temporary residence permit for victims of trafficking in human beings, who does not have enough material resources for necessary treatment, shall be provided access to medical and other necessary assistance by the competent state authority for identification and coordination of human trafficking victims protection, relevant centre for social work and other service providers and organisations. [...]

Law Enforcement

The Division for Combating Human Trafficking and Smuggling operates under the Department for Combating Organized Crime within the Criminal Police Directorate. In 2019, competences for handling human trafficking cases were transferred from the Border Police Directorate to the Criminal Police Directorate through the *new Rulebook on Internal Organization and Workforce Systematization in the Ministry of the Interior*. Specialized police sections are also located in Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Nis, with specialized criminal inspectors assigned to other regional police administrations.

Specialized prosecutors within higher prosecutor's offices serve as contact points for human trafficking cases, and there are information services available for victims and witnesses.

Graph 7: Data on criminal complaints related to THB filed by the police



Source: Ministry of Interior, [Statistical Data on THB](#).

** **Note:** The data from the Ministry of the Interior for the year 2023 has not been published yet. Therefore, for the purpose of more illustrative comparison, the statistical data for the year 2020 has also been included.*

In 2022, the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office worked on the cases related to the crime of Human Trafficking (Article 388 of the Criminal Code) involving 48 individuals (40 males and 8 females). In the previous year, 2021, the prosecutor's office dealt with cases against 64 individuals, but gender-specific statistics are not available.

Regarding the criminal offense of Trafficking in minors for adoption (Article 389 of the Criminal Code), the office worked on cases involving a total of nine individuals in 2022 (6 males and 3 females). In 2021, there were two complaints, and both were dismissed.

It is indicative that the Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office did not handle any of the cases related to the THB crime during the 2021-2023 period. This is even though the Police Organized Crime Unit submitted such criminal reports, totaling 21 complaints (2020-3, 2021-3, 2022-2) during the same period. KIs did not have information about these 21 complaints that the Police Organized Crime Unit worked on.

During 2020 and 2021, the courts in Serbia issued 18 and 16 decisions, respectively⁹⁴. Statistical data for individual criminal offenses for the year 2022 are not available on the website of the Supreme Court of Serbia, but according to a [recent ASTRA 2022 report](#)⁹⁵, there were 19 proceedings in Higher courts related to Article 388 of the Criminal Code, with six judgments/decisions issued, including one involving a plea bargain. One indictment was rejected, and 12 proceedings are still ongoing. Additionally, based on responses from the Appellate Courts, in 2022, there were 16 proceedings related to Article 388⁹⁶.

As per ASTRA report⁹⁷ the shortest imposed sentence in 2022 was one year, and the longest single sentence was six years and nine months. The average single imprisonment sentence was two years and four months. In total, four cases resulted in sentences of less than three years, while only one of the cases had sentences exceeding five years.

Unfortunately, fewer cases of human trafficking are being uncovered, resulting in a reduced number of criminal complaints. Some of these reports are dismissed, and from the cases where indictments are filed, there is again a decrease in the number of cases that make it to trial and result in convictions. There are no available data on the number of individuals serving sentences for the crime of human trafficking, but based on data related to other criminal offenses, it is reasonable to suspect that this number is lower than the number of convictions handed down.

According to the TIP 2022 Report⁹⁸, police, prosecutors, and courts employed various methods for counting cases, leading to inconsistent statistics across databases. This has resulted in inadequate tracking of record data, a lack of in-depth analysis, and, consequently, a deficiency in evidence-based planning and response capabilities.

Since 2003 and ratification of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime with supplementary protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol),⁹⁹ the Serbian Government has taken significant

⁹⁴ Supreme court of Cassation. (2022). Godišnji izveštaj o radu sudova u 2021. godini.

⁹⁵ ASTRA. (2023). Position and Rights of Victims in Criminal Proceedings: Analysis of the Judicial Practice for 2022 for the Crimes of Mediation in Prostitution, Trafficking in Human Beings, and Trafficking in Minors for Adoption.

⁹⁶ Courts were sent requests for the procurement of data, in accordance with the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 120/2004, 54/2007, 104/2009, 36/2010 and 105/2021).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Serbia, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, US Department of State. 2023

⁹⁹ According to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Article 16 - International relations: The foreign policy of the Republic of Serbia shall be based on generally accepted principles and rules of international law. Generally accepted rules of international law and ratified international treaties

steps towards improving its legal and institutional framework in relation to suppressing human trafficking and protecting the victims. However, while Serbia has developed a robust legal framework and has made efforts to improve it over the past 20+ years, implementation remains a challenge.

Gaps and Challenges

The issues mentioned in the previous chapter in the functioning of the judiciary include among others lenient sentencing practices, and inadequate data collection methods. Additionally, there are several issues in Serbia's legal system that directly impact the protection and support of trafficking victims.

Namely, the position of victims in court proceedings is not adequate and further efforts should be made to enhance protection and support for VoTs (adults and children), to avoid re-victimization during investigation and trial. For the purposes of this assessment, some of the most frequently mentioned issues in the relevant literature, and during interviews (including feedback from the VoTs to KIs service providers) are listed below:

