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to the Council of Europe Convention
on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

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Report submitted by the authorities of Serbia on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP/Rec(2023)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

Third evaluation round

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REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EVALUATION REPORT OF THE THIRD ROUND OF THE EVALUATION OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR THE PERIOD FROM JUNE 2023 UNTIL JUNE 2025

In accordance with the obligation of the Republic of Serbia to report to the Committee of States Parties on the measures taken to comply with Recommendation CP/Rec(2023)06 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the Republic of Serbia, we hereby submit the Report on the implementation of the recommendations from the Third Evaluation Report of GRETA for the period from June 2023 until June 2025, with the deadline for submission of the Report on 16 June 2025. We would like to point out that the contact person for cooperation with GRETA has sent a request to the GRETA Secretary to extend the deadline for submission of the report, on the basis of which the Republic of Serbia has received a new deadline for submission of the report on 30 June 2025.

Bearing in mind the focus of the third round of evaluation of the Convention on access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as taking into account the conclusions and proposals contained in Appendix I of the Third Evaluation Report of GRETA on the topics related to the third round of evaluation and the accompanying topics specific to Serbia, as well as the positively assessed measures and progress taken by the Republic of Serbia in the implementation of the Convention, we point out that in order to improve the systemic response of society to the problem of trafficking in human beings in the Republic of Serbia, at the session of the Government of the Republic of Serbia held on 20 March 2024, the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2024-2029 (hereinafter referred to as: the Programme) with an Action Plan for its implementation for the period from 2024 to 2026 was adopted (hereinafter referred to as: Action Plan).

The Programme is a cross-sectoral planning document that comprehensively establishes goals and measures for combating human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia. The Programme aims to promote respect for and protection of human rights and ensure a continuous comprehensive response of society to the problem of human trafficking through an improved system of prevention, timely identification, assistance and protection of victims, as well as the suppression of human trafficking.

The Programme was prepared in a consultative process based on the analysis of available documents and context analysis and is based on existing strategic and institutional resources. The starting point for the development of the Programme was primarily the recommendations from the Report of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) within the framework of the third round of evaluation of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, with a thematic focus on access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings and the recommendations from the State Department's Trafficking in Human Beings Report (TIP Report) for 2023, as well as the findings and recommendations from the External Evaluation of the Implementation of the Strategy to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, and to Protect Victims in the period from 2017 to 2022 and the Report on the results of the implementation of the Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, and the Protection of Victims for the Period from 2017 to 2022.

The Programme has been developed in accordance with the policies pursued by the European Union in the field of combating trafficking in human beings, primarily with Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims and the European Union Anti-Trafficking Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2025. The adoption of the Programme is envisaged as an obligation of

the Republic of Serbia in the Revised Action Plan for Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security, Chapter "Fight against Organised Crime" (activity 6.2.8.7).

The Working Group for the Development of a Planning Document in the Field of Combating Human Trafficking was established by a resolution of the Minister of the Interior on 14 August 2023. The Chairman of the Working Group was the Head of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in the Fight against Human Trafficking of the Ministry of the Interior.

The working group consisted of representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, the Ministry of Family Care and Demography, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the Ombudsman, the Serbian Red Cross, civil society organisations that were selected through a public call, which the Ministry of the Interior implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue: ASTRA – Action against Human Trafficking, the Citizens' Association for the Fight against Human Trafficking and All Forms of Gender-Based Violence "Atina", Group 484, the Centre for Girls Niš, the Roma Centre for Democracy and the Bureau for Combating Human Trafficking, as well as the National Employment Service, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Serbia, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Union of Employers of Serbia.

Representatives of the Minor Offences Court in Belgrade, the Labour Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Market Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, the National Academy of Public Administration, the Local Team for Combating Human Trafficking from Vranje and the Local Team for Combating Human Trafficking from Novi Sad also participated in the work of the Working Group as invited participants.

The programme envisages four specific objectives that contribute to a more effective suppression of human trafficking through the improvement of the regulatory framework, investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of the crime of human trafficking, whether they are natural or legal persons, with a special focus on a proactive approach, specialisation, strengthening of competencies and expanding the circle of trained subjects for recognising the crime of human trafficking and appropriate action in all aspects of criminal prosecution, as well as access to justice and effective protection of victims of human trafficking in all phases of investigation and criminal prosecution, in order to prevent the exposure of victims of human trafficking to secondary victimisation; achieving a higher level of quality of protection of victims of human trafficking through improving the efficiency of the procedure for identifying victims of human trafficking, both preliminary and formal; raising the level of awareness and knowledge to recognise human trafficking and recognise signs that a specific situation may develop into human trafficking, as well as about available protection options, as well as further developing a system that will respond to the specific requirements of preventing and combating human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation; continuing to strengthen partnerships and horizontal and vertical linkages in responding to human trafficking at the local, national and international levels, through ensuring intensive cooperation between state bodies, organisations and institutions with local self-government bodies, civil society organisations, the academic community, international partners and all stakeholders.

By the resolution of the Minister of the Interior of 14 August 2024, a Special Working Group was established for the implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the Programme for Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2024 to 2029, which is composed of representatives of state bodies, organisations and civil society organisations who possess expert knowledge in areas of importance for the implementation of the Program. One of the tasks of the members of the

Working Group is to monitor and evaluate the fulfilment of the Program's objectives, assess the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the implemented activities, analyse in more detail the problems and obstacles that arose in the process of implementing the Program, as well as to recognise the improvements achieved in the work, in order to create conditions for proposing necessary amendments and supplements. The Working Group may include in its work and, if necessary, invite to meetings state and other bodies, organisations, scientific and professional institutions and individuals, international organisations and others whose work is related to the prevention and fight against human trafficking. Also, members of the Working Group monitor the implementation of individual activities on behalf of their ministries and organisations for which they are responsible. The Working Group met in October 2024 and in February 2025. A total of 95% of the activities planned to be implemented in 2024 from the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme have been implemented.

The adoption of a special law should establish a unique and comprehensive system of measures and actions aimed at preventing and combating human trafficking, protecting the human rights of victims of human trafficking and providing timely and effective assistance and support to victims, as well as establishing an institutional and organisational system.

The key reform activity defined by the Programme is the adoption of a special law that will regulate the area of human trafficking in a systematic and comprehensive manner. By the resolution of the Minister of the Interior of 8 October 2024, a Working Group was established to draft a law in the area of combating human trafficking. The members of the Working Group are representatives of the Ministry of the Interior (Office for Coordination of Activities in the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings, Criminal Police Directorate, Border Police Directorate and Secretariat), Ministry of Justice, Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, Court of Appeal for Minor Offences, Supreme Court, Administrative Court, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Ombudsman, Ministry of European Integration, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Faculty of Law, University of Novi Sad, High Court in Belgrade, as well as five civil society organisations selected within the framework of a public call conducted by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior: ASTRA from Belgrade, Atina from Belgrade, "The World of Words" (in Serbian "Svet reči") from Velika Plana, "Freedom Has no Price" (in Serbian "Sloboda nema cenu") from Novi Sad and the Centre for Girls from Niš.

The resolution stipulates that the Working Group may include in its work and, if necessary, invite to meetings state and other bodies, organisations, scientific and professional institutions and individuals, international organisations, donors, etc. whose work is related to the prevention and fight against human trafficking. In accordance with the above, the work of the Working Group included representatives of the Ministry of Family Care and Demography, the Office of the Minister without Portfolio in charge of coordinating activities in the field of gender equality, prevention of violence against women and economic and political empowerment of women, the Labour Inspectorate, the National Council of the Roma National Minority, the Republic Secretariat for Public Policies and the Serbian Red Cross.

During the work on the Draft Law, the Spanish model of law was taken into account as a reference at the level of a European Union member state, the Finnish model of the organisational structure used for the purpose of implementing the Law, with a comparison with the Spanish model of organisation and the Croatian model of organisation (due to the legal heritage originating from the SFRY).

The Draft Law prescribes a national institutional mechanism for preventing and combating human trafficking and protecting victims of human trafficking, in order to overcome identified weaknesses and respond more effectively to the issue of human trafficking: the Council for Combating Human Trafficking,

the National Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking, the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, local teams for combating human trafficking and associations.

The Draft Law also prescribes preventive activities to prevent human trafficking, which are developed and undertaken by competent entities with the aim of raising awareness among citizens against all forms of human trafficking, especially in relation to persons at risk of human trafficking, i.e., sensitive groups whose vulnerability is increased due to their health and physical condition, economic situation and other circumstances, which causes a poorer quality of life and a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion.

For the first time, the Draft Law stipulates the rights of victims of human trafficking, namely: the right to information, the right to free choice and access to assistance and support services, the right to reflection, the right to temporary residence, the right to voluntary return, the right to protection of physical and psychological integrity, the right to health care, the right to privacy and protection of personal data, the right to support and assistance in the procedure, the right to free legal aid, the right to a translator and interpreter, the right to non-punishment, the right to work inclusion, the right to social protection, the right to education, the right to financial compensation and the right to safe accommodation, as well as the procedure for identifying victims of human trafficking.

The competent social welfare entities and associations are implementing the identification and assistance process for victims of human trafficking, which involves granting victim status and providing long-term assistance, thus the Republic of Serbia has opted for the so-called “Social Path” in implementing this process.

The working group held 13 one-day meetings, one three-day workshop with the support of the International Organisation for Migration, and a large number of internal consultations, within which the text of the Draft Law was prepared.

Also, a public debate process was implemented in the period from 22 May to 10 June 2025. The draft law was publicly available on the e-consultation portal and the website of the Ministry of the Interior. Now follows the period of harmonisation of the text with the proposals from the public debate.

The draft text has also been submitted to an independent expert whose role is to provide an opinion on the compliance of the text with international documents, primarily the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and Directive 2024/1712 amending Directive 2011/36. In addition to harmonising with the comments from the public hearing, the text also needs to be harmonised with the comments of an independent international expert, after which the text of the Draft Law with a table of harmonisation will be submitted to the European Commission. After that, the law should enter the regular adoption procedure.

We point out that the proposals from GRETA’s Third Evaluation Report, as well as the recommendations CP/Rec(2023)06 on the implementation of the Convention, were of exceptional importance for the work of the National Rapporteur, which is focused on monitoring the activities of the competent authorities in the field of trafficking in human beings and on activities to improve national legislation.

The first report of the National Rapporteur[1] was published on July 30, 2024, on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, and contains 28 systemic recommendations that focus on strengthening the capacity and improving the practices and actions of competent authorities to more effectively protect victims of human trafficking, raising awareness among the general and professional public about the seriousness of

[1] Available at: https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/izvestaji/n-ci-n-lni-izv-s-il-c-u-bl-s-i-rg-vin-ljudi.

the problem of human trafficking, informing victims of human trafficking about their rights, available protection mechanisms and services, as well as strengthening coordination and cooperation between various actors in the field of human trafficking.

When making recommendations to the competent authorities, the National Rapporteur took into account the conclusions and proposals from GRETA's Third Evaluation Report as well as recommendation CP/Rec(2023)06 on the implementation of the Convention, in particular with regard to simplifying procedures for providing free legal aid, specialising lawyers in providing legal support to victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as recommendations regarding the availability of accommodation for all victims of trafficking in human beings, ensuring appropriate and sustainable support.

Following the publication of the report, the National Rapporteur met with all relevant stakeholders in the field of trafficking in human beings in order to inform them, through direct contact, of current observations on the situation in the field and recommendations for further improvement.

The National Rapporteur held meetings with the Minister of the Interior, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Office for Coordination of Activities in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Judicial Academy, and the Bar Association of Serbia. Also, in order to learn about and take action to act on the recommendations, meetings were held with representatives of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, and relevant associations in the field of trafficking in human beings.

We point out that the National Rapporteur notes the openness to cooperation and readiness of the competent authorities to act on the recommendations made and highlights as significant data that, in the first five months after the publication of the First Report of the National Rapporteur, the competent authorities undertook intensive activities to act on over 50% of the recommendations made.

Final data on the implementation of the recommendations will be published in the Second Report of the National Rapporteur, on 30 July 2025.

In terms of methodology, the National Rapporteur collected relevant data for the preparation of the report through a specially designed questionnaire,[2] as well as through direct meetings with relevant stakeholders in the field of trafficking in human beings. For the purposes of preparing the Second Report of the National Rapporteur, the questionnaire was modified to the extent that it would primarily enable monitoring of action taken on the recommendations made in the previous period,[3] and specific questions were addressed to certain authorities in accordance with their role and importance in the field of trafficking in human beings.

[2] A questionnaire to collect information for the preparation of the First Report was sent to the addresses of all relevant stakeholders in this area (101 stakeholders). Eighty stakeholders responded to the specific act and questionnaire to the National Rapporteur. We also submitted the questionnaire to the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, all higher public prosecutor's offices in the Republic of Serbia, the Misdemeanor Court of Appeal and the Misdemeanor Court in Belgrade. All of the above authorities responded and provided information. In the process of preparing the Report, an expert from the Netherlands provided consulting and advisory services.

[3] More specifically, specific, targeted questions were asked, with the intention of obtaining precise data that allows for analysis of the situation and monitoring of trends compared to the previous period. This ensures a more comprehensive and analytically sound approach to reporting, in line with the strategic goals of monitoring and improving the system for combating trafficking in human beings.

A. It is recommended that the Government (authorities) of the Republic of Serbia take measures to address the following issues identified in the GRETA report for urgent action:

1. In line with the recommendation to take further steps to guarantee victims of trafficking in human beings access to legal aid and free legal aid, in particular by ensuring that victims of trafficking in human beings who are provided with free legal aid through municipal free legal aid services are assigned a lawyer with knowledge of human trafficking; that the training and specialisation of lawyers in providing legal aid to victims of trafficking in human beings are supported (encouraged) by the authorities and the Bar Association; that the costs of free legal aid and legal support provided to victims of trafficking in human beings by associations (OCDs) and lawyers hired by them are reimbursed (reimbursed) from the state budget (paragraph 58), we point out the following:

The Law on Free Legal Aid ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 87/2018) in its Article 4, paragraph 3, item 5) prescribes special protection for the most vulnerable groups of persons, including persons who exercise legal protection against torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or human trafficking.

When filling out the Request for Free Legal Aid, applicants are provided with assistance in filling out the form by the persons who decide on the requests, if they need such assistance. Applicants who belong to one of the 13 vulnerable groups of persons prescribed by the provision of Article 4, paragraph 3 of the Law on Free Legal Aid, including victims of human trafficking, need only circle that they belong to that group of persons, in which case the Law provides them with a higher level of protection in such a way that these persons are not required to meet the conditions related to their material and financial status. In other words, in such cases, the right to free legal aid is granted and the beneficiary will be referred to a free legal aid provider from among the lawyers.

Also, on 23 April 2024, the Ministry of Justice electronically sent a Request for Extraordinary Reporting to local government units and city municipalities, which relates to the collection of data related to the criminal offence of Human Trafficking. In response, local government units and city municipalities stated that they had no beneficiaries of free legal aid related to the matter of human trafficking. The regular annual report of the Ministry of Justice on supervision over the implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid was compiled on the basis of the Regular Annual Reports of administrative bodies and the Regular Annual Reports of providers of free legal aid and free legal support, in which they reported that there were no beneficiaries of victims of human trafficking.

According to the reports submitted in response to the Request for Extraordinary Reporting sent to local government units and city municipalities, regarding the provision of free legal aid, and in connection with the criminal offence of Human Trafficking, there were no users of free legal aid related to the matter of human trafficking, nor were there any procedures for reimbursement of costs for the free legal aid provided.

The provision of Article 39 of the Law on Free Legal Aid also stipulates the possibility of financing free legal aid and free legal support from donations and project financing. Also, the provision of Article 42 of the Law on Free Legal Aid provides for project financing from public revenues, which stipulates that funds intended for project financing of free legal aid or free legal support, which are provided from public revenues, may be transferred only to a provider who is registered in accordance with this Law (Article 16, paragraphs 1 and 3), and to bar associations. For the purpose of project financing, a public call, i.e., a public competition, is announced.

In the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice implemented project activities within the "You Have the Right" campaign, the aim of which is to inform the public about the availability of free legal aid, on which

a Joint Statement by the Minister of Justice and the Minister of State Administration and Local Self-Government was signed on 29 March 2023. The campaign is supported by the project “Strengthening the Rule of Law in Serbia – EU for the Fight against Corruption and Fundamental Rights”, jointly funded by the EU and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The campaign involves publishing audio and video material in order to reach as many citizens as possible, including victims of human trafficking, since audio and video formats are the most effective in communicating with the wider public, and these formats more easily attract attention and enable clearer understanding of messages.

