



SafeBorders

Country Report

Poland



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1. Introduction

Trafficking in human beings in Poland takes place for several purposes such as prostitution and sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, begging, forced criminality, domestic slavery, child trafficking, and organ trafficking. The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine exacerbated the risks of human trafficking among refugees. Difficulties still exist in identifying victims especially in cross-border contexts despite the efforts of the government for developing the capacity of border guards and establishing a more systemic cooperation system among relevant authorities. NGOs have stepped up and are currently cooperating with the government to tackle the problem.

Current trends indicate that most trafficking cases involve the use of victims for forced labour. In this form of exploitation, women, men and children can be exploited equally. This form of exploitation is therefore much more profitable for criminals than pure sexual exploitation and it is possible that Ukrainian nationals residing in EU countries, most of them in Poland, may fall victims to this form of exploitation in the coming years.

Poland has also seen an increase in the use of new technologies in human trafficking, with the growing use of online platforms and social media to recruit victims. The increase in the trafficking of children is also of concern.

Poland has however taken important steps forward in combatting human trafficking by establishing a multi-dimensional cooperation system among authorities at central and regional level that also include the cooperation with NGOs, developing the capacity of authorities to respond to human trafficking and through legal reform.

In terms of prosecuting perpetrators, international cooperation still needs to be strengthened, especially in the context of the cross-border nature of human trafficking and seek cooperation with countries of origin of the victims. The need to increase the efficiency of prosecutors and judges in the use of modern investigation tools, especially through investigating crime in online platforms is immediate. Perpetrators increasingly use new technologies for recruiting victims and organize human trafficking.

2. Legal and policy framework

2.1. Existing legal and policy framework on child trafficking

In Poland, human trafficking means “the recruitment, transportation, delivery, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person by means of: violence or unlawful threat, abduction, deception, misleading or exploitation of an error or incapacity to properly comprehend the undertaken action, abuse of a relationship of dependence, exploitation of a critical situation or helplessness, offering or accepting a material or personal benefit or its promise to a person having custody or supervision over another person, for the purpose of exploitation, even with the consent of the victim, particularly in prostitution, pornography or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, begging, slavery, or other forms of exploitation degrading to human dignity, or for the harvesting of cells, tissues, or

organs in violation of the law.” If the act concerns a child, it constitutes human trafficking even if none of the above-listed means are used.¹

Polish law does not contain a separate legal term for "child trafficking"; therefore, all provisions concerning human trafficking must also be interpreted in the context of child trafficking. Accordingly, when analyzing the phenomenon of child trafficking, it is based primarily on the provisions of the Polish Penal Code, particularly Article 115 § 22, which provides a general definition of human trafficking. Based on this provision, legal qualification of the act depends on whether the victim is an adult or a child. In the case of a child, the critical element is the intent to exploit, rather than the use of coercive or deceptive means. Thus, for the offense to be established, it is sufficient to prove the purpose of exploitation, regardless of whether the child consented or any of the typical trafficking methods were employed.

Based on this interpretation, child trafficking can be described as the recruitment, transportation, delivery, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, such as in prostitution, pornography, forced labour or services, begging, slavery, or other practices that degrade human dignity, or for the unlawful harvesting of tissues or organs, even if carried out with the child’s consent and without any coercive means.

It is also essential to highlight that Polish law does not require a financial or material transaction to occur for an act to be classified as trafficking. This distinction is crucial when assessing cases involving the exploitation of children. While the term “trafficking” is often colloquially associated with the buying and selling of persons, the legal definition focuses on exploitation rather than transaction. As such, emphasis on proving a literal sale can lead to misclassification and under-identification of trafficking cases.

The Polish Penal Code, under Article 189a § 1, explicitly criminalizes the act of human trafficking and outlines the applicable penalties. Following the amendment introduced by the Act of 7 July 2022, which entered into force on 1 October 2023, the penalties were significantly increased, to a penalty of imprisonment for no less than three years. Under aggravating circumstances, the penalty may extend to 25 years of imprisonment.²

Notably, Polish criminal law does not provide for a higher base penalty when the victim is a child, although the involvement of a child may constitute an aggravating factor during sentencing. The increase in penalties in 2023 reflects a broader trend toward harmonizing Poland’s legal response with international and EU standards on the fight against trafficking in human beings.