- According to NGO ASTRA's reports for [2022](#), [2021](#) and [2020](#), the institute/status of *especially sensitive victims* has not been applied in all trafficking cases. By definition, the trafficking victims meet eligibility criteria for being designated as especially sensitive victim/witness, but not all are granted this status. In those cases, only the availability of specialized lawyers and prosecutors with expertise in trafficking affects the protection of victims' rights.
- Judicial practices sometimes fail to inform victims and injured parties about their rights and obligations, hindering their access to justice. Standard informational materials are not consistently provided to victims and presumed victims.
- The relatively new Law on Free Legal Aid¹⁰⁰ allows for legal assistance in criminal, civil, and administrative proceedings, but it remains unclear if trafficking victims will have practical access to these services. Specialized legal assistance in criminal cases is often provided by lawyers hired by CSOs and/or CPTV.
- There is no specific provision for non-punishment of victims for status offenses in the Criminal Code. Although guidelines exist, their implementation is inconsistent and depends on several factors, including the involvement of experts in THB during court sessions, if the judge and prosecutor have adequate education on THB, their familiarity with positive court practice, etc

In 2023, a Ukrainian citizen was identified as a victim of human trafficking. However, she had previously been detained for theft and sentenced to prison because she lacked documents, even though she stated that her exploiters had taken them. The relevant court was unaware of the government's decision regarding providing temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine, ignored her exploitation, and treated her as an illegal migrant. Her detention was extended multiple times due to a lack of coordination between authorities, rather than applying the principle of not punishing VoTs.¹⁰¹

shall be an integral part of the legal system in the Republic of Serbia and applied directly. Ratified international treaties must be in accordance with the /Constitution.

¹⁰⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 87/2018.

¹⁰¹ KI with the representatives of CPTV, held on September 26, 2023 and CSO Atina writing inputs. The latest publication from JTIP provides important information on [Trafficking in Persons in the context of the aggression on Ukraine](#).

- Protecting victims' privacy is an additional challenge, with closed hearings rarely implemented, even in cases where child victims are involved. In some cases, personal information was disclosed or posted online to intimidate victims/witnesses.
- Also, compensation to victims is rarely granted – only a few cases in the last ten years. To date, the fund for compensation has not been established yet. Recovering assets from perpetrators is another challenge with this regard.
- Plea bargaining is used in trafficking cases, potentially downgrading them to milder offenses. Victims are not always informed or consulted during the negotiation process, which can significantly affect their rights.
- Also, on the part of investigative authorities, a more proactive attitude should be applied to avoid the investigation primarily relies on victims' statements.

When it comes to police work, other issues have also been identified. The external evaluation of the AT Strategy revealed that police officers from AT units and their superiors often consider human trafficking as one of their many tasks rather than a primary responsibility. Additionally, KIs from CSOs have expressed concerns that human trafficking is not given high priority, leading to limited resources allocated for its combat, while human smuggling often takes precedence.

Moreover, there is an absence of a dedicated unit within the police to monitor human trafficking cases. It is suggested that the Office of the AT Coordinator become more involved in coordination and sharing data related to ongoing investigations with service providers. As for the lack of coordination, for many years, Mol and the Office of the AT Coordinator actively supported the establishment and work of local AT teams in cities and municipalities across Serbia. However, over the last two years, there has been no information regarding whether Mol and AT Coordinator have maintained contacts, made coordination efforts¹⁰², or developed plans to support these teams in the future and enhance local investigations and support for VoTs.

Finally, there is a significant delay in providing CSOs with a list of officers in charge from the AT units, despite their licensing for direct assistance.

The legal protection of trafficked persons could be improved by the *Guidelines for the improvement of judicial practice in proceedings for compensation of victims of serious crimes in criminal proceedings* adopted during 2019, and the implementation of the activities of the *Strategy for the Realization of the Rights of Victims and Witnesses of Criminal Offences in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025* with the accompanying Action Plan, adopted on 30 July 2020.

Vulnerable and Target Groups

In relation to potential victims, the approach should be focused on the origins of vulnerability to exploitation. GRETA's Guidance¹⁰³ points out that: "Vulnerability and its abuse are central to any understanding of human trafficking". While vulnerability is used in the international human rights discourse to emphasize disadvantages of specific groups, generally regarded as

¹⁰² CSO Atina's input for EC 2023 Serbia's Progress Report.

¹⁰³ Council of Europe GRETA. (2020) Guidance note on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. p.5

needing particular or special support, there is no single definition of the concept nor of the criteria to be used to identify a group or person as vulnerable.

The UNODC¹⁰⁴ categorize vulnerability and sets out three categories:

- Personal vulnerability (may relate to a person's physical or mental disability)
- Situational vulnerability (may relate to a person being irregularly in a foreign country in which he or she is socially or linguistically isolated) ("The abuse of a position of vulnerability")
- Circumstantial vulnerability (may relate to a person's unemployment or economic destitution.)

Unfortunately, economic effects and poverty (see pages 11 and 12), lack of opportunities, increased the probability and directly led to certain vulnerable groups, primarily Roma, migrants/refugees including foreign workers, women and children, being abused by traffickers. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of trafficking, particularly for people in the most vulnerable communities (e.g., Roma, migrants, and informal sector workers).

In line with the IRC's mission and the target group(s) for the purposes of this report, more attention will be dedicated to the potential victims of THB within the migrant, refugee, and foreign worker population.

Migration, Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings

One of the most significant changes in the Serbian context in the last couple of years was the so-called refugee crisis. Being on the transit route between Turkey and Central and Western Europe, Serbia experienced a mass influx of refugees and migrants since the beginning of 2015. As of March 2016, and the closure of the borders on the route, refugees and migrants were forced to stay in transit countries, including Serbia. The number of migrants who expressed their intention to apply for asylum in the Republic of Serbia was 2,830 in 2020, 2,306 people in 2021 and 4,181 in 2022. Among them were children – 638 (77 unaccompanied and separated minor migrants - UASCs) in 2020; 529 (60 UASCs) in 2021, and 679 (82 UASCs) in 2022. The number of migrants who applied for asylum in the Republic of Serbia was considerably smaller – 144 migrants in 2020, 174 migrants in 2021, and 320 in 2022 – which is an increase of 84%.