Information on the possibility of exercising the right to free legal aid is continuously provided, both at the level of state bodies and at the level of local self-government bodies. The campaign “You have the right!” which is being implemented, deals with the promotion of free legal aid mechanisms, with the aim of raising public awareness of their existence and the opportunities they provide. The campaign is being implemented through phased implementation, and in the first part of its implementation, which began in October 2024, in parallel with training for the implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, a series of activities aimed at communication with local media were implemented. The campaign is divided into two flights and is being implemented through national, regional and local media, for which numerous activities are being undertaken. The first flight of the campaign includes the organisation of events for the media; guest appearances and statements; thematic texts; TVC; billboards, posters, leaflets; launch of an online platform; updating provider websites; communication via social networks; pop-up stands; user satisfaction survey.

The campaign website www.imaspravo.rs has been launched, which offers all key information on the right to free legal aid in the most effective way. All local government units and city municipalities have taken an active part in the implementation of the campaign, including by placing a link to the campaign website www.imaspravo.rs on their official websites, in order to raise citizens' awareness of the opportunities provided by the Law on Free Legal Aid. This was done by optimising the banner “You have the right!”, which proved to be the fastest and most effective way to obtain complete information on the right to free legal aid.

Starting from 1 November 2024, advertisements are broadcast on television channels with national coverage, as well as on certain local media. Broadcasting was most frequent on the following television channels: RTV1 (104 broadcasts), Happy TV (95 broadcasts), RTS 1 (32 broadcasts), TV Prva (18 broadcasts). The total number of broadcasts of the items is 254 as of December 23, 2024, for a total duration of 5 hours, 41 minutes and 8 seconds.

We would like to point out that during 2023, the National Rapporteur held a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Justice, which, among other things, was dedicated to a more efficient implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid.

It is specifically stated that victims of human trafficking, as a particularly vulnerable category, have the right to free legal aid in accordance with the Law on Free Legal Aid, but it can only be provided, in accordance with the Constitution, by lawyers or legal aid services of local self-government units.

Associations may have active legal standing in proceedings, but they cannot represent victims in proceedings or provide free legal aid or legal advice.

Active legal standing in court proceedings refers to the right of a party to initiate and participate in proceedings before a court. This is an essential condition for an applicant to be recognised as a plaintiff in

a court proceeding. The person must have a direct interest in the examination or resolution of a particular legal issue or dispute.

In other words, in order for someone to have active standing, they must prove that they have a legal interest, that is, that their right or legitimate interest has been violated or that there is an imminent threat of such a violation. A person with active standing is essentially the one who has the legal basis to seek judicial protection and present their case to the court. Active standing is provided for under the two aforementioned laws only in civil proceedings or in administrative disputes, but not in criminal proceedings for the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings.

In the First Report, the National Rapporteur made recommendations to the competent authorities that

- It is necessary to simplify the procedure for accessing free legal aid through local self-government units and provide specialised training for lawyers to provide legal support to victims of human trafficking.

We would like to point out that in September 2024, a new HELP course (Human Rights Education for Lawyers) of the Council of Europe on combating trafficking in human beings was implemented. The HELP course supported lawyers from Serbia to more effectively protect victims of trafficking in human beings and prosecute perpetrators. The course is implemented within the framework of the project “Strengthening the fight against trafficking in human beings in Serbia”, in cooperation with the Serbian Bar Association and the Bar Academy, and with the support of the project “HELP in the Western Balkans”. A total of 29 lawyers improved their knowledge of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, developed the necessary skills to combat trafficking in human beings, and studied the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as other international legal instruments and national good practice.

Also, in November 2024, a round table “First Support and Free Legal Aid for Victims of Human Trafficking” was held, organised by the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade. The round table participants were from the Serbian Bar Association and the Belgrade Bar Association, representatives of 6 municipal services that decide on requests for free legal aid, the Ministry of Justice, the civil society organisation Atina, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, the Ombudsman and the Office for the Coordination of Activities in the Fight against Human Trafficking. The workshop exchanged experiences and shortcomings in the implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid and discussed the modalities of involving lawyers with knowledge of human trafficking in the provision of free legal aid. The best solutions for the Draft Law on Combating Human Trafficking, which relate to free legal aid for victims of human trafficking, were also discussed. The National Rapporteur and the Serbian Bar Association agreed that it is necessary to intensify the professional development of lawyers who provide legal assistance to victims of human trafficking, which should be accompanied by the issuance of an appropriate certificate, and that this should be taken care of by the Bar Academy of the Serbian Bar Association, which organises training and other forms of additional professional development.

Also, a meeting was held as part of the implementation of the project: “Support to (potential) victims of migrant smuggling and human trafficking” in Serbia, which is part of the regional project: “EU support to strengthening the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the Western Balkans”. The meeting was an opportunity for discussion, exchange of experiences and to discuss joint coordination of state authorities and civil society organisations and work in the field. The meeting presented the project activities, including the provision of free legal aid, access to territory, access to the asylum procedure and support for reintegration through assistance in accessing economic and social rights of persons on the move,

refugees and asylum seekers, in order to improve measures aimed at preventing and combating trafficking in human beings throughout the Western Balkans region.

2. In line with the recommendation to establish without further delay a national system of compensation for victims of trafficking in human beings, regardless of their citizenship and residence status (paragraph 88), we inform you of the following:

The procedural authority (public prosecutor or court) is obliged to inform the injured party/victim of the right to file a property claim, which may relate to compensation for damage, return of property and annulment of a certain legal transaction, as well as of the right to submit a proposal and evidence for the realisation of the property claim and to propose interim measures for its security.

The decision on the property claim is made by the court. The agreement on the property claim, if submitted, is a mandatory element of the plea agreement. In this regard, the public prosecutor is obliged to invite the authorised claimant of the property claim to submit such a request before concluding the agreement.

The procedural authority may appoint a proxy for a particularly sensitive witness, which represents an additional form of protection, but also assistance when submitting a property claim. The procedural authority is obliged to collect evidence of importance for deciding on a property claim even before it is submitted (Article 256 of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

The “Guidelines for the Improvement of Judicial Practice in Proceedings for Compensation of Damage to Victims of Serious Crimes in Criminal Proceedings” specifically point out the role of the public prosecutor in the part related to the collection of evidence of the damage caused, i.e., the importance of collecting evidence necessary for deciding on a property claim in criminal proceedings.

Organised by the Judicial Academy, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, a series of seminars on the implementation of the Guidelines were held.

In 2024, four trainings were implemented on: Implementation of training for judges and public prosecutors – contact persons for handling cases of human trafficking for the implementation of the Guidelines for the Improvement of Judicial Practice in Procedures for Compensation of Damage to Victims of Serious Crimes in Criminal Proceedings, adopted by the Supreme Court. 38 misdemeanour court judges, 11 judicial assistants, 15 public prosecutors and 31 public prosecutor assistants were trained.

Following the development of the “Guidelines for the Improvement of Judicial Practice in Proceedings for Compensation of Damage to Victims of Serious Crimes in Criminal Proceedings” by the Supreme Court of Serbia, which were presented at a series of seminars for judges and public prosecutors, an increasing number of judgments have been observed in which property claims, especially when it comes to compensation for non-pecuniary damage, are decided in criminal proceedings. During 2024, in relation to 6 defendants, victims of human trafficking were awarded compensation for non-pecuniary damage ranging from RSD 100,000 to RSD 800,000 in guilty verdicts.

The Council for Combating Human Trafficking, at its session held on 25 December 2023, with the aim of improving operational, institutional and strategic capacities for a systemic response of society to the problem of human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia, adopted measures related to the development of a new planning document in the field of combating human trafficking with an accompanying action plan and the development of laws in the field of combating human trafficking.

We also point out that Chapter IV of the Draft Law on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting Rights stipulates for the first time the rights of victims of trafficking in human beings, including the right to financial compensation. The draft law stipulates that a formally identified victim of trafficking in human beings has the right to a one-time financial compensation and that the funds for the payment of financial compensation are provided from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, as well as through donations, EU financial assistance and other sources.

We also point out that the National Rapporteur, in his First Report, made recommendations to the competent authorities that:

- It is necessary to ensure that all victims of human trafficking are informed in detail about their right to compensation for damage, as well as about the procedure for exercising this right and the competent authorities before which they exercise their right.

3. In line with the recommendation to take measures to strengthen the criminal justice response to trafficking in human beings, including by ensuring that trafficking in human beings offences are investigated proactively and promptly, regardless of whether a specific criminal offence has been reported or not, using all possible evidence, including evidence collected through special investigative techniques, financial evidence, documents and digital evidence, in order to reduce reliance on the testimonies of victims or witnesses; ensuring that trafficking in human beings offences are prosecuted as such and not as lesser offences, whenever the circumstances of the case so permit, and leading to effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions for those convicted; ensuring that the procedure (institution) of plea agreements is used only exceptionally in cases of trafficking in human beings, with appropriate safeguards, where the reduction of the sentence is clearly outweighed by the advantages offered by the plea agreement (these advantages are indicated in the court decision approving the agreement) and that the agreement does not in any way prejudice the rights of victims, including their access to compensation; intensifying efforts to identify, seize and confiscate assets acquired through the commission of trafficking in human beings offences (paragraph 112), we inform you of the following:

Special evidentiary actions provided for in Article 161 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and in particular covert surveillance of communications, covert monitoring and recording, are enabled for the detection of criminal acts of human trafficking in all forms of execution. We emphasise that, among other things, the organisational unit, the Criminal Police Directorate, Department for Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling, through proactive work in the requested reporting period, proactively identified 16 victims of human trafficking in 6 proactively investigated cases (including one where a five-member organised criminal group was discovered).

During 2024, out of the total number of criminal proceedings conducted for the criminal offence of Human Trafficking, only in relation to two defendants was the criminal offence reclassified by the public prosecutor, after an investigation, as mediation in prostitution.

Also, no plea agreements were concluded in proceedings for the criminal offence of Human Trafficking in 2024. We highlight as an example of good practice the plea agreements for the criminal offence of Human Trafficking from the previous period, which also contained an agreement between the public prosecutor and the defendant, whereby the defendant agreed to compensate the victim of human trafficking for damages.

In accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia, for the period from 2024 to 2026, within the measure “Improving the

professional knowledge of police officers, public prosecutors and judges for the purpose of more efficient action in relation to the criminal offence of human trafficking and procedural protection of victims, especially women and children", a specialist training programme has been developed for public prosecutors - contact persons for action in human trafficking cases.

The programme was developed based on a previous analysis of potential and real challenges in the proceedings, and a series of training courses for judges, public prosecutors and police officers are planned for the coming period.

In order to improve and strengthen the system for detecting and prosecuting the criminal act of trafficking in human beings, and in accordance with the action plan, activities are also planned related to increasing the number of prosecutors – contact persons responsible for handling cases of trafficking in human beings, as well as establishing a network of contact persons in misdemeanour and appellate courts for identifying cases of trafficking in human beings. Accordingly, and for the purpose of adequate handling of cases of trafficking in human beings, in addition to contact points in higher prosecutors' offices for handling cases of trafficking in human beings and police officers assigned to these tasks, 67 judges (of the misdemeanour appellate court and misdemeanour courts) – contact points for handling cases of trafficking in human beings, who may come into contact with presumed victims of trafficking in human beings in misdemeanour proceedings, have been appointed in the Republic of Serbia.

In the reporting period during 2023, a regional expert meeting was held on "Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation via the Internet, in particular the Exploitation of Children in the Western Balkans" organised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Also, in the reporting period during 2023, a Conference on Human Trafficking was held, organised by INTERPOL, at which the results of Operation "Global Chain" and the results of the THB Balkans project were presented. INTERPOL also hosted an operational meeting for the Balkans region, at which analytical reports and results of Interpol, Europol and Frontex were presented within the framework of Operation Global Chain, which led to 212 arrests and the identification of 1,426 potential victims of sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced crime across 44 countries; with 244 new investigations opened due to field actions, and 138 suspected traffickers identified. The meeting was an opportunity to gather lessons learned, as well as exchange information on ongoing and new cases related to the above-mentioned operation and further strengthen international police cooperation in the fight against human trafficking in the region and beyond. Also, in November 2023, INTERPOL hosted representatives of partner countries involved in the current phase of the THB Balkans project for the purpose of exchanging information and pr 88.

During the reporting period in 2023, the third Regional Workshop on Addressing Human Trafficking with the Help of Technology, implemented by the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, was held in Bucharest. The workshop aimed to support anti-trafficking practitioners from OSCE participating States to better understand how online platforms, especially sexual services websites, can facilitate human trafficking and how to proactively identify victims exploited and advertised on these platforms, and was attended by a representative of the Ministry of the Interior.

In 2024, a regional multidisciplinary simulation of a human trafficking case was held in Belgrade, which was implemented within the framework of the project: "Preventing Impunity of Traffickers and Supporting Victims of Human Trafficking in South-Eastern Europe", funded by the United States Government Office for Monitoring and Combating Trafficking in Persons, implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Belgrade, in which representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the Prosecutor's Office

participated. The aforementioned workshop brought together criminal justice practitioners from all project countries, i.e., Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The workshop was led by regional experts, through the active participation of representatives from Belgium and France, and the simulation contributed to strengthening and improving cross-border investigations and prosecutions in human trafficking cases, as well as improving the position and rights of victims in criminal proceedings involving transnational elements.

In accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia in 2024, training was implemented for border police officers, the Asylum Office, and police officers assigned to foreign affairs on the topic of recognising potential victims among the migrant population.

In April 2024, the Annual Regional Meeting of the Western Balkans Task Forces and Counter-Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking Coordinators was held, which is a permanent activity of the project "Western Balkans Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings – WBJAST", implemented by the International Organisation for Migration. These meetings serve as a platform for sharing best practices and facilitating constructive dialogue between representatives of key institutions, including prosecutors, police and counter-trafficking coordinators. The meeting focused on analysing the latest trends and challenges in digital human trafficking and labour exploitation. The Annual Regional Meeting of the Western Balkans Task Forces and Key Stakeholders in the Field of Counter-Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking was also held in 2025.

In accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia, in 2024 the Ministry of the Interior implemented a course on the detection, prevention and suppression of human trafficking, intended for police officers in the status of authorised officials who perform or will perform tasks related to the detection, prevention and suppression of human trafficking. The aim of the course is to train participants in the effective and efficient detection, prevention and suppression of human trafficking. In 2025, the "Course Programme for the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking" from 2018 was updated, in accordance with new trends and modalities of committing this criminal offence, and another course for police officers will be implemented by the end of 2025.

From April to December 2024, based on the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Training and Professional Development of Police Officers of the Ministry of the Interior for the Implementation of the Law on Juvenile Perpetrators of Criminal Offences and Criminal Legal Protection of Minors, eight training courses were conducted for 240 police officers from organisational units at the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior, police departments and the Secondary School of the Interior, who were awarded certificates for dealing with minors by the Judicial Academy.

In October 2024, a regional conference entitled "The Impact of Technology on Human Trafficking: Changing Approaches for a More Effective Response" was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conference was attended by representatives of the police, prosecutors, international organisations, technology companies and civil society organisations, and the work was based on the exchange of experiences in securing digital evidence in human trafficking cases, preventing human trafficking in the digital environment, strengthening cooperation between all relevant actors and strengthening synergies between institutions. Representatives of the Ministry of the Interior participated in the aforementioned conference.

In 2024, the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education organised a seminar – training "Application of indicators for preliminary identification of students who are

potential victims of risk". The seminar was intended for advisors – external collaborators from the education system, with the aim of improving their knowledge and skills in the field of recognising and combating child trafficking. Through presentations and practical exercises, participants had the opportunity to acquire and expand knowledge important for detecting/identifying (potential) victims of human trafficking and children while performing tasks within their competence and referring them to the relevant authority. Participants also had the opportunity to meet key actors and their roles in the field of combating human trafficking (representatives of institutions and civil society organisations dealing with this problem). The workshop promoted multi-sectoral cooperation between various institutions and civil society organisations, as well as a human rights-based approach that takes into account the gender aspects of the problem and the specific needs of child victims of human trafficking. Participants and lecturers at the seminar were representatives of the Ministry of Education, advisors-external associates from the education system from 13 school administrations, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and civil society organisations "ASTRA" and citizens' association "Atina".

Also, in accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia, for the period from 2024 to 2026, organised by the Ministry of the Interior and with the financial support of the International Organisation for Migration within the framework of the regional project "Joint Action in the Western Balkans against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking", training on conducting digital investigations into human trafficking and migrant smuggling was conducted for public prosecutors and police officers in 2024, including monitoring cryptocurrencies and victim-focused interviewing techniques. The training aims to foster multidisciplinary cooperation between police and prosecutors for the purpose of effective victim support and investigation coordination through sessions on conducting digital investigations, introducing participants to digital investigation techniques, including the use of virtual agents, to strengthen investigations and gather intelligence, and proactively researching specific social networks and online advertising portals with the aim of identifying focal criminal online activities.