Recognizing gaps in the legal framework, the government is pursuing the drafting of a dedicated Act on Counteracting Trafficking in Human Beings, aimed at consolidating and clarifying the existing fragmented legal provisions. An assessment is also underway regarding the potential appointment of a National Rapporteur on Trafficking, in line with international good practices. Meanwhile, legislative reviews will continue to focus on

¹ Article 115 § 22, Act of 6 June 1997 – Penal Code, consolidated text: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19970880553>.

² (Article 189a § 1, as amended by the Act of 7 July 2022, Journal of Laws 2022, item 1600: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19970880553>).

improving mechanisms for victim compensation, criminal justice response, and protection against forced labour.

Poland's efforts to combat human trafficking are grounded in a well-structured national strategy, which continues to evolve in response to shifting challenges both domestically and globally. With the adoption of the National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2025–2027³ (hereinafter the NAP), the Polish government has reaffirmed its commitment to a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to preventing trafficking, prosecuting perpetrators, and protecting victims.

The NAP defines clear objectives. It aims to raise public awareness, enhance the quality and accessibility of victim support, especially for children, improve the effectiveness of criminal justice responses, expand training for professionals, strengthen international cooperation, and enrich data collection and analysis related to trafficking. These goals are addressed through detailed actions organized across multiple areas of intervention, ranging from public education to legislative reform. Evaluation and accountability are built into the structure of the NAP. Each task is assigned specific performance indicators, and implementation is reviewed annually by the Inter-Ministerial Team. These assessments feed into national reports submitted to the Prime Minister and international organizations, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement. The NAP places strong emphasis on international cooperation. Poland's Presidencies of the Council of the European Union and the Council of the Baltic Sea States are viewed as strategic opportunities to advance regional collaboration against trafficking. Poland is also expected to implement the revised EU Directive 2024/1712⁴ and respond to recommendations from the Council of Europe's GRETA, particularly in enhancing victim protection, improving access to compensation, and ensuring adequate legal aid.

Training and capacity-building are a major focus of the NAP. Police officers, border guards, prosecutors, judges, social workers, and consular staff will receive targeted training tailored to their roles in identifying and supporting victims or prosecuting offenders. Additional workshops are aimed at labour inspectors, municipal authorities, school staff, and NGOs. Importantly, the plan emphasizes training for those working directly with foreign nationals, such as staff at asylum centres, consulates, and labour offices, to ensure they can recognize and respond to trafficking indicators. There is also a strong emphasis on equipping employers, particularly in sectors known for exploitation risks, with knowledge about ethical recruitment and due diligence obligations.

The [National Referral Mechanism](#) (hereinafter NRM) was established as a first commitment of Poland to fight human trafficking. It is a comprehensive document laying out the role of stakeholder organisations in Poland in countering human trafficking, identification and support to victims.

³ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2025–2027, Warsaw, April 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/086bb484-3761-4035-b46e-dcb16170f4f2>.

⁴ European Parliament and Council, Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, Official Journal of the European Union, L 1712, 24 June 2024. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1712/oj>.

Use of AI technologies

In recent years, Poland has taken progressive steps toward integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into its national framework to combat human trafficking, particularly in relation to the detection and prosecution of child sexual exploitation crimes. This effort is aligned with broader EU priorities and has been reinforced through international cooperation, notably with Interpol and Europol.

A key area of AI application in Poland is the identification and analysis of Child Sexual Abuse Material. As outlined in the NAP, Polish law enforcement cooperates closely with Interpol's International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database. This global database employs AI-driven hash-matching algorithms to compare newly identified digital content with known CSAM, enabling rapid classification and aiding victim identification efforts. The ICSE system enhances the efficiency of investigative work by flagging previously unknown material for forensic analysis and potentially matching it to known victims or missing children.

The national CSAM reporting platform, Dyżurnet.pl, operated by NASK (Naukowa i Akademicka Sieć Komputerowa), incorporates AI-based mechanisms for handling online reports of illegal content. According to the 2023 Human Trafficking Report by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, this platform utilizes automated tools to triage and categorize thousands of user-submitted incidents involving suspected CSAM and related threats. This prioritization system enables Polish law enforcement agencies to respond more swiftly and allocate resources more effectively to high-priority cases.⁵

AI is also used to monitor digital environments in real-time, including high-risk zones such as the dark web, encrypted chatrooms, and mainstream social media platforms. AI algorithms support the Police and Border Guard in identifying patterns consistent with grooming, online recruitment, or the sale of children. These technologies are trained to recognize linguistic cues, behavioral red flags, and networked interactions that could indicate trafficking operations targeting children. As noted in the 2023 GRETA report⁶ such tools are essential in early detection and disruption of online trafficking chains.