In 2022, almost 119,127 newly arrived refugees and migrants were registered by the relevant state authorities, which implies that the number of arrivals doubled in comparison to 2021 (60,407 newly arrived refugees/migrants).

Although the legislative framework for protecting refugee/migrant children is mostly in line with international standards, limited resources and implementation within the social welfare system creates protection gaps.

These include an overstretched guardianship institution, overstrained case management capacity dependent on external funding, and poor application of best interest assessment/ determination procedure.

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***Note:** All statistical data related to the first-instance asylum procedure and the number of present migrants in the Republic of Serbia, as mentioned in the section above, have been obtained from the annual reports 'Right to Asylum in the Republic of Serbia' for 2021, 2022,

¹⁰⁴ UNODC. (2012). Guidance Note on 'abuse of a position of vulnerability' as a means of trafficking in persons in Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

and the semi-annual report for 2023, published by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). BCHR bases its reports on data received from the UNHCR Office in Belgrade, which receives official reports on activities and statistical data from the MoI.

The gender dimension in the context of migration is particularly important. According to a 2017 survey of NGO Atina¹⁰⁵, over 50% of refugee and migrant women reported they experienced violence¹⁰⁶ in their country of origin, 65% stated they survived violence while on the move, and 77% said they have witnessed violence against other women.

In the refugee crisis context, one of the key challenges in identification of trafficking cases was what some of the KI's called a *blurred line* between human trafficking and smuggling. Namely, some trafficked people might start their journey by agreeing to be smuggled into some territory, only to then be deceived, coerced, or forced into an exploitative situation (for instance, being forced to work for very low wages or in debt bondage to pay for their transportation)¹⁰⁷. According to KIs¹⁰⁸, a phenomenon that has become relevant in the last few years is that smugglers hire the local population in Serbia to transport migrants, not on a voluntary basis, but by forcing/extorting them in many ways and for several reasons. This may be due to debt repayment, or it may be people who are struggling with substance use disorder (SUD), etc. One such case has been officially identified in Serbia, a person who was arrested in another Western Balkans country for smuggling and was not recognized as a victim by the authorities there.

Another challenge reported by the partners of IRC's recent THB project in the Balkans (including ATINA) was the lack of tools to identify (and support) VoTs in situation of transit, and the willingness of many migrants to not be identified, so as to not be stopped in their migration journey, even if they are being trafficked.

Many migrants in Serbia lack personal documents, relying solely on statements to prove their identity. When they face obstacles in their planned journey, some continue to move within Serbia and neighboring countries without legal status. Some express an intention to seek asylum but do not follow through, leaving them undocumented and without access to social services.

For those who enter accommodation facilities, they receive food, clothing, health services, and protection (especially unaccompanied minors). These facilities also offer psychosocial, educational, and occupational activities by CSOs.

Most migrants in Serbia are solo male travelers (90%)¹⁰⁹ facing financial difficulties. To sustain their journey or support their families, they may engage in illegal employment with high risks of exploitation, such as informal work, selling goods, or working in various industries.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, data on these situations is scarce due to migrants' reluctance to provide information, fearing job loss and immigration sanctions.

Some migrants, particularly those staying longer in Serbia, may accumulate financial assets by cooperating with criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ NGO Atina. (April 2018). available at: <http://www.atina.org.rs/en/violence-against-women-and-girls-among-refugee-and-migrant-population-serbia-0>

¹⁰⁶ This includes domestic violence, forced and child marriage, forced prostitution, rape, sexual harassment, physical assaults, threats of honor killings, revenge marriages, and survival sex (for food, shelter, protection), trafficking.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch; available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/07/smuggling-and-trafficking-human-beings> (retrieved April 2018).

¹⁰⁸ For the purposes of this report, a total of seven professionals- relevant actors in the field of anti-trafficking from various institutions / organizations were interviewed. The report refers to them as Key Informant(s) – KI(s).

¹⁰⁹ UNHCR, UNHCR Serbia Snapshot AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023.

¹¹⁰ Drašković M. et al. (2019), *Challenges in Asylum and Migration System - position of particularly vulnerable categories*. Group 484, Belgrade, p. 16.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

UNHCR estimates show that about 6% of the migrant population in Serbia are children, with 0.8% being unaccompanied.¹¹² Unaccompanied minors often travel in large groups with adult men, mostly from the same nationality.¹¹³ Usually, authorities register cases of minors traveling with adult male cousins, referred to as "male families."¹¹⁴

As for the *migrant workers*, In recent years there has been an increase in foreign workers in Serbia, mostly from [India](#), Turkey and [China](#)).

Many foreign workers are recruited from their home countries by foreign companies, which then bring them to Serbia for employment. For a migrant worker employed by a foreign company to be legally assigned to work in Serbia, they must first obtain legal residence status. This status grants them the right to access the labor market in Serbia, typically through either a long-stay visa based on employment or temporary residence for work-related reasons. Additionally, they must secure the proper work permit.

The specific type of work permit varies depending on the position to which a foreign worker is assigned in Serbia. For key personnel, a work permit for relocation within a single company is necessary, while for other positions, a work permit for seconded individuals is required.

Foreign workers who have successfully obtained temporary residence and a work permit enjoy the same legal employment protections as domestic workers. However, it is important to note that their visa status is often tied to their employer, subjecting them to certain restrictions.

Typically, these laborers are employed by foreign companies that conduct operations in Serbia, with the construction sector being the primary domain. While the employment arrangement for these individuals may seem straightforward, there have been documented cases of these workers enduring various infringements upon their rights and facing exploitative treatment by their employers. These violations encompass working without the required work permits, deprivation of essential documents such as passports, receiving inadequate or no wages, or being promised payment upon their return to their home countries, and enduring harsh living and health conditions, among other issues. The Chamber of Commerce of Serbia states that in the first six months of 2022, almost 15,000 work permits were issued to foreigners.