Following the basic level training, advanced training on conducting digital investigations in human trafficking was implemented for key participants in human trafficking and migrant smuggling investigations, which aimed to provide an additional level of knowledge about high-tech crime and electronic evidence in the specific sub-area of criminal law dealing with human trafficking, within which contemporary migrant smuggling is also recognised, as well as to provide them with an advanced level of understanding and application of advanced techniques for legal analysis of electronic evidence obtained during the pre-investigation, investigation, and main search phases of criminal proceedings conducted ex officio. The advanced training is designed as an important upgrade to the basic training on conducting digital investigations in human trafficking and migrant smuggling and includes the following topics: recapitulation of the most important parts of the introductory training in this area, advanced presentation of modern forms of committing crimes in the field of high-tech crime and their reflection on the field of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, methods of achieving cooperation with service providers on computer networks, especially international ones, and obtaining quality data of evidentiary value through voluntary data transfer by them, modern international criminal law approach in this area and the impact of electronic evidence on the actions of authorised authorities, presentation of more advanced insight into the existence, use and criminal law value of digital money and cryptocurrencies, advanced techniques for determining and presenting electronic evidence in the evidentiary and investigation phases, and especially during the main hearing before the court, modern and upcoming trends in synergy between electronic evidence, high-tech crime and human trafficking and migrant smuggling and case presentations based on previous topics.

In 2024, a regional training of trainers (ToT) on digital investigations (including cryptocurrency tracking) and victim-focused interviewing techniques in cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling was also implemented, organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The training included

teaching methods and simulations for hands-on learning, with a dedicated module focusing on didactics/teaching methods. The participants in the training are representatives of the Task Forces and police officers involved in human trafficking investigations and representatives of social services/service providers providing assistance and protection to victims of human trafficking from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

In accordance with the Action Plan, basic training on conducting digital investigations into human trafficking and migrant smuggling for public prosecutors and police officers was also implemented in 2025, including monitoring cryptocurrencies and victim-focused interviewing techniques, conducted by trainers who had completed the training for trainers on digital investigations in 2024, and following the training implemented in Serbia, the same trainers also conducted training for police officers in North Macedonia.

During 2025, a regional conference on the prevention and suppression of labour and sexual exploitation in the digital environment was held in Dubrovnik, organised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, at which a representative of the Ministry of the Interior presented the national response of the Republic of Serbia in preventing and responding to trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation, with a focus on online exploitation and modern technologies, as well as challenges and lessons learned.

In 2024, a workshop “Human Trafficking through the Internet and Technology” was held, which was implemented within the project “Strengthening the Fight against Human Trafficking in Serbia”, which is implemented within the framework of the joint programme of the Council of Europe and the European Union “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2023-2026”. At the workshop, Professor Paolo Campana from the University of Cambridge presented the GRETA report on “Human Trafficking through the Internet and Technology”, which provides analysis and guidance on how to improve the criminal justice response by improving the detection, investigation and prosecution of cases of human trafficking that take place with the help of technology. The impact of modern communication technology on human trafficking in Serbia and beyond was also discussed.

Representatives of the Ministry of the Interior continuously conducted and participated in the implementation of training related to the fight against human trafficking.

We point out that the education of border police officers on topics related to human trafficking is carried out through professional training and advanced training.

Professional training is intended for participants in basic police training for the position of border police officer. It is implemented through the Programme for Professional Training of Participants in Basic Police Training for the Position of Border Police Officer, and the manual also includes a teaching unit “Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking and Other Vulnerable Groups”.

Professional development is intended for border police officers and is carried out through ongoing training, and is implemented through theoretical classes, the aim of which is to provide police officers with the opportunity to renew the necessary knowledge for performing border police duties. The content of the theoretical classes is mandatory, and one of the topics is “The concept, recognition and action of the police on the criminal act of trafficking in human beings”.

Representatives of the Ministry of the Interior participated in a study visit to the Swiss Confederation within the framework of EMPACT 2023 “Joint Days of Action – Human Trafficking”. Also, border police officers participated in the following trainings:

- AIRCOP – Regional training on systematic analysis of opiate trafficking networks, migrant smuggling and human trafficking);
- Training on “Human Trafficking” organised by the EUAA;
- Roundtable organised by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the topic of a joint response to combat human trafficking and gender-based violence in the migrant population;
- Training on “Interviewing vulnerable categories in the asylum procedure” organised by the EUAA;
- Online training on “Victims of Gender-Based Violence” organised by the EUAA;
- Training on “Gender-based violence in the context of international protection” organised by the EUAA;
- Regional training “Interviewing and Assessment of Asylum Claims for International Protection on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression – SOGIESC” organised by the EUAA;
- Workshops on “Child Sexual Abuse in a Refugee Context” organised by the UNHCR;
- Workshop on “Challenges and Opportunities in Migration: A Gender Equality Perspective” as part of the EU4FAST project, organised by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ);
- Roundtable on “Improving the position of asylum seekers and refugees who are victims of gender-based violence and members of the LGBT population” organised by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and UNHCR.

The legal qualification of the criminal offence of human trafficking and its distinction from related criminal (punishable) offences is one of the topics of training for public prosecutors - contact persons for this criminal offence.

We also note that the public prosecutor – contact person, among other things, is responsible for monitoring the actions of other appellate and higher public prosecutor’s offices in order to standardize practice, as well as monitoring the actions of immediately lower public prosecutor's offices in criminal cases due to so-called related criminal offences (Mediation in prostitution under Article 184 of the Criminal Code, etc.).

We would like to point out that the Judicial Academy has begun work on developing a specialist training programme for public prosecutors - contact persons for handling cases, after which it is planned to continuously implement specialist training for public prosecutors – contact persons for handling cases of human trafficking.

A working group was formed by the decision of the Director of the Judicial Academy to develop a specialist training programme for public prosecutors – contact persons for handling cases. The initial material for developing the training programme consists of the results of evaluations of training in the field of trafficking in human beings, as well as relevant data from the annual educational needs analysis. The implementation of training for judges and public prosecutors - contact persons for handling cases of trafficking in human beings for the implementation of the Guidelines for the Improvement of Judicial Practice in Procedures for Compensation of Damage to Victims of Serious Crimes in Criminal Proceedings, adopted by the Supreme Court. will form part of the training programme for handling cases.

After the training programme is developed, a team of lecturers will be formed and the implementation of training will begin at the appeals offices during 2025 and 2026.

The Judicial Academy is also working on developing Guidelines on the Method of Interrogating Victims of Human Trafficking for Police Officers, Prosecutors and Judges. The activity is supported by the OSCE

Mission to Serbia. The implementation of the activities will begin once the Guidelines are developed and available.

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia envisages the implementation of advanced multi-sector training for labour inspectors, market inspectors, police officers, prosecutors and judges in the field of combating human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation during 2025 and 2026. It was agreed that the organisational form for the implementation would be a round table, not multi-sector training, and that after the implementation of the planned training, an online format would be created that would be available to training participants on the distance learning platform of the Judicial Academy, and would also form part of the learning material for future training for higher levels of learning (advanced training and workshops).

The Judicial Academy implemented two training courses “Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation and Forced Labour”, in the period from July 2023 until October 2023, in which 30 participants took part (judges of the Supreme Court, judges of high courts, higher public prosecutors, police officers). The aim of the aforementioned training is to improve the knowledge and skills of participants in order to effectively prevent and suppress human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation and forced labour, as well as to strengthen inter-sectoral cooperation.

The Judicial Academy also implemented four training courses “Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking during Criminal Proceedings”, in the period from May until October 2023, attended by 46 participants (judges of appellate and high courts, appellate public prosecutors, senior public prosecutors, social workers, lawyers), which aims to strengthen the capacity of representatives of the justice system who encounter victims of human trafficking participating in criminal proceedings.

When we talk about intensifying efforts to identify, seize and confiscate assets derived from the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings (paragraph 112), we point out that the Financial Investigation Unit in the Criminal Police Directorate, Service for Combating Organised Crime, detects assets derived from a criminal offence in accordance with the Law on Confiscation of Assets Derived from a Criminal Offence, while maintaining intensive cooperation with the organisational units of the Ministry of the Interior that deal with criminal investigations of trafficking in human beings. The focus is on proactive access and use of databases to which the Financial Investigation Unit has access. The initiation of the financial investigation itself is within the jurisdiction of the prosecutor’s office.

As part of the multi-donor regional EU project Support to Strengthening the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans (EU4FAST), and organised by the Ministry of Interior, a roundtable was held for police officers and public prosecutors – contact persons for handling human trafficking cases, on the topic of how to conduct financial investigations, best practices and legal instruments for ensuring high-quality cooperation of all participants in financial investigations and improving professional knowledge and skills for planning and conducting financial investigations.

Considering that the holding of a roundtable on the topic of conducting financial investigations is an activity envisaged by the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, it is planned to continue the implementation of this activity in 2025 and 2026.

4. In relation to the recommendation relating to ensuring the protection of the privacy and identity of victims of trafficking in human beings, in accordance with Article 11 of the Convention, by issuing appropriate instructions to all relevant experts (paragraph 130), we point out the following:

In order to take measures to encourage the media to protect the identity and private life of victims of human trafficking, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, held a training course on “Ethical Media Reporting in Cases of Human Trafficking”. The training was attended by 23 journalists from 13 news outlets from all over Serbia. The training presented, through concrete examples, the problems that victims of human trafficking face due to unethical media reporting.

In line with the recommendation to use all measures to protect victims and witnesses of human trafficking and prevent intimidation during the investigation, as well as during and after the court proceedings, we point out that public prosecutors consistently apply legal provisions relating to procedural and extra-procedural witness protection.

Public prosecutors, in all cases where the legal conditions are met, determine the status of particularly sensitive witnesses for victims of human trafficking and, accordingly, apply the rules on the examination of particularly sensitive witnesses, which include examination using technical means for transmitting images and sound, whenever the technical conditions for this exist.

We would like to point out that in 2024, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking made recommendations for granting this status to 71 people.

The Centre provides various services and assistance in the context of access to justice, which includes a wide range of activities – hiring lawyers, preparing for testimony, requesting the status of a particularly sensitive witness, sending findings and opinions to prosecutors' offices and courts, with a detailed description and interpretation of the human trafficking situation, organising transportation and escorting victims when going to prosecutors' offices and courts.

The status of a particularly vulnerable witness is extremely important, and practice has shown that victims who have to give statements before judicial authorities in the presence of traffickers are exposed to an extremely high degree of secondary victimisation, exhibit strong reactions to trauma, and are less willing to testify about what they have experienced. Unfortunately, not all prosecutors’ offices and courts have the necessary equipment for giving statements via video link, and some do not use this equipment even though they have it, so it happens that victims, despite their status as particularly vulnerable witnesses, have to testify in the presence of the accused and their lawyers, from small rooms, often under various pressures.

In the last two years, the Centre has provided all female beneficiaries, that is, beneficiaries who participated in judicial proceedings as injured parties, and who so desired, with the accompaniment of professional workers to testify and give statements, and has strived to organise their arrival safely and without encountering traffickers in cooperation with judicial authorities and the police. The accompaniment and support were most often provided by professional workers of the Centre, and in a smaller number of cases by representatives of social welfare centres and non-governmental organisations. In 2024, in 47 situations, professional workers of the Centre accompanied victims to give statements and testimonies in the Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices and courts.

A lawyer was provided for each minor victim who participated in the proceedings. Lawyers were also provided for adult victims. In 2024, the Centre provided lawyers for 8 victims, and in 2023, the Centre

provided lawyers for 25 victims. In addition to the Centre, lawyers were also provided by non-governmental organisations, and they were also assigned ex officio.

Thanks to the support of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in 2024, technical equipment and furniture for equipping the screening room were also provided. This investment is particularly significant, because in the future, the female beneficiaries of the Shelter will be able to give their testimony in conditions where they feel safe and secure, with adequate psychological support from professional workers with whom they have a developed relationship of trust.

We would like to point out that amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure have been prepared to align our legislation with the legislation of the European Union in this area. It is proposed to regulate in more detail the procedure for deciding on the status of a particularly sensitive witness, by prescribing the participation of the assistance and support service and experts, and it is expressly prohibited to ask a particularly sensitive witness or a witness who is a minor at the main hearing questions that constitute a prompt to answer or are based on the assumption that the witness stated something that he did not state. The aforementioned amendments and supplements were made due to the alignment of the CPC with Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime

Amendments to Article 103 of the Code of Criminal Procedure have been proposed, which read: “A witness who, given his or her age, life experience, lifestyle, gender, personal characteristics, health condition, type or nature of the criminal offence and the circumstances under which the criminal offence was committed, the consequences of the committed criminal offence, or other circumstances of the case, is particularly sensitive, the public prosecutor's office, or the court, may, by a reasoned resolution, at the request of the parties, the witness himself or herself, or ex officio, determine the status of a particularly sensitive witness.”

Before determining the status of a particularly sensitive witness, the procedural authority referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article may obtain the opinion of the assistance and support service or an expert.

If it considers it necessary to protect the interests of a particularly sensitive witness, the procedural authority referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article shall issue a decision on the appointment of a proxy for the witness, and the Chief Public Prosecutor or the President of the Court shall appoint the proxy in the prescribed manner and according to the order from the list of attorneys drawn up by the competent bar association (Article 76).

An appeal against the resolution referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article shall be allowed to the panel referred to in Article 21, paragraph 4 of this Code.

An amendment to Article 104 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which regulates the cross-examination of witnesses, has also been proposed, which reads:

“During the cross-examination of a particularly sensitive witness or a witness who is a minor at the main hearing, it is prohibited to ask questions that constitute a lead or are based on the assumption that the witness stated something that he did not state.”

In accordance with Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, the concept of “victim” has been clarified and the circle of persons who have this status has been expanded (persons with whom the person lived in an extramarital or other durable

partnership, children, parents, adoptive parent, adoptive parent, brother, sister and legal representative of that person).

Based on the Law on Court Organisation, the High Judicial Council adopted the Rules of Procedure and Procedure of the Service for Providing Support and Assistance to Victims and Witnesses and the Contact Point for Informing Victims and Witnesses ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 104/24), which regulate the organisation and internal structure of the Service for Providing Support and Assistance to Victims and Witnesses and the Contact Point for Informing Victims and Witnesses, the goal, principles of work, obligations and responsibilities for work; as well as the tasks of the Service for Support and Assistance and the Contact Point for Informing and Procedure in supporting and assisting victims and witnesses.

5. Regarding the recommendation relating to the intensification of efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, taking into account the GRETA Guidelines on combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation and CM/Rec(2022)21 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, we point out the following:

In order to strengthen the capacity of labour inspectors to actively engage in the prevention of human trafficking and to ensure that their mandate includes a specific focus on detecting potential victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, a total of 100 labour inspectors participated in training on the topic of combating human trafficking at the Labour Inspectorate's expert consultation held in September 2024 in Zlatibor. Also, in 2024, five contact persons were designated in the Labour Inspectorate to act in cases of suspicion of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation. In the same year, labour inspectors and representatives of the Ministry of the Interior (the contact point for combating human trafficking) carried out 5 coordinated targeted inspections in risky activities, such as construction, in order to identify possible cases of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation.

The competences of labour inspectors related to human trafficking relate to:

- monitoring indicators of labour exploitation during inspections and identifying forms of human trafficking;
- collecting relevant information and informing other authorities and services in order to take further steps towards detecting human trafficking and organising coordinated actions;
- exchange of information on acquired experiences with all relevant actors operating in the field of detecting human trafficking in order to better organise preventive activities and more efficiently recognise and detect potential risks of human trafficking, etc.

The indicators serve as a practical tool to help identify potential situations of forced labour, exploitation and/or trafficking in human beings. The list of indicators, which is based on those proposed by the International Labour Organisation, may not always clearly indicate human trafficking, but it will certainly signal that something is wrong and indicate the need for further information gathering and the involvement of other actors.

The project "Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia" – a joint support programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe for the Western Balkans and Turkey (2023-2026) - Phase III, aims to assist the Republic of Serbia in fulfilling its obligations under the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, based on the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). The project aims to contribute to strengthening the capacity of relevant institutions for the prevention of trafficking in human beings, the

protection of victims and the strengthening of criminal justice response, as well as to develop and strengthen partnerships in combating trafficking in human beings that are necessary to combat specific forms of exploitation (labour exploitation, child trafficking).

Since 2017, within the framework of the project “Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia” – a joint support programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe for the Western Balkans and Turkey, around 266 labour inspectors, some of whom have stopped working in the Labour Inspectorate, primarily due to retirement, have participated in various capacity-building activities (basic and advanced training, use of the Guide for Labour Inspectors on the Detection and Preliminary Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking, online HELP course, regional conference “Fighting Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation in Europe: Standards, Reality and New Strategies for Action” held in Belgrade in 2022, etc.).