Advanced image recognition and biometric comparison tools are employed to identify victims of trafficking more efficiently. Law enforcement agencies can cross-reference facial features, tattoos, scars, and other identifiers from seized material (e.g., CSAM) against databases of missing persons or previously identified victims. The NAP emphasizes the importance of expanding these capabilities, particularly for identifying underage victims before they are re-victimized or further exploited.

Emerging AI applications in Poland also include predictive modeling to assess the probability of trafficking activities. These models analyze diverse datasets—such as irregular migration flows, unusual visa patterns, prior criminal reports, and digital footprints—to flag individuals or networks that may pose a heightened trafficking risk.

⁵ Same as above.

⁶ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). Evaluation Report on Poland: Third Evaluation Round – Access to Justice and Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Strasbourg, June 2023. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-poland-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-08-a/1680ab7039>

These tools support proactive policing by allowing units such as the Border Guard to focus on cases with the greatest potential threat⁷.

2.2. Effectiveness of the framework

Systemic Strengths and Recent Progress

One of the most prominent institutional achievements has been the establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Team for Counteracting Human Trafficking in September 2023, replacing the previous advisory body. Now functioning under the authority of the Prime Minister, this team has improved inter-ministerial coordination, especially at a time when migration pressures, amplified by the war in Ukraine, have increased vulnerability to trafficking. The National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings (2022–2024) and its successor for 2025–2027 outline coordinated objectives focused on awareness-raising, improving victim support standards, and strengthening international cooperation. Subsequently, Poland has been upgraded to Tier 1 in the 2024 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report⁸, indicating that it now fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. This advancement reflects significant progress in key areas, including increased prosecutions and convictions of traffickers, enhanced funding for victim services and National Action Plan implementation—marking the first increases in eight and six years, respectively.

The U.S. Department of State 2024 report, also highlighted concerns, such as the identification of fewer victims compared to previous years and the lack of a central mechanism to consolidate law enforcement statistics. Additionally, there were concerns about the national system's ability to address the needs of unaccompanied children, who remain vulnerable to trafficking⁹. The GRETA Roundtable held in 2025¹⁰ acknowledged Poland's formal adoption of the new Action Plan and praised its focus on improving access to legal aid, compensation, and trauma-informed support, especially for children.

The 2023 Krajowy Plan Działań Przeciwko Handlowi Ludźmi (hereinafter KPD) (National Action Plan) Implementation Report¹¹ documented wide-ranging training initiatives targeting police, border guards, labour inspectors, and judiciary personnel. These activities aimed to build capacity for victim identification and to improve understanding of trafficking dynamics. In line with these efforts, operational tools were updated, including

⁷ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2025–2027, Warsaw, 2024. p. 18. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/5261cc29-b043-423f-a8b8-cfa540843dd2>

⁸ U.S. Department of State 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

⁹ U.S. Department of State, 2024. The Impact of Trauma on Child Trafficking Survivors. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Available at: <https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-impact-of-trauma-on-child-trafficking-survivors/>

¹⁰ Council of Europe, Round-table discussion on Poland's progress in combating human trafficking, Warsaw, 28 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/-/round-table-discussion-on-poland-s-progress-in-combating-human-trafficking>

¹¹ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Implementation Report of the National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2023, Warsaw, March 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/caa1a072-6791-44eb-8b2a-fb60e89ba386>

the Algorithm for Law Enforcement in Human Trafficking Cases¹² and its dedicated version for child victims, along with the practical handbook National Referral Mechanisms¹³ with overview of practical institutional procedures that focus on identification and protection of human trafficking victims.

Persistent Gaps and Structural Limitations

Despite these advancements, the national anti-trafficking system faces several ongoing challenges that limit its ability to deliver consistent, effective protection, particularly for children. Across all referenced reports, the under-identification of child victims emerges as a critical concern. In 2023, only 11 children were officially recognized among more than a thousand trafficking cases. The KPD Report (2023) points to the difficulty in recognizing indicators of child exploitation, particularly when children appear accompanied by guardians or engaged in informal labour¹⁴. This gap is exacerbated by insufficient child-focused training among front-line workers and limited screening protocols for unaccompanied children and asylum-seeking children. There remains no national, unified mechanism for collecting and analyzing data on human trafficking. Inconsistent methodologies across law enforcement, social services, and judicial bodies hamper the ability to detect trends or evaluate the impact of interventions. The KPD Report (2023) explicitly flags this as a structural weakness that undermines evidence-based policymaking.