As it was mentioned earlier, in November 2021, a collective effort involving the CSO ASTRA, a journalist from VOICE Zrejanin, and the Initiative for Economic and Social Rights brought together with approximately 50 Vietnamese laborers. These workers were actively engaged in construction tasks at a tire care factory located in Zrejanin, situated 80 kilometers north of Belgrade.¹¹⁵ It was found that¹¹⁶:

- The victims were lured, i.e., recruited, deceived, referred, transported, accepted **(action)**,
- The victims were deceived, their freedom was restricted - they could not move and travel freely, their position of vulnerability was abused, i.e., abuse of authority and power of the employer **(means)**,
- Money is earned through abuse by agencies and forced labor by the employer **(purpose: intention to exploit and labour exploitation¹¹⁷)**.

¹¹² UNHCR, UNHCR Serbia Snapshot AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023.

¹¹³ Drašković M. et al. (2019), *Challenges in Asylum and Migration System - position of particularly vulnerable categories*. Group 484, Belgrade, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ KI Interview. September 2023

¹¹⁵ [ASTRA. 2021.](#)

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Based on the definition of THB Criminal Act from Serbian Criminal Code that is harmonized with [the Palermo Protocol \(2000\)](#). A definition identifies the three major elements of THB: (a) the act (what is done); (b) the means (how it is done); and (c) the purpose (why it is done).

According to the same report, while all indicators pointed to human trafficking, Vietnamese workers were not identified as victims of trafficking. Specifically, following the Serbian NRM for VoTs, nearly 50 reports, inquiries, and appeals were submitted to more than 16 Serbian institutions to trigger a response from state institutions. Regrettably, Serbian institutions avoided properly fulfilling their duties in accordance with the legal framework¹¹⁸. The highest-ranking officials, including the president, the prime minister, several ministries, and the Protector of Citizens, issued statements of denial. Furthermore, these officials accused the media, CSOs, and activists of harboring malicious and destructive intentions toward state capital investments and cooperation with China.¹¹⁹

From 2022 till September 2023, nine VoTs were identified among the population of migrants and refugees. While this represents “an increase” compared to the annual average of formally identified VoTs in this group (with only one case in 2021), it remains significantly low when considering the overall population of refugees and migrants in Serbia and the ongoing risks of exploitation and violence they face on daily basis.

The explanation commonly heard from first responders in Serbia is that migrants and refugees stay for very short periods in the country. Consequently, within this limited timeframe, professionals may find it challenging to preliminarily identify trafficking victims. However, even during brief stays, it is possible to offer some assistance to presumed VoTs. This can include informing them about available services in their destination country¹²⁰, psychological/crisis intervention aims to address immediate crisis situations and provide support until further treatment or assistance can be arranged, and more. It is crucial to develop new approaches and enhance the capacities of professionals in conducting initial interviews and recognizing the complex indicators of human trafficking. The first interview should be conducted with sensitivity to the discomfort victims may experience when discussing their experiences, driven by various reasons. For example, refugees may hesitate to report violence and trafficking due to uncertainties surrounding their legal status, the fear of being separated from familiar groups, concerns about their families, and the potential psychological consequences. Stigma and other personal factors also play a role in their reluctance to report. It is not uncommon for professionals and first responders to primarily focus on providing humanitarian aid rather than addressing trafficking. This situation may be exacerbated by the absence of coordinated procedures and facilities that cater to the needs of trafficking victims and at-risk groups or a lack of specific expertise in reception facilities or points.

On 18 March 2022, GoS adopted the Decision on Providing Temporary Protection in the Republic of Serbia to Displaced Persons Coming from Ukraine. On 16 March 2023, the Government extended temporary protection to displaced people until 18 March 2024. According to the statement of the Prime Minister of Serbia, there were over 43,000 Ukrainians in Serbia at the end of August 2023. Parallely, according to the MoI, more than 370,000 Russian citizens entered Serbia from the beginning of the war in Ukraine until the end of April 2023.

Traditionally, for decades, residents of Serbia have been migrating to EU countries, primarily to Germany, Austria, France, and to a lesser extent, Sweden, and Norway. Lately, Slovenia

¹¹⁸ For example, the Office of the National AT Coordination provided no direct response, only referring to the response memo of the Zrenjanin Police Directorate, while the CPTV did not conduct formal interviews with the workers to establish the circumstances and explore the alleged labour exploitation. Other institutions, such as the Labour Inspectorate, declared themselves incompetent for the facts listed in ASTRA's reports, or stated that they were not part of their jurisdiction.

¹¹⁹ Apart from political aspects, foreign investments in Serbia tend to prioritize investors over the welfare of workers and their working conditions. In addition to subsidies aimed at job creation, many 'preferred foreign investors' have been granted free land for constructing their factories, and, in some cases, local authorities have been mandated to provide necessary infrastructure. Despite numerous worker complaints and awareness of the unscrupulous practices of these foreign employers, the representatives of the Serbian government often choose to turn a blind eye to these issues.