At the seminars, inspectors learned about the concept of trafficking in human beings (definition, standards, international and national strategic and legal framework for combating trafficking in human beings and forced labour), national standard operating procedures and referral mechanism. They also met key actors in the field of combating trafficking in human beings (representatives of institutions and civil society organisations dealing with this problem), as well as the roles that key actors have in the system of combating trafficking in human beings. In addition, inspectors had the opportunity to hear about examples of good practice from Council of Europe member states (Belgium, Netherlands, Finland...) regarding the role of the Labour Inspectorate in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation.

The Guide for Labour Inspectors on the Detection and Preliminary Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking is very important for the Labour Inspectorate, which was developed within the framework of the Project “Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia” - a joint support programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe for the Western Balkans and Turkey, in which the Labour Inspectorate has been involved since the beginning of its implementation.

Labour inspectors have acquired the knowledge to effectively detect, preliminarily identify, and appropriately refer victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, as well as to exchange information in a timely and adequate manner.

From 20 to 23 May 2024, representatives of the Labour Inspectorate participated in a study visit to Helsinki, Finland, which was organised within the framework of the joint project of the European Union and the Council of Europe "Strengthening the fight against trafficking in human beings in Serbia". Representatives of relevant state bodies of the Republic of Serbia and Finland participated in the study visit. The participants exchanged experiences and knowledge about their systems and action plans for combating trafficking in human beings, as well as the roles and methods of work of relevant actors in the field of combating trafficking in human beings. Among other things, the participants exchanged their knowledge on trends in human trafficking, especially with regard to trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, as well as on the implementation of prevention measures and newly developed methods of cooperation and joint and coordinated supervision of labour inspectors with other relevant authorities in order to combat trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation.

The Labour Inspectorate pays special attention to inspections in high-risk industries (construction and agriculture), during which foreign citizens were found working, both employed and posted foreign workers, as well as foreign citizens engaged in seasonal work. During the inspections, labour inspectors also paid attention to recognising indicators of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation.

In 2023, during 251 inspections, labour inspectors found a total of 7,781 foreign citizens at work, of whom 867 did not have a work permit in the Republic of Serbia. 450 foreign citizens were found working “undeclared”, without a concluded employment contract and/or without a mandatory social security application.

Also, in the field of employment of foreign nationals, in the field of labour relations and in the field of occupational safety and health, the labour inspectorate filed a total of 187 requests for initiating misdemeanour proceedings against employers who hire foreign citizens and 3 criminal charges against persons responsible in the field of occupational safety and health, and issued a total of 73 resolutions with 135 orders to eliminate identified irregularities, 39 decisions on the prohibition of work at the workplace, 89 orders on 81 minutes, 10 warnings and warnings and 27 notifications to the Ministry of the Interior, Directorate for Foreign Nationals.

The Labour Inspectorate carried out inspections of supervised entities that hire seasonal workers. Labour inspectors monitored the implementation of the Law on Simplified Employment in Seasonal Jobs in Certain Activities, as well as other regulations within the jurisdiction of the labour inspectorate, at employers in agriculture and family farms.

During inspections, labour inspectors found 632 seasonal workers, of which 503 were foreign citizens.

Due to the identified illegalities in the application of the Law on Simplified Work Engagement, the Law on Labour and the Law on Occupational Safety and Health in seasonal work in certain industries, labour inspectors submitted 9 requests to initiate misdemeanour proceedings, and also issued 2 resolutions prohibiting work at the workplace.

According to the report of the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade, Market Inspection Sector, in 2024, 11 inspections were carried out, 14 decisions were made, as follows: 7 resolutions on the prohibition of advertising employment jobs and 7 decisions on the prohibition of employment jobs; 7 requests for the initiation of misdemeanour proceedings against unregistered entities were submitted (3 legal entities and 4 natural persons); 3 natural persons, foreign citizens, as unregistered entities were immediately processed and sentenced by the duty judge for misdemeanours with a fine for two misdemeanours in the total amount of RSD 183,000.00. One natural person, a citizen of the Republic of Serbia, was fined in the amount of RSD 27,000.00. Three requests were filed with the judge for misdemeanours against 3 legal entities and responsible persons in the legal entity for advertising and performing employment activities without a work permit (license) issued by the Ministry of Labour (court proceedings are ongoing).

Upon a report from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, an inspection was conducted of 3 individuals, citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, who were advertising employment opportunities for citizens of the Republic of Serbia to work in companies in the Republic of Slovenia, without having a license to perform employment activities. Market inspectors found them performing employment activities in the premises of a hotel in Kruševac, and they found documentation related to employment, including: lists of employees with personal data, employment contracts and data on employers from the Republic of Slovenia. An urgent request was submitted to the duty misdemeanour judge, who immediately prosecuted them and issued a conviction.

The Market Inspection Sector conducts investigations on the Internet based on reports from state authorities, legal entities and individuals, or on its own initiative, finding advertisers who, as unregistered entities, advertise employment opportunities in the country and abroad.

If the market inspector determines that unregistered entities are advertising employment opportunities, he or she shall immediately issue a resolution prohibiting them from advertising and from carrying out employment opportunities.

If foreign citizens are found on the territory of the Republic of Serbia advertising and performing employment activities as unregistered entities, an urgent decision shall be issued immediately, in accordance with the Law on Misdemeanours, to prohibit advertising and performing employment activities, and a request shall be submitted to the duty misdemeanour judge for initiating misdemeanour proceedings against them on two grounds.

It should be noted that the Market Inspectorate acts preventively to prevent human trafficking and to prevent illegal advertising and employment services by agencies that do not have a license to perform employment services, unregistered entities and natural persons. We would like to point out that the Market Inspectorate cooperates with the civil society organisation “ASTRA”, from which it receives information and data on any unregistered entities that advertise or perform employment services. Upon completion of the inspection controls, the civil society organisation is notified of the outcome.

The Border Police Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior carries out tasks related to the entry, movement and stay of foreign nationals on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The procedures begin when submitting a visa application at the diplomatic and consular missions of the Republic of Serbia abroad, since before issuing a visa, the diplomatic and consular mission obtains prior consent from the Ministry of the Interior. Prior consent is given based on the results of the assessment of the organisational unit of the Ministry of the Interior that performs tasks related to the movement and stay of foreign nationals, according to the place of arrival of the foreigner, based on the results of the assessment of the state body responsible for protecting the security of the Republic of Serbia and based on other operational knowledge available in the specific case, and when issuing a D visa for a long stay on the basis of employment, the organisation responsible for employment affairs submits an assessment of whether the foreigner meets the conditions for employment in the Republic of Serbia, i.e., the decision on whether the conditions for employment are met is within the competence of the National Employment Service. For this purpose, the data of the applicant and the caller are checked, by reviewing the records kept in accordance with the law. This is an opportunity for the caller to ask how he came across the foreign citizen for whom he provided a guarantee, i.e., whether there was any mediation by an employment agency or a temporary employment agency. The credibility of the statements in the documentation attached to the visa application is further determined and the justification of the purpose of the trip is determined.

Regarding the procedure for granting temporary residence, it should be noted that on 1 February 2024, the provisions of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Foreign Nationals, which relate to the electronic submission of applications for the issuance of a single permit for temporary residence and work of a foreigner, began to be implemented. With these amendments, the Ministry of the Interior, or rather the organisational units for foreign affairs in regional police departments, has taken over the role of a single administrative point and enabled the submission of a single request that can be submitted by a foreigner or his employer on behalf of the foreigner (individually or through a group request), thus establishing a new single (unified) procedure, which replaced the previous obligation of the foreigner to first regulate temporary residence in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Foreign Nationals, and after that, the employer or the foreigner himself submits a request for the issuance of a work permit, in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Employment of Foreign Nationals. A single permit can be issued to a foreigner for a period of validity of up to three years, and is issued in the form of a biometric card document.

Information collected during checks carried out for the purpose of granting prior consent for the issuance of visas, as well as in the procedure for approving a single residence and work permit, and proactive

monitoring, is used for the purpose of preventing and combating human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, by forwarding the information obtained to the competent authorities such as the Labour Inspectorate and the Criminal Police Directorate.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration also implements integration programs for persons who have been granted asylum in Serbia, through various programs and activities, which enable easier and faster integration into the new environment. The integration counsellor informs the person about the rights they exercise in the integration process and provides support in exercising them (right to personal documents, temporary accommodation, social and health care, access to education, unhindered access to the labour market, etc.). Such programs significantly promote the prevention of human trafficking in the population of asylum seekers and persons with approved asylum because they provide them with systemic support in exercising their rights and do not leave room for potential abuses.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the National Employment Service and UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2021, and activities are being implemented continuously. The cooperation was established for the purpose of better understanding of status and rights, faster inclusion in the labour market, as well as the inclusion of asylum seekers and persons with approved asylum in difficult-to-employ categories. In cooperation with the NES, certified training was conducted during the reporting period for 8 persons who expressed a desire to start their own entrepreneurial business.

In joint cooperation, asylum seekers were informed about the conditions and methods of accessing the job search site and legal employment paths at organised info sessions or through individual counselling. A significant step was also taken with the entry into force of the Amendments to the Law on the Employment of Foreign Nationals in January 2023, according to which asylum seekers acquire the right to work after six months from the date of filing for asylum instead of the previous 9 months, thus creating more efficient conditions for earlier legal employment of this category of persons.

In the asylum centres where asylum seekers stay, info sessions are held once a week for asylum seekers, which include, among other things, information on the right to work, access to the labour market, and assistance in finding an adequate job.

In February 2025, in accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme to Combat Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2024 to 2029, the Ministry of the Interior, with the financial support of the International Organisation for Migration, implemented training for employees of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the Employers' Union of Serbia, and the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Serbia on the topic of preventing human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation. Transfer to labour exploitation.

We point out that in the First Report, the National Rapporteur made recommendations to the competent authorities that:

- It is necessary to intensify the proactive actions of labour inspectors in detecting cases of human trafficking.

6. In line with the recommendation to take steps to improve assistance to victims of human trafficking, we point out the following:

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking provides accommodation services in the Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking, which is the only shelter of its kind in Serbia and operates according to a unique system of support for victims who are at high risk. The female beneficiaries are provided with an intensive support program, which involves going through 3 phases of work, a large number of activities aimed at their safety, recovery and empowerment, and the 24-hour presence of professional workers, who are trained, educated and sensitised to work with people who have survived traumatic experiences. The shelter was licensed by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs in February 2022 for a period of 5 years. The shelter is available 24 hours a day to receive victims, and support and assistance from professional workers to service female beneficiaries is available 24/7 every day.

During 2024, 16 female beneficiaries stayed at the Shelter, which is the largest number since the establishment of this service.

During 2024, the adaptation of the Shelter premises continued, so that the female beneficiaries would have the best possible conditions while using the accommodation service. Thanks to the financial resources received from the competent Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Shelter was reconstructed and adapted, which solved some of the problems that the Centre had been facing since its establishment. Work was carried out to reconstruct worn-out and defective electrical installations. In addition to the work on the electrical installations, completely new heating equipment with a heat pump was installed, which ensured optimal conditions for the stay of the beneficiaries, especially considering that they are often accommodated with small children. This increased energy efficiency and ensured minimal electricity consumption throughout the year. A water filtration device was also installed, which solved the long-standing problem of microbiological and physico-chemical defects in the water. Sinks and faulty taps were replaced. As part of the work carried out, doors and some of the windows were replaced, and mosquito nets were installed on all windows. The adaptation also included replacing the floors in two rooms of the Shelter, as the existing ones could not be maintained in a hygienically adequate manner due to their wear and tear. Air conditioning units were provided for the rooms used to accommodate the female beneficiaries, as well as white goods, small household and kitchen appliances. For the proper storage and storage of business documentation, metal security cabinets were purchased, i.e., safes for storing confidential documents, primarily female beneficiaries' files. The remaining funds were used to equip the Shelter premises, purchase office tables and chairs, wardrobes for the rooms where the beneficiaries are accommodated, as well as shelves for the office and common areas of the female beneficiaries.

Thanks to the support of the competent Ministry, technical equipment and furniture for equipping the screening room have been provided. This investment is particularly significant, because in the future, the female beneficiaries of the Shelter will be able to give their testimony in conditions where they feel safe and secure, with adequate psychological support from professional workers with whom they have a developed relationship of trust.

The Centre has submitted an initiative to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs to expand the capacity of the existing Shelter, as well as to allocate an apartment for the Centre. These premises would be used to receive child victims, as well as to establish an accommodation service for male victims of human trafficking. The Ministry supported this proposal, and the procedure for allocating space is underway.

The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection provides for special procedural and reception guarantees for victims of human trafficking, which are provided to all potential or identified victims of human trafficking who reside in centres managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. The assessment of the best accommodation and coordination of services is carried out in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking. In addition to material reception conditions, all persons are provided with all other services such as access to healthcare, psychosocial support, occupational and educational activities, free legal aid, translation services, etc. During their stay in centres managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, persons are accommodated in special separate units or rooms in order to ensure their additional safety. Physical and technical security has been deployed in the centres where they resided, and video surveillance is in place.

All centres and accommodation facilities managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration are equipped and aligned with the accommodation standards prescribed by the European Asylum Agency and are suitable for longer stays, and the Commissariat, within its competence, has provided all potential victims with material reception conditions, which include: accommodation, clothing, footwear, personal and collective hygiene products.

Also, all these persons are provided with three meals a day as well as adapted nutrition in accordance with religious preferences and health needs. The Commissariat has provided all persons with free translation services in the centres, which also have immediate access to free legal aid provided by specialised civil society organisations with which the Commissariat has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation. In the case of potential victims of human trafficking, this service is provided in coordination with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking.

In order to ensure appropriate long-term support and assistance for victims of human trafficking in accordance with individual needs, the Board of Directors of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking adopted a new Rulebook on the Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking and the Coordination of Protection in December 2024. In addition to the described changes in terms of responding to reports, it also introduces changes related to the coordination of victim protection. It also introduces the principle of organising a multidisciplinary and multisectoral meeting for each victim, creating a support network that will consist of all relevant institutions and organisations from the state and non-governmental sectors. Upon the recommendation of the Ombudsman, the Centre introduced the principle of organising a multidisciplinary and multisectoral meeting for each child victim as a rule, and in 2024 the Centre decided that this rule would apply to everyone, regardless of age.

A coordination system has also been defined, whereby members of the support network, together with victims of human trafficking, develop a protection plan. The Centre will monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan, and ensure regular exchange of information and problem-solving in the implementation of activities.

The Rulebook also regulates the manner in which persons undergoing the identification procedure are informed of their rights and the procedures for exercising them (whenever possible, the female beneficiaries are informed of this within 24 hours of the initiation of the procedure and are always informed of the outcome of the identification procedure). The notification is carried out in accordance with the beneficiaries' capacity to understand the information.

The Rulebook also introduces the obligation to inform the victim about the possibility of filing a complaint with the competent ministry regarding the work of the Centre, including the identification procedure, its outcome, as well as all other professional procedures conducted by the Centre.

During 2024, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking organised 363 case conferences and intersectoral meetings, most often online, and in addition to users and professional workers of the Centre, representatives of social welfare institutions and specialised non-governmental organisations, as well as representatives of educational institutions, the judiciary and the police, participated in them. For the purpose of coordination, thematic meetings are also organised with specific actors in the protection of victims, and daily communication also takes place via telephone and e-mail.

For each identified victim during 2024, a protection plan was developed in which the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking included other relevant stakeholders, such as social welfare institutions, citizens' associations, health institutions, educational institutions, the police and others, striving to create the widest and most functional support network for each victim. Each plan was developed in cooperation with female beneficiaries.

The most common areas of work are:

- Safety of female beneficiaries, which includes activities of close cooperation with the police, their regular alerting and advisory work with female beneficiaries, along with the creation of safety strategies;
- The Centre provides various services and assistance in the context of access to justice, which includes a wide range of activities – hiring lawyers, preparing for testimony, requesting the status of a particularly sensitive witness, sending findings and opinions to prosecutors' offices and courts, with a detailed description and interpretation of the human trafficking situation, organising transportation and escorting victims when going to prosecutors' offices and courts.
- Health care, which includes assistance in exercising the right to health insurance, scheduling medical examinations and interventions, purchasing medications, organising transportation and accompanying people when going to the doctor;
- Support in overcoming trauma is provided through the counselling work of the Centre's professional staff, as well as through psychotherapy services, which are provided directly by the Centre or by other organisations or institutions, most often specialised non-governmental organisations;
- Ensuring material security is mainly done through cooperation with other institutions that can provide various types of material support, such as social welfare centres, the Red Cross or other humanitarian organisations;
- Accommodation is most often provided through placement in the Shelter of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking or in other social welfare institutions. Most often, victims use the accommodation services of the Centre's Shelter, the supported housing service provided by the NGO Atina, and somewhat less often in safe houses, homes for children without parental care and foster families;
- Support for family functioning involves working with victims' families with the aim of helping their functioning, reintegrating the victim into the family, mobilising their capacities for the purpose of supporting the victim, strengthening the parental capacities of the victim or the capacities of the victim's parents, as well as improving partnership relationships;
- Providing guardianship protection is within the domain of guardianship authorities, with whom the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking cooperates closely and provides them with assistance and support, as well as coordinates their cooperation with other institutions and organisations. When the presumed or identified victim is a minor, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking must notify the Social Welfare Centre and together with them a plan for the protection of the female beneficiaries is created;

The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking initially informs presumed victims about their rights, as well as about institutions and organisations that can provide various types of assistance,

provides contacts, recommendations and advice, but adult victims themselves make the decision about what type of support and from which actor they will accept.