While the National Consulting and Intervention Centre (KCIK) and the Ministry of Justice offer legal and psychological aid to victims, services are limited in scope and geographical reach. According to the KPD Report 2023, only 21 victims received comprehensive support from the Ministry in 2023. Specialized child protection services, such as safe housing, trauma care, or reintegration programs, remain scarce, particularly outside major urban centers. In addition, young victims turning 18 often face abrupt termination of support without transitional measures.

Although Poland amended its Penal Code via the Act of 7 July 2022 (in force from 1 October 2023), increasing penalties for trafficking under Article 189a, other legislative gaps persist. Forced labour remains vaguely defined in national law, and there is no standalone legal definition of child trafficking. This absence complicates prosecution and limits alignment with the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive (2011/36/EU) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings¹⁵. Jurisdictional challenges in assigning legal guardians for child victims, especially in emergency medical cases, continue to hinder timely intervention. Moreover, procedural

¹² Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Algorithm of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officers in Case of Revealing a Crime of Trafficking in Human Beings, Warsaw, 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/f403cd82-fa2b-4e47-ade5-bab52f6cb5c9>

¹³ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, Warsaw, 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/3f0a3d89-96c9-42c5-a63c-c172d14f6f2f>

¹⁴ Human Trafficking Report 2023r, Department of Public Order, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Republic of Poland. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2>

¹⁵ Official Journal of the European Union, L 101, 15 April 2011, pp. 1–11. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/36/oj/eng>

delays often prevent rapid referral of children to protective institutions, especially in rural or under-resourced municipalities.

According to the GRETA report, to bridge these gaps, Poland should prioritize:

- A centralized victim identification and data management system,
- Comprehensive legal reform, including codification of forced labour and the legal recognition of child trafficking,
- Expansion and decentralization of child-specific support services, and
- Mandatory child-sensitive training for professionals in policing, health care, education, and judiciary.

3. Institutional landscape

3.1. Public institutions

The following institutions are involved in the NRM, and responsible for shaping public policy and implementing government action on countering human trafficking:

The [Interministerial Team for Counteracting Human Trafficking](#) was established on September 18th 2023, after the Prime Minister signed Order No. 392 for its establishment. The Team is composed of representatives of government bodies, law enforcement agencies, and non-governmental organizations. The tasks of the team include:

- Coordination of the policy relating to combating human trafficking in Poland
- evaluation of the implementation of programmes aimed at combating and preventing trafficking in human beings;
- initiating actions taken to combat and prevent trafficking in human beings;
- preparing draft National Action Plans against Human Trafficking, monitoring the feasibility of planned tasks and preparing annual reports on the implementation of the National Action Plan.

The chairman of the team is the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration, the Deputy Chairman of the Team is the Secretary of State or Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, the scope of activities of which includes cases in the field of combating human trafficking. Two working groups have been established within the Interdepartmental Team:

- working group for monitoring the implementation of National Action Plan
- working group for the support of victims of human trafficking

Additional ad hoc groups are established to perform tasks as indicated in the Action Plan.

The Division for Counteracting Trafficking in Human Beings, Hate Crimes and Supporting Actions in the Department of Public Order of the [Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration](#) is the responsible public body that oversees anti-trafficking policies. Its mandate is:

- maintaining a portal for combatting human trafficking
- maintaining a 24/7 Helpline
- monitoring the progress of the actions implemented within the Action Plan
- providing access to medical and legal assistance, psychosocial support, provision of basic needs items such as food, clothing, personal hygiene items and safe accommodation
- proposing actions for follow-up Action Plans

- monitoring the performance of public administration actions on the support and protection of victims
- running the National Consulting and Intervention Centre for the Victims of Trafficking (KCIK)
- supporting the work of the Anti-Human Trafficking Team and the Working groups
- raising awareness in the area of human trafficking

The [Office for Foreigners](#) is responsible for managing migration in Poland according to government migration policy. Within this scope of work it is responsible for identification of victims of trafficking among foreigners entering Poland. The office can determine whether foreigners seeking international protection in Poland are victims of human trafficking.