¹²⁰ Regarding that it is crucial to encourage exchange of information, communication and coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination.

and Croatia have also become more relevant. KIs with a long history in this field emphasize that there has been a correlation for years between the number of identified victims from Serbia in EU countries and the size of the migrant community in those countries. As for the migration from Serbia towards EU countries the issuance of residence permits to Serbian citizens in the EU has shown a consistent upward trend (with a slight expected decline in 2020 due to movement restrictions). While some experts argue that this reflects circular migrations, the EUROSTAT data reveals that the number of Serbians having received a first permit in 2021 almost doubled (+85 % compared with 2013). Serbian citizens received 58 % of their EU first residence permits from Germany, Croatia and Austria. Even in instances of circular migrations, often unrecorded due to workers being employed without proper registration and work permits, it becomes clear that this sustained migration volume over the past decade, with a gradual increase, substantially impacts the labor shortage in the Serbian job market. To provide further illustration of this, one can also consider the fact that comparing the situation at the end of 2021 with that at the end of 2013, the number of Serbian citizens holding valid permits had fallen by 5 %. Also, a decrease of 20 % in the number of citizens from Serbia acquiring EU citizenship was recorded in 2021 compared with 2011.¹²¹

Certainly, there are varied reasons for these declines. However, they can also be viewed as a heightened risk for Serbian citizens who stay in EU countries beyond the permitted three months due to visa liberalization, often illegally. The magnitude of this issue becomes evident when considering that approximately 400,000 Serbian nationals returned within the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of their status abroad.¹²² According to some informal sources, it is believed that by the end of 2021, half of them had once again went abroad, mostly in EU countries.

Effective strategies should focus on what vulnerable populations need, and they should actively participate in making these plans. When programs are developed together with people who have firsthand experience with the problems, communities are more likely to get involved. National authorities must also work together across different areas to solve related issues. However, recent developments, like more migrant workers in foreign-owned factories in Serbia, add extra challenges for national authorities.

Considering the above, one potential project that could be implemented, titled '*Enhancing Protection and Preventing Human Trafficking among Migrant, Refugee, and Foreign Worker Populations in Serbia*,' can follow this (generic) model below¹²³:

Objective: To prevent and reduce human trafficking among migrant, refugee, and foreign worker populations in Serbia.

If: Government front-line professionals enhance their capacity to identify, refer, and assist Victims of Trafficking (VoT) for labor exploitation through training and improved case management.

And If: VoT gain access to information and channels for trauma-informed services.

Then: VoT will access improved protection, legal assistance, and essential trauma-informed services.

Resulting In: Enhanced protection for VoT in Serbia, shielding them from further labor exploitation and violence.

¹²¹ EUROSTAT. 2021.

¹²² Ministry of Interior (Moi) of Republic of Serbia - Border Police Data. (2020). In The Institute of Social Sciences - Centre for Demographic Research. (Ed.), (2021) Book of abstracts: *COVID-19: Socio-demografski procesi, izazovi i posledice pandemije*. (pp. 61). (available in Serbian)

¹²³ Aspect of labour exploitation can be developed further, depends on the call, other actors etc.

Objectives – examples:

Increased capacity among government front-line professionals to identify, refer, and assist VoT for labor exploitation,
 Improved coordination and management of (trans)national trafficking cases,
 Establishment of accessible channels for VoT to reach trauma-informed services,
 VoTs gain improved access to protection, legal assistance, and referrals to essential trauma-informed services.
 Enhanced support for VoT in Serbia or
 VoT in Serbia are shielded from further THB, labor exploitation and violence.

Assumptions:

Effective collaboration and cooperation will be maintained among government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations.
 The political and legal environment will continue to support efforts to combat labor exploitation and THB in general, as well as violence against migrants, refugees, and foreign workers.

Key Activities:

1. Capacity Building: Conduct training programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of government front-line professionals in identifying, referring, and assisting Victims of Trafficking (VoT) for labor exploitation (KIRS suggestion)¹²⁴.
2. (Trans)national Case Management: Strengthen the coordination and management of trafficking cases across borders, facilitating effective responses to transnational trafficking networks. (CPTV suggestion)¹²⁵
3. Establish Information Channels: Create accessible channels through which VoT can access information about their rights and services, including trauma-informed support (suggested by KIRS, CPTV etc.)
4. Legal Assistance and Referrals: Facilitate legal assistance and referrals for VoT to access essential trauma-informed services (NGO and Prosecution Office)¹²⁶.

Timeline: 24 -36 months.

¹²⁴Key Informant Interview conducted on September 27, 2023. In addition to create Indicators for the identification of potential VoTs among migrants and refugees and foreign workers, accompanied with screening list for the practitioners.

¹²⁵ Key Informant Interview conducted on September 26, 2023

¹²⁶ For example: Misdemeanor judges, KI held on September 19 and September 29, 2023.

Instead of a Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the Republic of Serbia has made significant efforts to combat human trafficking. These actions have resulted in the formulation of specific strategies, the implementation of targeted measures, and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to evaluate progress in this ongoing process. But, while progress has been achieved, a number of challenges persist.

The Serbian government has invested significantly in establishing a robust legal framework aligned with international standards for addressing THB. Cross-sectoral cooperation and partnerships have been cultivated to foster collaboration among stakeholders and provide support to victims of THB.

However, despite the creation of systems, policies, and legislation, the actual implementation remains inadequate. Data collection on THB is unequal and varies among involved parties. A unified approach to the National Referral Mechanism would strengthen the fight against THB on both national and regional fronts.

Regional cooperation has advanced, allowing stakeholders to coordinate efforts, share data, and implement measures to combat THB, identify victims, and provide social protection.

Efforts are underway to improve access to justice, expand legal aid, and provide compensation for THB victims within the justice sector. Training for prosecutors on handling THB cases and supporting victims is a concurrent priority.

Challenges in early victim identification, particularly among children and potential victims among migrants, remain persistent. Enhancing social protection, legal aid, and proactive identification efforts are crucial for more effective THB prevention.