The Centre organises 24-hour on-call staff in the Coordination Service and 24-hour work in the Shelter. Professionals in the Coordination Service are on duty for a week and on that occasion, they are assigned an official telephone with the duty number +38163610590, which is constantly available and can be called by both the Centre's female beneficiaries, associates and all citizens who wish to report suspicions of human trafficking. The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking promotes this number during each professional meeting, at public appearances, through campaigns and on the institution's website.

In line with the recommendation to provide training and sensitisation of representatives of social welfare centres and employees of centres for victims of domestic violence who provide support and accommodation to victims of human trafficking (paragraph 225), we point out that in 2023, 2024 and 2025, the Centre trained hundreds of employees of social welfare centres and other social welfare institutions in identifying cases of human trafficking and working with victims. During 2023, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking conducted 4 trainings on "The Role of social welfare centres in Preliminary Identification and Support for Victims of Human Trafficking", which were attended by 100 professional workers in the field of social welfare. These trainings, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, began in late 2021 and 12 trainings have been implemented so far for around 300 professionals. Participants gave these trainings an excellent rating (4.9/5) and their effect is best seen in the significant increase in the number of applications from the social welfare system (53% compared to the previous year).

The Centre also conducted 3 trainings on the topic of preliminary identification and support for victims from the migrant population, which were attended by 60 representatives from the social protection system and employees of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. They were held as part of the project "ENHANCING RIGHTS-BASED AND SURVIVOR-CENTREED RESPONSE TO TIP", which is implemented by the International Organisation for Migration and funded by the State Department.

During 2023, the Centre's experts participated in the implementation of 3 training courses "Practitioners in the fight against human trafficking with a special focus on migration", which were attended by 75 participants from different systems locally, in Belgrade, Bujanovac and Sombor. The trainings were organised by the non-governmental organisation Atina.

Also, in 2024, 3 trainings on "Recognising Human Trafficking among Migrants and Refugees" were held for 50 participants from international and non-governmental organisations, organised by UNHCR.

In 2024, 8 training sessions were held on "Application of Indicators for Preliminary Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking" for 200 participants - employees of the social welfare system and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

During 2025, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, with the support of the project "Western Balkans Joint Action Against Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings", implemented by the International Organisation for Migration and the German Development Cooperation project "Support to Social Inclusion in Serbia", implemented by GIZ in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, began a series of training courses on recognising cases of human trafficking.

The first such training was held in Pirot, and was opened by the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. In addition to the Minister, the participants were also welcomed by the Mayor of Pirot, the National Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking, the Project Leader for “Support to Social Inclusion in Serbia” and the IOM Head of Mission in Serbia. The participants of the meeting were employees in the social welfare system, education, healthcare and police.

So far, 14 trainings have been held, attended by over 350 employees in the social welfare, police, education, healthcare, non-governmental sector, judiciary and local self-governments. It is planned that by the end of the year, a total of 25 trainings will be held in different regions of Serbia, and that over 1,000 experts from these systems, from all municipalities in the country, will complete them.

During 2023 and 2024, representatives of the National Rapporteur conducted two visits to the Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking.

During the visits, it was determined that an assessment of strengths, needs and risks was made for each female beneficiary, as well as an individual protection plan in accordance with the Plan of the professional worker of the Coordination Service and the female beneficiary's referral authority. According to the individual plan, and based on the assessment, priority goals were determined for each female beneficiary and activities and expected outcomes were planned. The priority goals for each female beneficiary were safety and compliance with security procedures, health care, provision of personal documents and assistance in exercising rights from the social welfare system, as well as the development of the potential and skills of female beneficiaries for independent living, as well as the stabilisation of psychological functioning through the provision of psychosocial support. In accordance with the Programme of Work of the Shelter, the professional workers of the Shelter organised and conducted psychological, educational and occupational workshops on a daily basis.

All female beneficiaries of the Shelter received the necessary health services, including gynaecological and psychiatric examinations as basic, as well as others, in accordance with their conditions. Some female beneficiaries had associated psychological disorders, and some of them also had serious health problems. They regularly went to scheduled psychiatric check-ups and received appropriate medication therapy, which was regularly administered to them in the presence of employees.

All female beneficiaries who participated in judicial proceedings were provided with a legal representative, preparation for their testimony was organised at the Shelter, and they were provided with support and accompaniment from professional workers during their statements. At the time of the 2024 visit, activities were being undertaken to equip a room in the Shelter, from which female beneficiaries could participate in proceedings before the competent judicial authorities via video link.

The female beneficiaries had the opportunity to use the swimming pool, gym, cinema, theatre and library for free, as well as attend courses and workshops according to their interests. During the visit in 2024, one of the female beneficiaries was finishing primary school part-time.

Through the project “Mental Health of Victims of Human Trafficking and Service Providers”, female beneficiaries of the Shelter were provided with online psychotherapy.

In terms of the infrastructure of the building housing the Shelter, in 2024 the carpentry in all rooms (windows and doors) was replaced, and at the time of the visit, work was being completed on a new, more economical and efficient heating system for the buildings.

In the First Report, the National Rapporteur made recommendations to the competent authorities that

- It is necessary to increase existing accommodation capacities for victims of human trafficking and develop specialised accommodation capacities for male victims of human trafficking;
- It is necessary to determine the exact number of foster families in the Republic of Serbia and to conduct training for foster parents in working with child victims of human trafficking, so that children can be placed, in accordance with their needs, in environments that are most similar to family ones.

B. In relation to the recommendations that the Government of the Republic of Serbia take measures to implement the other proposals for action listed in Annex 1 of GRETA's third evaluation report, we point out the following:

Right to information:

In accordance with the recommendations relating to the systematic provision of oral and written information to presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking in practice, in a language they can understand, regarding their rights, available services and how they can access them, as well as what it means to be identified as a victim of trafficking, and that police officers, prosecutors, judges, members of local anti-trafficking teams, as well as employees of migrant reception centres and shelters for victims of trafficking, need to be trained and further instructed on how to properly explain their rights to victims of trafficking, taking into account the cognitive skills and psychological state of the victim (paragraph 46), we inform that representatives of the Ministry of the Interior are implementing the Instructions on the Procedure for Employees of the Ministry of the Interior in Cases of Human Trafficking. An integral part of the Guidelines is an information brochure for persons with experience of human trafficking, which has been translated into 15 languages. The Guidelines, brochure and indicators are available to all police officers on the Ministry’s intranet address.

The public prosecutor, as the body of the procedure, is obliged to inform the victim of their rights pursuant to Article 50 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, in accordance with the law.

Parties, witnesses and other persons participating in the proceedings have the right to use their own language and script during the proceedings, and if the proceedings are not conducted in their language and if, after being instructed on the right to translation, they do not declare that they know the language in which the proceedings are conducted and that they waive the right to translation, they will be provided with a translation of what they or others present, as well as the translation of documents and other written evidence, at the expense of budgetary funds.

The General Mandatory Instruction of the Supreme (formerly the Republic) Public Prosecutor from December 2016 regulated the procedure of the Service for Information and Support for Victims and Witnesses in Public Prosecutor's Offices (SIP), which was established with the aim of enabling victims/victims and witnesses of criminal offences to effectively exercise their right to obtain information and access to support services during the procedure, in order to facilitate their participation in the procedure and increase the efficiency of the procedure.

Injured persons/victims and witnesses are provided with a brochure containing basic information about their rights and information about the Service, along with the invitation to testify.

Information is provided to victims and witnesses in simple and easily understandable language, in person, by telephone or email.

Starting with the adoption of the Mandatory Instruction, organised by the Judicial Academy and with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, a series of seminars for public prosecutors and SIP officers were held on the topic of acting in accordance with the aforementioned instruction.

In December 2024, the Board of Directors of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking adopted a new Regulation on the Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking and the Coordination of Protection. The Rulebook, among other things, regulates the manner in which persons undergoing the identification procedure are informed of their rights and the procedures for exercising them (whenever possible, female beneficiaries are informed of this within 24 hours of the initiation of the procedure and are always informed of the outcome of the identification procedure). The notification is carried out in accordance with the beneficiaries' capacity to understand the information. The Rulebook also introduces the obligation to inform the victim about the possibility of filing a complaint with the competent ministry regarding the work of the Centre, including the identification procedure, its outcome, as well as all other professional procedures conducted by the Centre.

The Centre has begun developing a special guide to inform victims of human trafficking about their rights, as well as a written information booklet that will be translated into multiple languages.

In order to improve the work of employees and respond more effectively to suspected victims of human trafficking, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, with the support of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, has developed a shortened internal procedure for the actions of employees in the centres, including the address list of competent institutions and basic definitions and measures in the field of human trafficking, with information that must be provided to suspected victims.

At the initiative of the Office for the Coordination of Activities in the Fight against Human Trafficking, a free national hotline for reporting suspected human trafficking was established at the premises of the Command and Operations Centre of the Ministry of the Interior, 0800 100 388. The hotline began operating in 2021 and is available 24 hours a day, staffed by trained and sensitive police officers.

In order to ensure the availability of interpreters for the different languages spoken by victims of human trafficking, as well as to raise their awareness of the problem of human trafficking, the Ministry of Justice regularly updates the Register of Permanent Court Interpreters, which is publicly available on the Ministry's website. The total number of interpreters is 1,054.

In the period from 1 January 2024 until 1 October 2024:

- An advertisement for the appointment of permanent court interpreters for Chinese and English for the area of the High Court in Zaječar was published on 02.02.2024, in which 28 permanent court interpreters for English were appointed, as well as 6 permanent court interpreters for Chinese;
- A public announcement for the appointment of permanent court interpreters for the Slovenian language for the area of the High Court in Kruševac and for the Italian language for the area of the High Court in Požarevac was published on 15 March 2024, in which 12 permanent court interpreters for the Italian language were appointed, as well as 4 permanent court interpreters for the Slovenian language;

- An advertisement for the appointment of permanent court interpreters for the Russian language for the area of the High Court in Valjevo was published on 16 July 2024, in which 16 permanent court interpreters for the Russian language were appointed;
- A public announcement for the appointment of permanent court interpreters for the Italian language for the area of the High Court in Valjevo was published on 31 May 2024. Two permanent court interpreters for the Italian language were appointed.

Psychological help

Regarding the recommendation that the Republic of Serbia take further steps to ensure that victims of trafficking in human beings are provided with psychological assistance that will help them overcome the trauma they have experienced and achieve sustainable recovery and social inclusion (paragraph 65), we point out that the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings continued to provide psychological support to victims in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Support in overcoming trauma is provided through the advisory work of professional workers of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as through psychotherapy services, which are provided directly by the Centre or other organisations or institutions. The most intensive psychological support is provided to the female beneficiaries of the Shelter, who have access to this type of assistance 24 hours a day and for whom special workshops are held. The Centre has 4 professional workers who are trained to provide psychotherapy services. In 2024, all professional staff of the Centre underwent a multi-day training course on working with people who have survived traumatic experiences, held by the President of the Serbian Psychological Society, with the support of the State Department. In 2024, psychological support was provided to 382 people, including all 16 female beneficiaries of the Shelter.

Taking into account GRETA's recommendation that every victim of human trafficking should undergo a clinical assessment conducted by an experienced clinician, the Draft Law on Suppression and Prevention of Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims includes a legal basis for the adoption of a by-law – the Protocol on the Treatment of Victims of Human Trafficking by the Health Care System, which is prescribed by the Minister of Health.

This by-law will prescribe indicators for the identification of victims of human trafficking by the healthcare system, the rule that every victim of human trafficking must undergo a clinical evaluation in terms of the need for further psychological assistance and support, an algorithm for the healthcare system to deal with victims of human trafficking, a notification and referral mechanism, as well as possible controversial issues, such as the procedure in the event that a victim of human trafficking does not have personal documents. This Protocol is already being worked on, and indicators for the healthcare system were drawn up at the end of January 2025.

The planned deadline for the adoption of this legal act is 6 months from the entry into force of the Law on Suppression and Prevention of Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims, the adoption of which is expected in June 2025. The adoption of this Protocol will affect legal certainty, equality of treatment of victims of human trafficking and ensure the exercise of their rights in the exercise of health care. Of particular importance is the fact that this Protocol will apply to all those who provide health care in the Republic of Serbia, regardless of whether they are state-owned or privately-owned health care institutions or private practice.

Bearing in mind the shortage of experts in the field of mental health, in 2025 the Ministry of Health declared the specialisation in psychiatry and the specialisation in child psychiatry as shortage specialisations, which allows for these specialisations to be applied for by people who are unemployed or employed for a fixed

term, in addition to permanent employees, thus increasing the number of people who can be approved for one of these two specialisations.

The Law on Health Care and the Law on Health Insurance stipulate that funds for the provision of health care for all victims of human trafficking who are not covered by mandatory health insurance shall be provided from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. This right is exercised not only by citizens of the Republic of Serbia, but also by foreign citizens who are victims of human trafficking. Based on this insurance, victims of human trafficking have the right to complete health care, which also includes the protection of their mental health, in accordance with their needs and health condition, which can be exercised free of charge in all publicly owned health institutions. In order to exercise the right to free health care, a victim of human trafficking, if he or she does not already have a health insurance card, should register with the nearest branch of the Republic Health Insurance Fund. The manner of exercising health care for a victim of human trafficking who does not have personal documents will be prescribed by the aforementioned Protocol.

In the above-mentioned ways, primarily by adopting the Protocol on the Treatment of Victims of Human Trafficking by the Health Care System, the Ministry of Health is taking further steps to ensure that victims of human trafficking are provided with uniform and high-quality health care, in accordance with their needs. By increasing the number of psychiatrists and especially child psychiatrists, conditions are being created for more accessible specialised mental health care for victims of human trafficking, and especially child victims.

Access to work, vocational training and education

In line with the recommendation that the Serbian authorities should strengthen effective access to the labour market for victims of human trafficking and their economic and social inclusion, by providing professional training and job placement, raising awareness among employers, as well as by promoting micro-business, social entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships, including state employment programs, with the aim of creating suitable jobs for victims of human trafficking (paragraph 70), we point out that the Action Plan for the period from 2021 to 2023 for the implementation of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2026, within the framework of certain active employment policy measures, defines categories of less employable persons who are included in the measures. In measures where categories are not defined, priority for inclusion and intensive individual support is also provided to unemployed persons who are victims of human trafficking. Also, priority for inclusion in measures and intensive individual support for victims of human trafficking is also determined by the Action Plan for the period from 2024 to 2026 for the implementation of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2026. The National Employment Service is oriented towards providing services to unemployed persons through information and advisory work (individual and group), employment mediation, as well as the inclusion of unemployed persons in active employment policy measures, in accordance with the identified needs of the person. The active employment policy measures in which a person will be included primarily depend on his or her needs for assistance as well as the needs of the labour market on the other hand, and are determined by the individual employment plan. All activities and measures implemented by the National Employment Service are aimed at providing intensive support for faster entry into the labour market and employment.

Provision on non-punishment

In line with the recommendation in which GRETA welcomes the distribution of guidelines on the application of the principle of non-punishment and the training provided to competent authorities, and considers that it is necessary for the Serbian authorities to make additional efforts and ensure that all

authorities involved in the investigation and prosecution of potential cases of trafficking in human beings, including misdemeanour judges, receive the necessary training in order to ensure the consistent application of the principle of non-punishment to all victims of trafficking in human beings (paragraph 118), we point out that the second edition of the publication “Legal framework and recommendations for the application of the principle of non-punishment of victims of trafficking in human beings” was published in the second half of 2024, which was aligned with changes to the Constitution and criminal and misdemeanour legislation, supplemented by sections relating to misdemeanour proceedings, information from new sources and practical examples of the application of the principle of non-punishment.

Following the publication, four seminars were held for judges and public prosecutors, with a special emphasis on the participation of misdemeanour judges, taking into account the expressed interest and practical problems in applying this principle in misdemeanour proceedings.

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2024 to 2026 provides for continuous training for public prosecutors, police officers and judges (misdemeanour, basic and High Courts) on the application of the principle of non-punishment of victims of trafficking in human beings (Article 26 of the CoE Convention).

Specialised bodies and coordinating bodies

In line with the recommendation that the Serbian authorities ensure the inclusion of civil society organisations in all multidisciplinary teams for combating trafficking in human beings (paragraph 141), we note that the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings held a series of consultative meetings with civil society organisations (ASTRA, Atina, Group 484, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and others) in the reporting period regarding problem solving in specific cases.

By resolution of the Minister of the Interior, a Working Group for the Development of a New Planning Document in the Field of Combating Human Trafficking and a Working Group for the Development of a Draft Law in the Field of Combating Human Poisoning were established. The work of both working groups included civil society organisations selected within the framework of a public call conducted by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior.

Representatives of the National Rapporteur actively participated in the consultative meeting organised by the associations Astra and Group 484.

The consultative meeting was dedicated to key current issues in the field of human trafficking and the interdependence between the anti-trafficking and migration systems.

In the First Report, the National Rapporteur made recommendations to the competent authorities that

- It is necessary to continue the active inclusion of relevant associations in the institutional framework in the field of human trafficking, in order to ensure the sustainability of support services for victims of human trafficking.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Bearing in mind that GRETA welcomes the participation of the Serbian authorities in international cooperation and calls on them to continue their work in this regard, and that the positive use and benefits of using Eurojust and cooperation through Interpol and Europol should be included in the training of police officers, prosecutors and judges (paragraph 150), we point out the following:

Regarding the first one, you can put the following: In accordance with the priorities of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia, which relate to the fight against organised crime through strengthening operational police cooperation with EUROPOL, police officers of the Criminal Police Directorate, the Service for Combating Organised Crime, the Department for Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling, since February 2024, at the invitation of EUROPOL's analytical project PHENIX, have been participating in one operational working group aimed at dismantling criminal groups from Latin American countries, which, through forced prostitution, exploit citizens of Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela in the EU and the Western Balkans using highly sophisticated methods for advertising prostitution and recruiting victims of human trafficking. During the work in the OTF, dozens of pieces of information of importance for detecting criminal activities were exchanged. By taking adequate measures and actions guided by proactive techniques, during the work of the OTF, several female citizens from Latin America were identified as potential victims of human trafficking, who were taken over by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking. Work in this OTF is ongoing.

On 23 January 2018, the Minister of the Interior approved the Plan and Programme of the Course for the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, which, among other things, in the teaching unit entitled "operational criminal proceedings" addresses several topics on the importance of establishing and exchanging information through international cooperation. The aforementioned teaching unit also allows participants to gain knowledge about the importance of establishing and working in Joint Investigation Teams. Among other things, in September 2024, training was held for police officers in accordance with the Programme of the Course for the Detection, Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, in which 4 members of the criminal police were engaged as lecturers. In addition to the above, police officers of the Ministry of the Interior, criminal police officers, were enabled to attend special training courses related to joint investigation teams organised by EUROPOL and CEPOL. We highlight the two most significant ones: the Western Balkans Criminal Justice Project (WBCJ), under the auspices of CEPOL, training of joint investigation teams (JIT), in 2024 in The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the workshop for the development of a manual for the implementation of joint action days (JAD Handbook), also in 2024, in Warsaw, Poland.

In the period from 1 June 2023 until 1 June 2025, a total of 25 cases of international legal assistance were registered for the criminal offence of Trafficking in Human Beings, of which:

Output requests: 8

- Extraditions: one case (request submitted to the Republic of Italy) – unsuccessful;
- International arrest warrants issued: four cases – two arrest warrants suspended, two active;
- Taking over criminal prosecution: one case (letter of request to the Slovak Republic) – unsuccessful;
- Other types of international legal assistance: two cases:
- 1 letter of request to the Republic of Austria for the service of documents – granted;
- 1 letter of request to Switzerland for the provision of evidence – in progress;

Input requests: 17

- Extraditions: two cases
- request from Montenegro – granted
- request from Hungary – in progress;
- Taking over criminal prosecution: 1 – letter of request from Montenegro – not granted;
- Recognition and enforcement of a foreign court decision: 1 (letter of request from Hungary) – in progress;
- Other types of international legal assistance: 13
- 1 request for a hearing from the Republic of Austria – granted;
- 1 letter of request from the Kingdom of Belgium for the service of documents – granted;
- 1 letter of request from the Slovak Republic for the service of documents – granted;
- 2 letters of request from the Republic of Slovenia for hearing – granted;
- 1 request from the Republic of Turkey for the delivery of information – granted;
- 1 letter of request from Montenegro for the delivery of documents – not granted;
- 1 letter of request from Switzerland for the delivery of documents – granted;
- 1 letter of request from Switzerland for the use of data obtained during surveillance in the Serbian territory in criminal proceedings in Switzerland – granted;
- 1 letter of request from Switzerland for the provision of information on conviction and obtaining the verdict – partially granted;
- 1 request from the Kingdom of Spain for the provision of data – granted;
- 1 letter of request from the Federal Republic of Germany for the delivery of documents – in progress, and
- 1 letter of request from the Republic of Austria – request from the competent authorities of the Republic of Austria submitted through INTERPOL Belgrade for the provision of information – in progress.

We would like to point out that the Ministry of the Interior is currently in the negotiation phase for the following agreements:

- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina on cooperation in the field of combating trafficking in human beings;
- Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on cooperation in the field of combating trafficking in human beings and child abuse;
- Protocol between the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia and the General Secretariat of the Government of Montenegro – Office for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings on cooperation in the fight against trafficking in human beings;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of Montenegro on cooperation in the field of combating trafficking in human beings.

The Ministry of the Interior also participates in the work of the Network of National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of South-East Europe (“Brdo Process”). A delegation of the Ministry of the Interior participated in the 13th informal meeting, from 27 to 28 March 2025 in Brdo pri Kranju, Republic of Slovenia. In the joint declaration that was adopted, the Ministers of the Interior and representatives of the “Brdo Process” countries expressed support for improving regional cooperation in the fight against terrorist threats and highlighted the key role of the Network of National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of South-East Europe in the fight against irregular migration.

Representatives of the National Rapporteur participated in the 24th Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Human Beings, held in Vienna, Austria. Representatives of the National Rapporteur

participated in the 24th Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Human Beings, held in Vienna, Austria. The Ombudsman's Advisor on Trafficking in Human Beings participated in the panel "From Vulnerability to Innovation: Addressing the Risks of Child Trafficking" and gave a presentation dedicated to innovative responses to the risks of child trafficking with a focus on the institutional analysis of the maturity of the system of the Republic of Serbia in understanding contemporary challenges.

The National Rapporteur held meetings with the National Rapporteurs and equivalent mechanisms of the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Italy and the Republic of Armenia, during which experiences in monitoring cases of trafficking in human beings were exchanged and steps to strengthen bilateral cooperation were agreed.

During the reporting period, meetings were continuously held with representatives of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the Republic of Serbia, the Council of Europe Office in the Republic of Serbia, the US Embassy and a representative of the Office of the United States Secretary of State's Office for Combating Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office).

Procedures for achieving access to justice and legal protection adapted to children

In line with the recommendation that measures should be taken to ensure that all professionals working with children, including lawyers, prosecutors and judges, receive the necessary interdisciplinary training on the rights and special needs of children, and that interviews with child victims of trafficking are conducted in child-friendly premises (paragraph 159), we point out the following:

In 2024, ten trainings were implemented on Implementation of trainings for police officers and public prosecutors – contact persons for handling cases of human trafficking for the implementation of the Council of Europe guidelines "Interviewing children who are victims of exploitation and trafficking in human beings and children at risk".

85 judges, eight public prosecutors, 86 judicial assistants, 69 public prosecutor assistants and 153 police officers were trained.

From April to December 2024, based on the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Training and Professional Development of Police Officers of the Ministry of the Interior for the Implementation of the Law on Juvenile Perpetrators of Criminal Offences and Criminal Legal Protection of Minors, eight training courses were conducted for 240 police officers from organisational units at the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior, police departments and the Secondary School of the Interior, who were awarded certificates for dealing with minors by the Judicial Academy.

The role of the economy

In accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2024 to 2026, a roundtable for public prosecutors and police officers on dealing with cases of trafficking in human beings was held in June 2025, with a special focus on the criminal liability of legal entities. The roundtable will serve as a platform for exchange between practitioners from different institutions, primarily contact points from the police and prosecutors' offices responsible for combating trafficking in human beings. The focus will also be on sharing EU practices regarding the liability of legal entities for criminal offences, as well as insight into existing national practices — to the extent that they currently exist — given the limited case law in this

area in the Western Balkans region. Representatives of trade unions, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Serbian Employers' Union also participated in the roundtable.

Measures to detect and prevent corruption

In line with the recommendation that the Serbian authorities should ensure a thorough and independent investigation of all cases concerning the alleged involvement of state officials in human trafficking. Furthermore, the authorities should introduce measures to combat corruption in the context of human trafficking into general anti-corruption policies and effectively implement them (paragraph 167), we point out that by the final judgment of the Court of Appeal in Kragujevac of 11 April 2023., partially accepting the appeal of the Higher Public Prosecutor in Jagodina and the defence counsel of the defendant, the judgment of the High Court in Jagodina was reversed and the defendant, otherwise a police officer, was found guilty of the criminal offence of Trafficking in Human Beings under Article 388, paragraph 3, in conjunction with paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code and sentenced to 5 (five) years of imprisonment.

Additional topics specifically related to Serbia

News in the legal, institutional and policy framework for combating human trafficking

In accordance with the recommendation regarding the need for the Serbian state authorities to take steps and improve coordination in the fight against trafficking in human beings, including by increasing the frequency of meetings of the Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (paragraph 17), we point out that by the Government Decision of 20 July 2023, the Council for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was established in a new convocation, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, while the members of the Council are the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of European Integration. At the Council meeting held on 25 December 2023, with the aim of improving the operational, institutional and strategic capacities for the systemic response of society to the problem of human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia, the Council adopted a proposal for measures related to the development and adoption of a new planning document in the field of combating human trafficking with an accompanying action plan in order to improve the system of prevention, assistance and protection of victims and the suppression of human trafficking and a comprehensive continuous response of society to the problem of human trafficking and the development of a law in the field of combating human trafficking whose aim is to regulate this area in a systematic and unified manner, among other things, the organisation and actions of state bodies and organisations, institutions and civil society organisations for the purpose of effectively combating human trafficking, as well as to ensure timely and effective identification, support and protection of victims of human trafficking.

The new Council for Combating Human Trafficking was formed on 21 November 2024, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, while the members of the Council are the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Minister of Health, the Minister of European Integration and the Minister of Education.

In 2025, the Ministry of the Interior initiated the procedure to form a new Council for Combating Human Trafficking.

By the Government Resolution of 6 September 2023, the National Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking was appointed, who is also the head of the Office for Coordination of Activities in Combating Human Trafficking.

During the reporting period, two meetings of the Special Working Group for the Implementation, Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia were held. At the second meeting, the Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for 2024 was analysed and adopted by the members of the Special Working Group.

Also, in accordance with the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2024 to 2029, a workshop was held in December 2024, within the framework of the multi-donor regional project "EU Support to Strengthening the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans (EU4FAST)" on "Establishing a Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism between the Local and National Levels in the Fight against Human Trafficking". Members of local anti-trafficking teams from 17 cities participated in the workshop. The goal of the workshop was to develop a Communication Plan between the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and local anti-trafficking teams.

Preventing child trafficking

In line with the recommendation that the Serbian authorities should continue to sensitize and train child protection professionals, teachers, Roma health mediators (see paragraph 193), police officers and prosecutors on the vulnerability of children to trafficking, with particular reference to children from the Roma community (paragraph 177), we point out the following:

The Ministry of Education has been intensively undertaking a number of activities in recent years to empower employees in the education system to prevent and combat human trafficking. Following the revised list of indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking for the education system and the development of a guide for their implementation in cooperation with the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade, during 2021/2022, the Ministry of Education continued with activities related to raising awareness among employees in the education system about dealing with human trafficking, i.e., children and young people, in accordance with the revised indicators. In accordance with the GRETA recommendations from 2023, the Ministry of Education continued to implement training for employees in the education system in order to empower them to apply the list of preliminary indicators and implement preventive activities with students.

At the beginning of 2024, in cooperation with the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade, within the framework of the project "Strengthening the fight against trafficking in human beings in Serbia" (2023-2026), the third training for 26 external advisors for protection against violence from 17 school administrations (organisational units of the Ministry of Education) was implemented in April 2024. Upon completion of the training, employees within their school administrations, and in cooperation with external advisors (50 external advisors) who attended the training in the previous phase, were tasked with implementing activities with employees in schools from their territories in order to implement the training content and present indicators.

In order to empower employees to early identify risk factors in students that may lead to human trafficking and to act in situations of suspicion or knowledge of the potential involvement of students in the trafficking chain, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Training and the financial support of the European Commission (IPA III programme), implemented 10 distance learning training courses attended by a total of 1,200 participants. The training was also created with the aim of continuing the implementation in schools of the revised List of Indicators for the Preliminary Identification of Students Who Are Potential Victims of Human Trafficking for the Education System. During the training, employees had the

opportunity to learn about the complexity of the phenomenon of human trafficking, to apply indicators through descriptions of situations of human trafficking, i.e., child trafficking, as well as to plan preventive activities that they would implement in their schools with students.

Examples of good practice are available to employees at https://remis.rs/dobre_prakse/3311/. Part of the training content specifically addresses risk factors/vulnerability factors and sensitive social groups, such as migrants, who may be at greater risk of becoming victims of human trafficking.

Within the same project, and in order to provide additional support to employees in the education system for the implementation of the list of indicators, an additional mechanism, an application, was developed – https://indikatori.prosveta.gov.rs/.

Through the application, school employees, after marking the indicators identified in the students, the programme as a result, in accordance with the number of identified indicators in relation to the entire list, at the very end of the assessment, provides clear guidelines to employees for further measures and activities within the school and directs employees to which competent systems they can contact – the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, the competent social welfare centre, the police, the prosecutor's office.

In addition to the above activities, since the very beginning of the work of the National Platform "I Protect You" (the Platform was established by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2021 with the aim of strengthening intersectoral cooperation between competent institutions in protecting children from all forms of violence), the Ministry of Education has continuously participated in the creation of the information and educational part of the platform and training content for employees, parents and students in the field of prevention of various forms of violence (including human trafficking, i.e., children) and discrimination. Currently, the Platform has 22 training courses, and more than 400 information and educational content has been published, which are available to the general public, in the field of prevention of various forms of violence, discrimination and risky behaviour of children, ways of providing support to children and ways of reacting in situations when a certain situation of violence/discrimination occurs – https://cuvamte.gov.rs/

Since May 2023, citizens have been able to report any form of violence involving children through the Platform.

During 2024, two new training courses were created and are available on the National Platform for Students and Parents, which specifically relate to the topic of human trafficking - prevention and action in situations of suspicion or knowledge of human trafficking. In cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, training courses were created for students and parents aimed at raising awareness of the complexity of the phenomenon of human trafficking, its forms, risk factors and methods of protection. The training for students – "Human Trafficking – Prevention, Recognition, Reporting and Support" was attended by 458 students by March 2025, and the training for parents – "Human Trafficking – Prevention, Recognition, Support" was attended by 3,336 parents.

The employee training, which was created during 2023 - "The Role of Educational Institutions in Combating Human Trafficking" was attended by 17,781 employees by March 2025.

In parallel with the aforementioned activities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, employees in the education system are intensively participating in the initiated intersectoral trainings that are implemented with the aim of preventing and stopping human trafficking – "Recognising Cases of Human

Trafficking and Supporting Victims". The implementation of a series of 25 trainings has begun (beginning of 2025) and by May 2025, seven trainings were implemented in several cities in Serbia, in which nearly 80 employees, professional associates from primary and secondary schools and representatives of school administrations participated. Employees in the education system will participate in the next trainings that will be implemented.

In addition to the above activities, the Ministry of Education has additionally taken systemic measures to respond promptly and report suspicions of human trafficking, and within the framework of the latest amendments to the Rulebook on the Protocol of Action in Institutions in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 11/2024), it specified the actions of employees in the education system and the obligation to implement the list of indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking and the guidelines for action defined within the aforementioned list.

Social and economic initiatives for vulnerable groups in terms of human trafficking

In line with the recommendation that the Serbian authorities should increasingly involve health mediators in the prevention and detection of human trafficking in the Roma community by providing them with training on this topic (paragraph 197), the Ministry of Health, in partnership with the National Council of the Roma National Minority, organised training for 25 health mediators employed in the territories of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Smederevo and Požarevac. The health mediators received information during the training on organising health and educational work and educating Roma families about healthy lifestyles and improving hygienic and epidemiological conditions in settlements, as well as providing a healthy environment for newborns, but also in the areas of reproductive health, protection from unwanted pregnancies, health promotion measures, risky behaviour and domestic violence.