Serbia continues to promote cross-sectoral cooperation at various levels, demonstrating commitment to addressing human trafficking. Nevertheless, ongoing dedication and further improvements are vital to tackle the complex challenges that persist.

Reports from international actors, such as GRETA, the US State Department (through its J-TiP reports), and the EU progress report, acknowledge Serbia's systemic response improvements in combatting human trafficking. Yet, there is a consensus that additional challenges must be addressed effectively. Key stakeholders emphasize the need for enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, increased capacities for victim assessment, improved compensation schemes, consistent support for especially sensitive victims, and better procedures and capacities for child trafficking victims.

Additionally, through a 2021 KAP survey¹²⁷, professionals identified financial constraints, a lack of training and capacity building, difficulties in identifying victims, insufficient services, and coordination challenges as major barriers in providing support within the National Referral Mechanism. Respondents indicate the critical need for increased funding, additional training, new services, and more staff to address these challenges effectively.

In spite of the dynamic environment, over the past twenty-plus years, a number of good practices have been established. In addition, those that can serve as a strong foundation for further improvement and alignment with international standards have been listed here:

- *Identification of victims as a part of the social system, not law enforcement.* The system of identification in Serbia is such that the status of a victim is not connected with criminal

¹²⁷ Đikanović, B. et al. IRC. (2021) *KAP Survey - Knowledge, Attitude and practice of the professionals included in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in the Republic of Serbia.*

investigations or the prosecution of traffickers or results of prosecutions. Instead, victims are treated as persons in need of social welfare and the provisions of the Social Protection Law and bylaws are applied to them (not the Criminal Code).

- *Local anti-trafficking teams.* Local AT teams are a good practice in combating human trafficking as preliminary identification and social inclusion of victims takes place in the local environment. Members of AT teams showed better knowledge of THB than professionals who were not part of these teams. Some local AT teams have succeeded in ensuring the local budget for their work by introducing VoTs as a particularly vulnerable target group and activities aimed at their support in the existing local action plans in the municipalities. For example, the local plan for migrants, the local plan for gender equality, the employment action plan, etc. Monthly meetings of a prosecutor specialized in THB with representatives of the police, local CSWs, and the shelter for victims in Novi Sad are examples of good practice.
- *Bilateral cooperation - AT Agreement between Serbia and North Macedonia.* On December 16, 2019, the AT Cooperation Agreement was signed between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Two more bilateral agreements have been initiated (with UAE and Montenegro; agreement with the United Arab Emirates is in the final phase).
- In 2022, the *informal peer Advocacy Group of Human Trafficking Survivors* made its contribution to NGO Atina's comments on the revision of SOPs and presented it at a meeting with the national AT coordinator.
- *Supervision and prevention of vicarious trauma*¹²⁸. CSOs ASTRA and Atina conduct regular group supervision and individual sessions with a psychologist for their employees. Furthermore, external supervision was provided to the CPTV earlier, to strengthen the capacities of the staff to prevent and/or reduce stress and secondary traumatization and thus to improve the process of identifying and supporting VoTs.
- *CSO ASTRA and project partners - Monitoring and Evaluation of Anti Trafficking Policies: Handbook for Victims' advocates*, was developed within the EU-funded Balkans ACT Now! Project. Monitoring tool contains comprehensive and detailed indicators that enable monitoring of anti-trafficking policies, with the emphasis on the policies aimed at the protection of victims.
- The *Ministry of Education of Serbia* has incorporated the issue of human trafficking into nationally significant training programs related to prevention of violence for Teachers.

¹²⁸ Vicarious trauma (VT), the exposure to the trauma experiences of others, is an occupational challenge for the fields of victim services, emergency medical services, fire services, law enforcement, and others.

Recommendations

The recommendations are designed to address the real needs on the ground while providing a framework for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to contribute effectively. IRC should redirect its efforts towards projects focusing on potential human trafficking victims within mixed migrations and humanitarian contexts. Feedback from the Key Informants during the assessment, as well as previous comments from certain donors¹²⁹, emphasize the importance of this shift. To further align with donor interests, it would be advisable for IRC to present its work and achievements to the U.S. State Department and JTIP Office representatives, both at the Embassies in Belgrade and/or Sarajevo and with the JTIP Office in Washington, using various presentation models. Support from the relevant units at the IRC headquarters would be of crucial importance.

The majority of KIs have expressed that human trafficking is regaining the attention of donors, partly attributed to Serbia being placed on the [Tier 2 Watch List JTIP Report](#) for two consecutive years. Respondents have also observed a more active role played by the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, both in Serbia's political life and its activities related to human trafficking.

It is suggested that IRC Europe considers submitting a project proposal under the JTIP Program to End Modern Slavery [PEMS grants](#) scheme. Given this, a project involving multiple IRC offices along the migration route from Asia to Europe (e.g., Pakistan – given that the office in Afghanistan is no longer functioning, Greece, Serbia, and Germany as a destination country) could be pursued. To ensure the success of the research project, it is essential to involve a prominent U.S. university as a partner. The proposed project objective could be defined around the prevalence along migration routes, accompanied by statistical models and a risk matrix.

In contacts with KIs from state institutions, a sense of fatigue from numerous projects demanding their regular participation was palpable, often diverting them from their primary roles. It is advisable to convene donors in Serbia before and at the commencement of specific projects to create a support plan and timeline for Serbia's AT Mechanism. The coordination of activities would prevent overlapping and potential burnout among project participants.