There are currently 84 health mediators (one mediator has been employed as a nurse in the health system). In order to include them in the prevention and detection of human trafficking in the Roma community, after the publication of the Protocol for the Treatment of Victims of Human Trafficking by the Health Care System, appropriate training will be organised for all health mediators.

In relation to the recommendation that the Serbian authorities should take additional measures to strengthen the prevention of trafficking in human beings through social, economic and other measures aimed at vulnerable groups, including members of the Roma community, migrants and asylum seekers (paragraph 198), we point out the following:

The right to education is not only a right, but also a soft measure that enables the enjoyment of all other rights, but is also a kind of prevention of risky behaviour. Education brings sustainable social inclusion and breaks the cycle of poverty, which is why the Ministry of Education is actively improving access to and quality of education for all children, with a focus on vulnerable social groups, such as children and students from the Roma national minority and migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

During 2024, continuous support measures for children and students of Roma nationality continued:

- Affirmative enrolment in preschool, as well as in primary school, is provided to children of Roma nationality who do not have the necessary documents.
- Affirmative action measures for the enrolment of Roma students in secondary schools are defined by a by-law; for the 2024/25 school year, this measure was used by 2,502 Roma students; so far, over 23,000 students have used this support measure.

- - Scholarships as a measure of support for pre-university education of Roma – In the 2023/2024 school year, 1,084 student scholarships were approved, 59% of which were girls (447 m, 636 f), in the 2024/25 school year, 1,097 were approved. In the last nine school years, a total of 9,834 scholarships were awarded to Roma students, of whom 65% were girls. For the last six years, a special competition has been announced, within the general competition for student scholarships and loans, which is intended for members of the Roma national minority.
- Pedagogical assistant (PA) as a support measure – A total of 281 PAs have been hired so far (financed from the local and national levels), 239 in primary schools, 10 in secondary schools, 32 pedagogical assistants in preschool institutions. The PA network is expanding every school year, and 11 new PAs have been hired for the 2024/25 school year. All PAs have been provided with free distance learning (financed from the budget of the Ministry of Education). PAs have been provided with laptops to support their field work, as well as computers for the schools in which they are hired.
- The free textbook programme as a support measure – is intended for primary school students from socially/materially disadvantaged families (recipients of cash social assistance), students with developmental disabilities and disabilities, primary school students who are the third or every subsequent child born in the family in the system. For each school year, an average of 16.5-18% of students are covered by the free textbook program. Our assessment is that a large part of Roma families, that is, students, are covered by this support measure, given the non-obligatory declaration on an ethnic basis, we do not have a precise insight into how many Roma students participate in this measure in percentage.
- Measures to prevent dropout from the education system – The Ministry of Education continues to continuously strengthen the competencies of employees in the education system to work in the field of dropout prevention. Educational institutions continuously apply the early identification and response system in order to prevent dropout from the education system. “Training for planning, implementation and monitoring of measures to prevent student dropout”, which is accredited as a training programme of public interest and planned by the budget of the Ministry of Education. During 2024, 227 participants from 16 schools were included in the dropout prevention training; in total, 2687 employees from 466 primary and secondary schools attended this programme by the end of 2024. The trainings were financed from the budget.
- Students returned under the Readmission Agreement – During the 2024/25 school year, a total of 43 returnees were enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, 42 students in primary school and 1 student in secondary school, 24 girls and 19 boys. 90% of students who were returned under the Readmission Agreement were enrolled in the appropriate age class. Students returned under the readmission agreement were included in 12 primary schools and one secondary school in the following school administrations: Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Sombor, Zaječar, Čačak, Kraljevo, as well as in schools on the territory of the Novi Pazar Group for Professional Pedagogical Supervision. The highest concentration of returnees was recorded on the territory of the Kraljevo, Čačak, Belgrade and Sombor School Administrations. The reason for the decrease in the number of students registered in schools as returnees under the Readmission Agreement is the affirmative action of primary and secondary schools, which continue to apply simplified procedures for the enrolment or re-inclusion in school of students who were absent from classes for a certain period of time during the school year. Schools also engage a team for a preliminary knowledge check, if parents/other legal representatives do not have documentation on the level of inclusion in the education system in the country where they resided, or documentation on the completed level of education. The team assesses the grade in which the student returned under the Readmission Agreement will be included and continue attending regular classes. Additional measures: providing free textbooks, Serbian as a foreign language is included in elective programs and in the Teaching and Learning Plan for primary school, referral to cooperation with local Roma associations and school cooperation on civil society projects, support for the Roma PA.

The Ministry of Education actively participates in the work of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage in Serbia – as part of this initiative, led by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Government

of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, a media campaign was implemented to raise awareness about the harmfulness of traditional practices of child and underage marriages.

We also point out that the Ministry of the Interior, Office for Coordination of Activities in the Fight against Human Trafficking, has established cooperation with the National Council of the Roma National Minority, which was involved in the work of the Working Group for the Draft Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and the Protection of Victims. A plan has also been developed for further work with the Roma population, with the aim of implementing preventive activities in Roma settlements. The activity should be implemented in the coming period.

The education of migrant students in the Republic of Serbia is one of the examples of good practice in Europe. So far, over 5,500 migrant students, asylum seekers and refugees have successively passed through the education system. The inclusion of students takes place in accordance with the Professional Instructions for the Inclusion of Migrant Students in the Regular Education System (2017). The sustainability of the education of this, socially extremely sensitive group, is reflected in the legally enabled simple process of including sensitive social groups in the compulsory primary education system without having the documentation required for enrolment, and with the submission of proof of the child's health examination. Migrants and asylum seekers are enrolled in secondary school on a voluntary basis in those secondary school profiles in which there are places after completing the second round of enrolment or (if they have mastered the Serbian language) after passing the final exam. The sustainability of migrant education is also reflected in the mentoring support implemented by mentors who are external advisors and are already in the education system and who, together with schools, respond to a number of challenges in the process of implementing inclusive practices. Donor support is certainly important, especially for schools where migrant students are educated. Therefore, the Ministry of Education participates in various projects that provide this type of support. To improve the accessibility and quality of education for students from the migrant population, the Ministry of Education has also provided translators of educational materials into the native languages of migrants (Arabic and Ukrainian). As support for schools where migrants are educated, the Ministry of Education has provided non-refundable funds through small grants for the implementation of curricular and extracurricular activities. These non-refundable funds motivate schools to create and implement innovative and inclusive extracurricular and curricular activities during the school year. More than 120 small grants have been provided so far, and 14 small grants will be implemented during the 2023/24 and 2024/25 school years. These grants are an additional motivation for schools to create curricular and extracurricular activities in which all students are included. Students who have found themselves in a situation of forced migration are included in more than 30 primary schools and 21 secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia. During the 2024/25 school year, 145 students from the migrant population were included in the regular education system, or 85-87%: 108 in primary schools (m56/f52); 37 in secondary schools (m25/f12). Students from Ukraine who have status based on the Decision on Provision of Temporary Protection in the Republic of Serbia to Displaced Persons Coming from Ukraine make up 67%, or 97 (50m/47f) students, of the total number of students from the migrant population included. For migrant students who leave Serbia and were part of the education system, a school report (in Serbian and English) is prepared, which contains the level of educational competencies that the migrant student has achieved during his education in Serbia, and which represents a kind of educational passport. During 2024.In 2018, a total of 36 school reports were submitted for students who left Serbia. The Ministry of Education pays special attention to supporting sensitive categories within the migrant population, such as children and minors unaccompanied by parents/other legal representatives. Active work is underway to strengthen the competences of teachers to provide support to migrant students. So far, more than 4,000 teachers and professional associates have been covered by various trainings. In the period from October until December 2024, 15 two-day professional development trainings were implemented for employees on the implementation of the Professional Instructions for the Inclusion of Migrant Students/Asylum Seekers in the Education System and the Development of a Support Plan and Didactic Materials for Working with Migrant Students. The trainings covered 400 participants. Good practice and materials are available on the websites of the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Training https://zuov.gov.rs/plana-podrske-

didakticki-materijal-migranti/ and of REMIS. With the aim of improving the competences of teachers in implementing the curriculum for the elective programme Serbian as a foreign language, four trainings were implemented with a total of 130 participants. So far, more than 700 teachers have improved their knowledge and skills in the field of Serbian as a foreign language. Materials with examples of good practice are available at: Serbian as a foreign language | Institute for the Advancement of Education and Training and REMIS.

Examples of the involvement of students from the migrant population in extracurricular activities in schools:
https://www.facebook.com/peta.vranje/posts/pfbid025pY3T3yojXuXzDfrQR76V5iXAwcPbaMgpc21XQhkuQ7AspxQM4AXYRSjRLerdMKxl
https://hl.rs/cula-projektova-cinnost/
https://media.rtv.rs/ostalo/ukrajinska-panorama/97258
https://www.rtv.rs/sr_ci/vojvodina/novi-sad/obelezen-medjunarodni-dan-ljudskih-prava-u-os-jovan-popovic_1591457.html
Link to the announcement of the “Sava Šumanović” High School
REMIS.

Promotion of democratic culture in schools

Promoting democratic culture in the formal education system and implementing the Council of Europe Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture – CEFC, out of twenty competences for democratic culture, creates a safe and engaging school environment, while strengthening the competences of education staff to eliminate violent, discriminatory and anti-democratic structures in the school and school environment, improving the ethos in the school and providing support to students. These school activities significantly contribute to promoting a multicultural, multilingual and intercultural perspective in education. With the aim of supporting changes in education policies at the system level, a package of materials in this area has been created https://prosveta.gov.rs/kategorija/publikacije/, such as the Guide for Promoting Democratic Culture in Schools, the Handbook with Examples of Good Practice in the Application of Competences, and Developing Competences for Democratic Culture in the Digital Age. The education system has engaged 20 external advisors for the implementation of the ROKDK in schools, and more than 1,200 teachers and professional associates have improved their knowledge and skills for the implementation of the ROKDK in schools in the last two years. In cooperation with the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Education, 36 mentor schools were selected to foster democratic culture in schools within the EU/CoE project “Quality Education for All”. Visits and trainings were held for about 150 new schools on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in all school administrations. The mentor schools used guides for mentors and guidelines for new schools for the development of competences for democratic culture. This activity, which started in the 2023/24 school year. year, will continue until the end of 2026, when it is expected that over 800 schools will be included in the programme for developing competences for democratic culture, in accordance with the pan-European Framework of the Council of Europe.

One of the measures to support students from vulnerable social groups is external advisors who contribute to improving the accessibility and quality of education. A total of 41 were engaged for inclusive education, 20 for the implementation of the Framework for Democratic Culture, and 67 for the area of protection from violence. All colleagues participated in the training on the implementation of inclusive education.

The Ministry of Education will continue to invest efforts in raising awareness among employees in the education system about dealing with human trafficking and empowering them to plan preventive activities for students and parents and for early recognition of risk factors and indicators that lead to human trafficking.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration has continuously worked on the social and economic empowerment of vulnerable groups, including internally displaced Roma and Roma returnees under readmission agreements, through various programs to improve living conditions and reintegration, which strengthen them and thus make them more resilient to the risks of human trafficking.

When planning and implementing budget and donor funds, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration takes care to include local self-government units in whose territory a large number of internally displaced persons and returnees live under readmission agreements. Roma belonging to the above categories can apply for all programs for improving living conditions. The local action planning process identifies the best ways to engage the capacities of all social actors in the community to address challenges.

In order to raise public awareness about the dangers and measures for victims of human trafficking, the Commissariat continued to provide support to local self-government units in the development of Local Action Plans (LAPs), through which the local self-government determines the situation, problems and needs of various categories of migrants located on its territory, in order to improve their position.

When revising existing and developing new LAPs, local self-government units included victims of human trafficking as a special category for which a needs assessment should be conducted and measures developed.

10 local self-government units have included specific objectives related to victims of human trafficking in their local plans in the field of migration, and another 10 local self-government units have recognised victims as one of the vulnerable categories in these plans, but no specific objectives and measures have been defined for them. Four municipalities responded to the public call of the Commissariat for the allocation of funds for building the capacity of local self-government units through the implementation of workshops, training, improving information and other activities of importance for the migrant population: Šid, Kragujevac, Kikinda and Vranje. The end beneficiaries are employees in local institutions (Kikinda), returnees after readmission (Kragujevac), beneficiaries of the asylum centre (Vranje) and migrants in transit (Šid).

Specialised sessions and educational workshops were regularly held in asylum and reception centres to inform users about how to recognise and protect themselves from human trafficking and other risks, and workers were empowered through the training they attended to identify potential victims and enable prevention.

Identification of victims of human trafficking

In line with the recommendation that the Serbian authorities should take additional steps to ensure that all victims of trafficking in human beings are identified and can benefit from the assistance and protection measures contained in the Convention, in particular by encouraging police officers, social workers, asylum officers and other relevant actors to adopt a more proactive approach and increase fieldwork to identify victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of various forms of exploitation, we point out that the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings has an increasing number of cases detected through proactive work from year to year. Mainly through work on other cases, information about other victims is obtained, but also through monitoring media reports and through holding forums and education sessions, where cases of trafficking in human beings are recognised. During 2024, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking had the highest number of cases it discovered on its own, through proactive work, since the institution was founded – as many as 21, which represents an increase of as much as 75% compared to the previous year and shows the result of the Centre’s efforts to be as proactive as possible.

A more proactive approach was achieved through intensive cooperation between the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration and the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as by enabling unhindered access to the centres by representatives of specialised civil society organisations who, through fieldwork and direct work with beneficiaries, work on identification, empowerment and provision of specialised support. Cooperation in the field of trafficking in human beings was achieved with all competent institutions, UN organisations (IOM, OECD) and specialised civil society organisations (ATINA, Group 484, CRPC, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights). Cooperation with GIZ was also expanded and improved, and within the framework of the EU4FAST project related to trafficking in human beings, through which the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights carried out its activities in the centres managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

The multidisciplinary approach applied in the implementation of training in the reporting period also contributed to a more proactive approach of all stakeholders and more efficient support to beneficiaries.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration organises thematic info sessions in all asylum and reception centres, independently or in cooperation with other competent authorities, international organisations and specialised civil society organisations, which are intended to inform users. The Commissariat also provides translators for the most widely used languages (Arabic, Farsi and Pashto), in order to provide users with translation in a language they understand. If necessary, translators are also engaged in cooperation with international and non-governmental organisations.

Specialised sessions and educational workshops are regularly held in asylum and reception centres to inform users as an identification measure aimed at the users themselves – how to recognise and protect themselves from human trafficking and other risks, and are conducted by specialised civil society organisations.

During 2023, 105 workshops were held in centres managed by the Commissariat in cooperation with the ATINA organisation, attended by 324 participants from the migrant population, of whom 298 were adults and 26 were minors.

During 2024, the Commissariat provided educational activities in cooperation with the Citizens' Association "Atina" and the Red Cross Palilula at the Krnjača Asylum Centre and the Dimitrovgrad and Bujanovac Reception Centres, where the families were staying. The activities were carried out through workshops aimed at empowering women and girls to recognise and report various situations, including human trafficking, as well as to familiarize themselves with the risks that may arise when accessing the labour market and labour exploitation. A total of 97 workshops were held, 44 workshops at the Krnjača Asylum Centre, five workshops at the Dimitrovgrad Reception Centre, and 48 workshops at the Bujanovac Reception Centre. A total of 295 migrants in various statuses (asylum seekers and irregular migrants) were included in the workshops, of which 276 were adults and 19 were minors.

During the first six months of 2025, 46 workshops were conducted, 23 of which were at the Krnjača Asylum Centre and 23 at the Bujanovac Reception Centre.

In accordance with the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is continuously working on the identification of persons who are provided with reception guarantees. By the mandatory instruction of the Commissioner for Procedures in Asylum Centres of 7 December 2023, the vulnerability identification tool developed by the European Union Agency for Asylum is applied in asylum centres.

In order to standardise procedures, the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) application for identifying vulnerable categories is used in daily work. One of these categories is victims of human trafficking, so the application contains 47 indicators sensitive to victims of human trafficking (physical, psychological and environmental indicators). By mandatory instruction of the Commissioner for Procedures in Asylum Centres, when accepting a person into asylum centres, a preliminary identification of vulnerability is carried out using this tool, and the results are an integral part of the personal file of each asylum seeker.

Reception officers of the Commissariat are continuously trained in the centres in cooperation with relevant international and civil society organisations in the areas of protection, work and treatment of vulnerable categories of migrants, identification of potential victims of human trafficking, gender-based violence, etc. in order to provide adequate support to migrants and prevent various forms of violence. All cases of suspicion are immediately referred to the competent services in accordance with standard operating procedures.

The standard operating procedures for human trafficking are included in the basic mandatory training: Procedures for employees in asylum centres and other facilities intended for the accommodation of asylum seekers, which the Commissariat conducts for all employees. Since April 2023, 69 people have completed this course, and in 2024, 50 employees, and in the first six months of 2025, 14 newly hired people.

During 2023, 2 specialised trainings on human trafficking were held: “Practitioners in the fight against VHR and human trafficking with a special focus on migration” for 8 employees was conducted by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking in cooperation with the ATINA organisation, “Use of indicators for preliminary identification and support to persons at risk” for 7 employees and was conducted by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking with the support of the International Organisation for Migration, and the implementation of this training continued during 2024. In the period from January until December 2024, 57 employees of the Commissariat underwent three trainings that included identifying potential victims of human trafficking and dealing with them in the context of reception in asylum centres and reception centres:

- the need for indicators for preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking and providing support to persons at risk – training provider: Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking. A total of 35 employees attended the training.
- Reception of vulnerable categories: identification of vulnerabilities and provision of basic support – training provider: EU Asylum Agency. A total of 21 employees attended the training.
- Persons with special needs and unaccompanied minors in reception and asylum procedures – training provider: EU Asylum Agency. One employee attended the training.

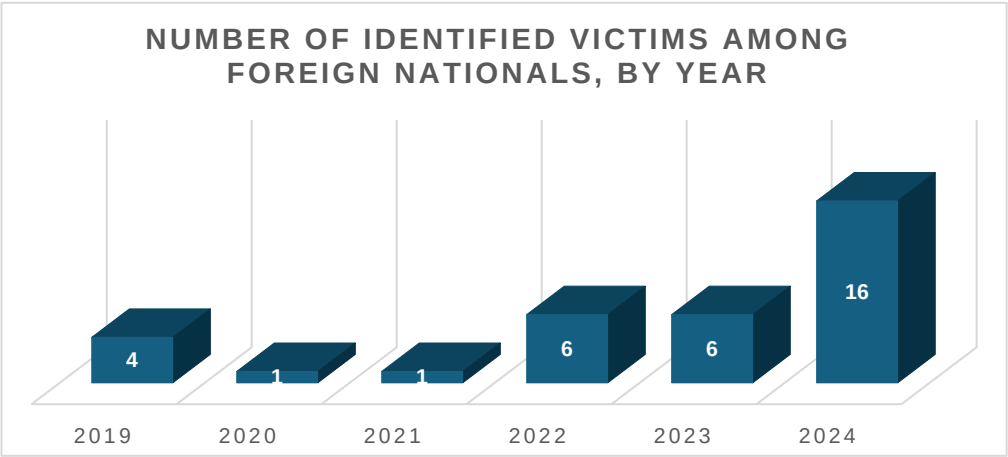
During 2025, 18 employees working in asylum centres and developing procedures and reporting underwent training entitled: “Fighting Human Trafficking” conducted by the National Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, the Ombudsman as the National Rapporteur in Combating Human Trafficking, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, the Centre for Crisis Policy and Response, with the support of the GIZ organisation and the EU4FAST project. In 2025, a workshop was also held with the aim of improving skills for timely identification of potential victims of human trafficking in cooperation with the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking and the International Organisation for Migration for employees of the Commissariat with the aim of better mastering the necessary techniques and skills that would clearly distinguish the suspicion of the crime of human trafficking.

The largest number of reports to the Centre in 2024 came from the civilian sector, which represents a change from previous years when the most common source of reports was the Ministry of the Interior.

It is particularly noteworthy that the Centre also receives applications from organisations that did not previously participate in preliminary identification, but with which the Centre previously intensified cooperation and whose members have undergone training at the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking. During 2023 and 2024, the Centre held several trainings for representatives of various citizens' associations, in cooperation with citizens' association "Atina", Church World Service, UNHCR, and the Centre's cooperation with the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights was also intensified, with which various activities were implemented, such as visits to migrant centres and joint meetings, which also resulted in a large number of referrals. Citizens' associations submitted a total of 54 applications in the reporting period, which is over three times more than in the previous year. Most often, these are organisations that are present on the ground and work with migrants, so this intensification of cooperation has also led to a significant increase in the number of identified persons from mixed migration.

In 2024, the Centre signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Atina Association, which specified the method of joint work on cases, including the identification process and the method of referral. The Centre has been cooperating intensively with the Atina Association for more than a decade and efforts are being made to ensure that their programs are complementary, in order to jointly provide comprehensive support to beneficiaries. This applies in particular to accommodation services, given that the Centre provides accommodation in a shelter, and Atina provides a supported housing service. As they imply different intensities of support, they complement each other well, so that female beneficiaries of the Shelter can move to Atina's accommodation after they reach a certain level of recovery and empowerment and work more on integration, as well as female beneficiaries of Atina's accommodation can come to the Shelter in crisis situations, when they need a more intensive form of support.

Chart: Number of identified foreign nationals by year



The number of identified victims among migrants has been increasing for years. In 2024, the Centre identified a significantly higher number of victims from mixed migration. The number of identified foreign nationals is 167% higher than in the previous year.

The number of reports of suspected exploitation of foreign nationals is increasing, which is a consequence of numerous activities that the Centre has carried out in previous years to improve preliminary identification, such as training, expert meetings, but also an application developed for this purpose.

During 2024, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, with the support of the International Organisation for Migration, developed an application for the preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking. In the first phase, the application will be intended for employees in social protection and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, while the user group will be able to expand

later. A significant segment of this application relates to the identification of victims among foreign citizens and the Centre sought to present it primarily to professionals working with migrants.

Users of the application, which is available on Google Play and can be used on mobile phones, computers and similar devices, can use officially adopted indicators for preliminary identification, which are divided into two lists – for children and adults, which are gender and culturally sensitive and cover all forms of exploitation. When they check the indicators, they have noticed, they receive a notification informing them of the level of risk of human trafficking and brief instructions on how to proceed. They can then send a report to the Centre's software through the application, as well as later monitor the Centre's actions on the report and receive feedback from experts from the Centre.

In the previous period, the Centre held several trainings on recognising cases of human trafficking among foreign citizens:

During 2023, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking conducted four trainings on "The Role of Social Welfare Centres in Preliminary Identification and Support for Victims of Human Trafficking", which were attended by 100 professional workers in the field of social welfare. The organisation of these trainings, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, began at the end of 2021 and so far, 12 trainings have been implemented for about 300 professionals. Participants gave these trainings an excellent rating (4.9/5) and their effect is best seen in the significant increase in the number of applications from the social welfare system (53% compared to the previous year).

Also, during 2023, in cooperation with the Church World Service organisation, the Centre held 2 trainings "Identification and Protection of Refugees and Migrants Victims of Human Trafficking". One was held in Belgrade, for 12 representatives of non-governmental organisations working with migrants, and the other in Bihać, for 20 representatives of international organisations, domestic non-governmental organisations, social welfare centres and the Aliens Administration. These trainings were also excellently rated by the participants (4.9/5) and the Centre received a request to hold them again.

During 2023, the Centre's experts participated in the implementation of 3 training courses "Practitioners in the fight against human trafficking with a special focus on migration", which were attended by 75 participants from different systems locally, in Belgrade, Bujanovac and Sombor. The trainings were organised by the non-governmental organisation Atina.

In 2024, 8 training sessions were held on "Application of Indicators for Preliminary Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking" for 200 participants – employees of the social welfare system and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

Also, in 2024, 3 trainings on "Recognising Human Trafficking among Migrants and Refugees" were held for 50 participants from international and non-governmental organisations, organised by UNHCR.

In 2024, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking organised, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the United Nations International Organisation for Migration and the German Organisation for International Cooperation, the international conference "Liberalisation of Access to the Labour Market: Potential of Legal Migration and Prevention of the Risk of Precarious Occupations and Human Trafficking". This is the largest and most significant gathering that the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking has organised so far.

Through the exchange of experiences and knowledge of institutional and non-institutional actors, the aim was to highlight systemic challenges and the need to improve the legislative framework, with an emphasis on preventive measures and protection mechanisms. Special attention was paid to the fight against labour exploitation of migrants, as well as to improving cooperation in the region to strengthen a common response to trafficking in human beings.

The conference was attended by over 148 representatives of competent state institutions, prosecutors' offices, courts, independent institutions, international organisations, civil society organisations, researchers and representatives of the academic community from the Western Balkans region, as well as international experts from the United Kingdom, Canada, Ukraine and Bangladesh.

The conference was organised in a hybrid format, with an introductory panel and eight thematic panels with the participation of 50 panellists and moderators.

In 2024, the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education organised a seminar – training "Application of indicators for preliminary identification of students who are potential victims of risk". The seminar was intended for advisors – external collaborators from the education system, with the aim of improving their knowledge and skills in the field of recognising and combating child trafficking. Through presentations and practical exercises, participants had the opportunity to acquire and expand knowledge important for detecting/identifying (potential) victims of human trafficking and children while performing tasks within their competence and referring them to the relevant authority. Participants also had the opportunity to meet key actors and their roles in the field of combating human trafficking (representatives of institutions and civil society organisations dealing with this problem). The workshop promoted multi-sectoral cooperation between various institutions and civil society organisations, as well as a human rights-based approach that takes into account the gender aspects of the problem and the specific needs of child victims of human trafficking. Participants and lecturers at the seminar were representatives of the Ministry of Education, advisors-external associates from the education system from 13 school administrations, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and civil society organisations "ASTRA" and citizens' association "Atina".

In July 2024, a training course "Use of Indicators for Preliminary Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking and Providing Support to Persons at Risk" was held, organised by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, with the support of the International Organisation for Migration and the State Department, as part of the project "Enhancing rights-based and survivor-centred response to TIP".

In 2024, two trainings were implemented for local anti-trafficking teams, consisting of professionals from state institutions (police, prosecutor's office, education, health, etc.), as well as civil society organisations, who may come into contact with victims of human trafficking. The trainings were implemented within the framework of the multi-donor regional project "EU Support to Strengthening the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans (EU4FAST)". The trainings were implemented for local teams from Kragujevac, Smederevo, Kraljevo, Požarevac, Kikinda, Subotica, Sombor, Novi Sad, Sremska Mitrovica and Pančevo.

After the implementation of the training for local teams, a new local team was formed in Zrenjanin and the existing teams in Kraljevo, Subotica, Sombor and Kragujevac were reformed in a new convocation.

In 2025, two trainings were also implemented for local anti-trafficking teams, consisting of professionals from state institutions (police, prosecutor's office, education, health, etc.), as well as civil society

organisations, who may come into contact with victims of human trafficking. The trainings were implemented within the framework of the multi-donor regional project “EU Support to Strengthening the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans (EU4FAST)”. The trainings were implemented for local teams from Zrenjanin, Kragujevac, Smederevo, Kraljevo, Požarevac, Kikinda, Subotica and Pančevo.

In line with the recommendation regarding the provision of sufficient staff and resources to the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings to enable it to conduct timely identification of victims of trafficking in human beings (paragraph 210), we note that at the end of 2023, the Centre received approval and hired 4 new employees. The Coordination Service received 2 more professional workers (compared to the previous 3), and the Shelter received one professional worker and one associate. These changes enabled the Centre to reorganise its working methods in 2024 and introduce a system that enabled a faster and more efficient response.

A special system of 24-hour on-call professional workers at the Centre has been introduced, urgent response to reports, and an alert system for other actors (within 24 hours, the criminal police, the higher public prosecutor's office, for minor victims, and social welfare centres are contacted; in cases of labour exploitation, the labour inspectorate is alerted, and in cases involving migrants, the Administration for Foreign Nationals of the competent police department is also alerted).

The principle of organising a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral meeting for each victim has also been introduced, creating a support network that will consist of all relevant institutions and organisations from the state and non-governmental sectors. A coordination system is also defined so that members of the support network, together with the victim of human trafficking, develop a protection plan. Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the plan is carried out by the Centre, which ensures regular exchange of information and resolution of problems in the implementation of activities.

We would like to point out that in February 2025, the Ministry of Health, with the support of the International Organisation for Migration, presented national indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking for the health system and a manual for the use of the indicators.

We point out that in the First Report, the National Rapporteur made recommendations to the competent authorities that:

- It is necessary to ensure continuous education and specialisation of police officers for working with suspected victims of human trafficking, including regular training in the field of children’s rights and criminal legal protection of minors, in order to ensure more efficient identification of victims and collection of evidence for successful criminal proceedings;
- It is urgently necessary to continue and intensify the professional training of educators for the preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking in the education system;
- It is necessary to provide education for healthcare workers for preliminary identification and recognition of indicators of human trafficking;
- It is necessary to intensify the education of employees in social welfare institutions who work with families and children, in order to improve early identification and prevention of long-term exploitation of victims of human trafficking;
- It is necessary to intensify the proactive actions of labour inspectors in detecting cases of human trafficking.
- It is necessary to involve misdemeanour courts in the preliminary identification of victims of human trafficking and to provide training for judges so that they are able to recognise victims and respond adequately in situations where there are indications of human trafficking;

- It is necessary to ensure regular communication and informing victims of human trafficking about the steps taken against suspects;
- It is necessary to establish networks of translators for rare languages in order to enable the identification and protection of victims of human trafficking and to conduct training for translators in order to raise their awareness of the problem of human trafficking;
- It is necessary to ensure the systematic provision of information to presumed and identified victims of human trafficking regarding their rights, available services and ways in which they can access them, and to ensure the production of information brochures and materials that would increase the availability of specific information.

Period of recovery and reflection

Bearing in mind that GRETA welcomed the inclusion of a provision on a recovery and reflection period in the new Law on Foreign Nationals and considers it necessary for the Serbian authorities to ensure that all presumed victims of trafficking in human beings are offered a statutory recovery and reflection period, as well as all forms of assistance and protection that go with it, in accordance with Article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Convention (paragraph 229), we point out that the development of the relevant legislative and institutional framework has led to the introduction of a recovery and reflection period through the Law on Foreign Nationals, by prescribing provisions relating to the Temporary Residence of a Foreigner Presumed to be a Victim of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Temporary Residence for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.

If, during the procedure for establishing the identity of a foreigner, it is assumed, based on specific indicators, that the foreigner is a victim of human trafficking, the competent state body for the identification and coordination of the protection of victims of human trafficking shall assess the condition and needs of the victim, as well as identify the victim, in accordance with the legal powers in the domain of the registered activity. The competent state body for the identification and coordination of the protection of victims of human trafficking shall notify the Ministry of the Interior of the initiation of the victim identification procedure and inform the foreigner about the conditions for granting temporary residence and other rights.

During the temporary stay, recovery and elimination of possible further influence of the perpetrator of the criminal act on the victim are enabled, as well as the possibility to, based on timely and complete information about their status, independently, without being conditioned to testify, make a decision on further cooperation with the competent state body for the identification and coordination of the protection of victims of human trafficking, the court, the prosecutor's office or the police.

If, during the victim identification procedure, it is determined that a foreigner is a victim of human trafficking and that he or she has made an independent decision to further cooperate with the competent state body for the identification and coordination of the protection of victims of human trafficking, the court, the prosecutor’s office or the police, the competent body for the protection of victims of human trafficking shall notify the Ministry of the Interior of the above in the form of an expert opinion. A foreigner who has been granted temporary residence as a victim of human trafficking has the right to access the labour market, professional development and education.

Residence permits

Bearing in mind that GRETA welcomes the inclusion of a provision on a residence permit based on personal circumstances for victims of trafficking in human beings in the Law on Foreign Nationals and considers it necessary for the Serbian authorities to ensure that victims of trafficking in human beings can fully exercise their right to a renewable residence permit, regardless of their right to seek and enjoy asylum (paragraph

233), we point out that during 2023, no residence permits were granted to foreign nationals presumed to be victims of trafficking in human beings and to victims of trafficking in human beings.

At the end of 2024, there were 7 foreign citizens residing in the Republic of Serbia with an approved temporary residence permit for victims of human trafficking, as prescribed by Article 63 of the Law on Foreign Nationals, namely 5 citizens of Nigeria, of whom 2 are male and 3 are female, and 2 are citizens of the People's Republic of China. Of the above number, 5 Nigerian citizens were first granted a temporary residence permit for a foreigner presumed to be a victim of human trafficking, as prescribed by Article 62 of the Law on Foreign Nationals, and upon expiration, the temporary residence permit was extended pursuant to Article 63 of the Law on Foreign Nationals – for victims of human trafficking.

During 2024, 3 more requests were filed, for which a decision was made to discontinue the proceedings due to the parties withdrawing the requests.

In order to protect this category of particularly vulnerable persons, measures were implemented in 2024 to ensure that grounds for residence, such as temporary residence of a foreigner presumed to be a victim of human trafficking and temporary residence for victims of human trafficking, are not entered on the temporary residence permit card.