Furthermore, representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) have raised concerns that donors increasingly direct their contributions to institutions while overlooking the contributions and service quality of the civil sector. Taking into account that the civil sector provides essential (accredited) services supported by their continuous fundraising efforts rather than the state, they perceive this trend as another way to shrink the NGO space. Considering the country's complex political situation and the need to support actors advocating democratic values, the rule of law, and transparency, it is crucial to endorse local organizations and refrain from engaging in various bodies or platforms for cooperation with institutions, primarily designed for local civil society organizations. In future work, IRC needs to strengthen cooperation with coalitions of CSOs that build strategic partnerships (such as G484 and ASTRA or Atina with its partners) in the field of migration and human trafficking.

Finally, a generic project model for vulnerable groups is presented in the Vulnerable Groups section. Depending on IRC's strategic decisions and capacities at any given time, it is possible to initiate or participate in the recommended actions outlined below.

- Develop, support, and/or actively participate in activities related to strengthening identification and self-identification of trafficking victims among the migrant and refugee population, as well as other at-risk groups. Allocate adequate funds to technically

¹²⁹ E-mail communication from September 24, 2021, containing minutes from the meeting with JTIP representatives prepared by Wendy Ngoma, Senior Program Development Advisor for Europe.

support the CPTV to identify victims among the migrant and refugee population and coordinate victim protection and support. Strengthen an integrative approach instead of the current humanitarian approach to mixed migration flows.

- Work with the government to find the most suitable funding modalities to ensure long term and sustainable funding for the licensed services for protection of VoTs run by CSOs.
- Develop additional projects with the aim of informing relevant stakeholders about Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), organizing accompanying training or presentations, and monitoring the practical application of procedures, including regular updates of the SOPs in accordance with Part III of the document.
- Create innovative programs/projects and further strengthen existing capacities to reduce the risk of cybercrime and online recruitment and exploitation of victims. The cooperation with IRC Offices in the USA with the experience in this type of activities would be valuable.
- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign for migrant workers, by providing information in languages they understand about their rights and where to find support if needed. Explore promising practices, such as initiatives by trade unions, NGOs, or governments, to inform Serbian citizens/workers about their rights before or upon arrival in the EU. Additionally, support broader awareness-raising activities led by CSOs and trade unions, focusing on workers' rights, with multilingual information materials published and distributed. Human trafficking prevention involves empowering individuals and neutralizing conditions that generate vulnerability, rather than as mere information dissemination, which is the most widespread prevention practice today. In case any media campaigns are conducted as part of the future IRC project, it would be useful to conduct an impact evaluation of media content and previous campaigns or well-structured research on public opinion related to the campaign topic.
- Conduct a study, using participatory peer-led methodologies to map structural risk (i.e., poverty, social exclusion) and particular vulnerabilities related to trafficking, especially children and minorities.
- Support outreach activities to migrant workers, and within communities of migrants transiting or seeking asylum to provide information about their rights, where to turn for help, and to collect evidence about their situation.
- To pilot evidence-based prevention measures that provide alternatives to exploitation, reduce risk, and develop protective factors for vulnerable individuals and groups. This includes involving and working within programs with families, schools, communities, and peer groups.
- Identify channels to disseminate information about rights to migrant (workers) when in contact with state authorities, for example when applying for work visa.
- Conduct studies to review migration regulation to ensure there is firewall between enforcement of immigration law and protection of rights of potential trafficking victims/exploited migrant workers.
- Establish cooperation with foreign embassies to ensure that Serbian workers emigrating for work abroad are informed about their rights. Ensure that Serbian embassies abroad are provided training and resources to assist Serbians abroad.

- Support and/or participate in efforts to reduce the risk of trafficking among vulnerable workers and communities through targeted outreach and the mitigation of structural factors that exploit these vulnerabilities.
- Place particular attention to the issue of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation and related phenomena, where there has been a heightened risk for years, which, in the context of migration and economic crisis, is not expected to decrease.
- To create and develop a comprehensive program with all the necessary tools for the systematic and monitored education of professionals dealing with THB:
 - o Initiate and develop an electronic resource center modeled after Bosnia and Herzegovina, where information about the institutional framework and activities, as well as all publications, manuals, analyses, video materials, official documents, etc., relevant to combating human trafficking in Serbia, can be found.
 - o Consider establishing an online platform to collect information on conducted training sessions and participants. Implement a unified participant tracking system to assess education needs and prevent duplicate training.
 - o When planning training programs to be organized or conducted by the IRC, it is advisable to include a form of mentorship support, enabling participants to apply their newly acquired knowledge effectively.
- Continue efforts to enhance tools for monitoring the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking Action Plan of Serbia (link with the *From Harm to Safety project*). If feasible, allocate resources for an impact analysis of past educational programs. Use the findings to shape future activities, enhancing efficiency. Developing an efficient and effective monitoring and reporting system is a priority. Reporting should be goal-oriented, based on measures and indicators. To ensure the investment in monitoring tools is effective, align action plans with the Planning System Act of Serbia. The monitoring tool should facilitate real-time tracking of Strategy and Action Plan implementation progress. Additionally, enhancing the analytical capabilities of reporting parties as well as providing adequate software.
- Continue to strengthen local AT teams formalizing their roles in local governments and include their efforts in local migration action plans for future funding and sustainability. Create a unified, accessible database for these teams, or integrate the data into an existing one. (link from *Harm to Safety project*).
- If a strategic decision is made to continue working on the issue of human trafficking, IRC Serbia office representatives need to establish cooperation with the newly established function of National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking, which is an integral part of the Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia – National Rapporteur on trafficking in human beings.

The [GRETA Recommendations](#) on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which complement the GRETA 2023 Evaluation Report for Serbia and the recommendations from the [TIP 2023 Report for Serbia](#), serve as valuable sources for the consideration and planning of future activities that may not have been listed in the text above.

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Annexes

Annex 1 – List of Relevant Anti-Trafficking Projects and Donors

Support for anti-trafficking projects in Serbia primarily comes from well-established 'traditional' donors. Although this list of projects and donors covers the past six years, the donor landscape has remained largely unchanged for almost two decades.

Table 2: List of anti-trafficking project and donors for the period 2017 – 2023

#	Name of the project	Donor	Implementing partner
1	Support to strengthening fight against trafficking in Human Beings	EU IPA 2014 Twinning Instrument	Mol Serbia
2	Support for Victims and Witnesses of Crime in Serbia.	European Union	OSCE Mission to Serbia and Ministry of Justice of Serbia
3	Preventing human trafficking in the Western Balkans and supporting victims (PaCT)	GIZ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)	Leading executing agency: Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI)
4	Strengthening Capacities and Partnerships for Migration Management in Serbia - part of the Swiss–Serbian Migration Partnership	SDC - Government of Switzerland, State Secretariat for Migration SEM	IOM, together with the SRCM, MLEVSA and the MOI
5	Strengthening capacities and partnerships for migration management in Serbia	Government of Switzerland	IOM Serbia, Mol Serbia and KIRS
6	Integrated Border Management Capacity Building Facility (WBIBM)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark	IOM Western Balkans
7	Countering Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling in the Western Balkans within the scope of the project „Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings “(WBJAST)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, in cooperation with the project "Countering Serious Crime in the Western Balkans IPA 2019" (CSC WB IPA 2019), supported by the EU, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Italian Mol, implemented by GIZ, together with the Center for International Legal cooperation and Moi Italy	IOM Western Balkans
8	Enhancing capacities and mechanisms to identify and protect vulnerable migrants in the Western Balkans	The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)	IOM BiH and Serbia
9	Unlocking Impunity of Traffickers and Supporting Justice for Victims of Trafficking in Persons in Southeastern Europe	j/TIP Office - US Department of State	UNODC
10	Building together – Community Monitoring and Advocacy	European Union and implemented by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung	Atina, Macedonian Lawyers Association

11	Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings in Serbia (2016 – 2019) and action Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings in Serbia (2019 – 2022) Strengthening anti-trafficking action in Serbia (2023-2026)	The Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey (Horizontal Facility II) -co-operation initiative of the European Union and Council of Europe for the Western Balkans and Turkey – Phases I and II	CoE Serbia, Atina, ASTRA, and others.
12	Children are not for sale	Save the Children	ATINA and CIM
13	Local support for the most vulnerable refugees	UNFPA Serbia	ATINA
14	Permanent Mission of the French Republic to the International Organizations in Vienna	Permanent Mission of the French Republic to the International Organizations in Vienna	ATINA
15	The Measurement, awareness-raising and policy engagement project to accelerate action against child labour and forced labour (MAP16 Project)	United States Department of Labor.	ILO Serbia
16	Make it Work for Youth - My Way	EU EIDHR	ASTRA
17	Balkans ACT Now” - BAN III	EU Commission	ASTRA
18	Strengthening the capacities of newly established victim support services in the judiciary.	Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands	ASTRA
19	I'm a refugee – I'm a migrant – I'm a man	Norwegian Embassy	Group 484, ASTRA
20	Knowledge Sharing and Strengthening Joint Proactive Response to the Trafficking in Human Beings for the Victim Centered Approach	US Embassy in Serbia	ASTRA
21	REST – REsidency STATUS: Strengthening the Protection of Trafficked Persons	Council of Europe	LEFÖ-IBF Austria, CCEM France, Proyecto Esperanza Spain, CoMensha the Netherlands, La Strada Moldova and ASTRA
22	From Harm to Safety - Improving the Protection of Victims of Trafficking (VoTs) in Serbia	j/TIP Office - US Department of State	International Rescue Committee – IRC and NGO Atina

A useful publication has been recently published. Analysis conducted by The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) reveals that nonprofit grantees are currently dedicating less time to application and reporting procedures compared to the pre-COVID-19 era. They perceive these newly simplified proposal processes as beneficial for bolstering their initiatives. The research also highlights a slight increase in funders providing unrestricted support since the onset of the pandemic. However, it has been noted that bridging service gaps and addressing the intricate outcomes, sometimes stemming from funders' limited understanding of on-the-ground realities, can pose communication challenges, resulting in unmet needs among survivors.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP). (2023). Before and after 2020 - [How the COVID-19 pandemic changed nonprofit experiences with funders](#).

Annex 2 – List of Guiding Questions Used for Semi-Structured Interviews with KIs

For the purpose of the study, a semi-structured questionnaire within four core topics was used, while the key questions are included below:

1. Please assess the existing legal framework in Serbia, to what extent it aligns with international law, and which existing laws, protocols, and procedures are most helpful in practice in specific cases? Kindly evaluate the current efforts in implementing and aligning national laws and protocols regarding investigations and prosecutions of human trafficking cases and related criminal offenses.
 - What are the existing differences between the laws and actual practices, and how do these differences impact victims (including those from the migrant population)?
 - Do you have any recommendations for overcoming the mentioned issues and challenges?
2. Please evaluate the current efforts in implementing and aligning national laws and protocols concerning the identification and protection of victims, as well as current practices.
 - What are the existing differences between the laws and actual practices, and how do these differences affect victims (including those from the migrant population)?
 - Do you have any recommendations for overcoming the mentioned issues and challenges?
3. How do you assess the work on preventing human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia? What are the good practices and challenges?
 - Do you have any recommendations for overcoming the mentioned problems and challenges?
4. How do you evaluate the establishment of partnerships and collaboration within the national framework to combat human trafficking? Regarding this, how do you assess the position of civil society organizations?
 - What are your suggestions for addressing the aforementioned issues?



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