The National Police maintains an Anti- Human Trafficking Department in the [Central Investigations Bureau](#) of the National Headquarters and is responsible for investigating trafficking networks. An anti- human trafficking coordinator leads the anti-trafficking efforts in the national headquarters with task forces in regional offices investigating trafficking, child pornography and child sexual abuse. Its role is to combat crime related to human trafficking pedophilia, and child pornography as well as crime against sexual exploitation and harassment. It also supervises and coordinates the work of anti-human trafficking units in the criminal departments of regional police headquarters. Its tasks include detention of traffickers, supervision and coordination, identification and support of the process of identification of victims of human trafficking, participation in international operations, and in particular in joint investigation teams formed to detect human trafficking, non-police cooperation as well as organization and implementation of in-service training for criminal service officers in the field of countering human trafficking. The Department cooperates closely with judiciary authorities, public administration and state audit institutions, non-governmental organization and public service companies. The Department also cooperates with agencies on an international level such as Europol.

The [Polish Border Guard](#) plays a significant role in the fight against human trafficking regarding foreigners entering the country. Border Guards are often the first point of contact with victims and perpetrators and are tasked with identifying victims of trafficking. The Operational and Investigative Board of the National Headquarters of the Border Guard coordinates the performance of projects arising from NAP, as well as substantively supervises the activities of the organisational units of the Border Guard that involve combating and preventing human trafficking in Poland. The Border Guard operates a specialized central team and regional anti-trafficking coordinators and is tasked with monitoring cross-border trafficking. In each Border Guard unit, an anti-human trafficking coordinator is appointed within the Operations and Investigations Department to coordinate efforts and collaborate with relevant units of the Border Guard, the Police, and other institutions involved in combating human trafficking.

The [Children's Rights Ombudsman](#) (Rzecznik Praw Dziecka) protects the rights of children as per the Polish Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Polish Act on the Children's Rights Ombudsman. Specifically, the Ombudsman is responsible for protection the children's right to life and health, upbringing in the family, decent social conditions for development, and the right to education. The Ombudsman addresses government organisations as well as non-governmental organisations. The

office of the Ombudsman maintains a 24-hour Helpline that works both by a dedicated free phone line and online chat service that can be used by children.

At regional level the Provincial (Voivodeship) Teams (Wojewódzkie Zespoły) for Counteracting Trafficking in Human Beings are composed of representatives of various public institutions, law enforcement agencies and NGOs operating at regional level. These teams handle regional implementation and victim assistance, including children. The participation of individual institutions in the Provincial teams is decided by the Voivode. The participating government authorities at regional level are the Police, the Border Guard, the public prosecutor's office, labour inspection offices, local government authorities and local NGOs. The Teams coordinate to prevent and combat human trafficking at regional level.

The Department of Organised Crime and Corruption at the [Public Prosecutor's Office](#) (Prokuratura Krajowa) is responsible for combating human trafficking and coordinating prosecutorial actions in this area. Its core tasks include overseeing and conducting preparatory proceedings in organised and cross-border crime cases, including cybercrime and offences involving advanced technologies. The Department supervises regional offices, participates in court proceedings, and manages investigations into human trafficking, corruption, money laundering, illegal substances, weapons trafficking, and ransom abductions. It collects and analyses data on organised crime, supports international cooperation (including through Eurojust and OLAF), and ensures coordination with other state bodies. Additionally, it prepares legal drafts, oversees selected cases, reports to national authorities, and monitors the work of the prosecutorial service within its remit.

Regarding victim support and protection, the [Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#) is responsible for identification and assistance of victims of trafficking. Specifically, the ministry co-finances and supervises the National Consultation and Intervention Center for the Victims of Trafficking (KCIK). The ministry is also responsible for overseeing forced labour and labour trafficking including of children. The ministry is a permanent member of the Inter-Ministerial Team for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings, led by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration and develops awareness campaigns and training programs for social workers, shelter staff and local authorities on the identification and support of victims. Moreover, the ministry cooperates with civil society and international partners of combating human trafficking by providing funds and partnering with NGOs that provide support to victims. Finally, the ministry participates in EU and international initiatives and coordinates return and reintegration efforts of trafficked Polish national abroad.

The [National Consultation and Intervention Centre for the Victims of Trafficking](#) (KCIK), also mentioned above is financed by the Ministry of the Interior and is tasked with combatting trafficking in Poland. Specifically, it is responsible for:

- identification of victims of human trafficking, intervention, preventive counselling,
- provides shelter, legal and integration support to victims of trafficking
- consultancy for institutions and organisations and a specialist shelter for the victims.
- supporting organisations working with victims of trafficking and their families, persons exposed to the risk of trafficking as well as law enforcement and judiciary authorities.

The [State Labour Inspection](#) (PIP) is responsible for monitoring compliance with labour laws and employment of children. PIP inspectors are trained to recognise signs of trafficking in children for the purposes of forced labour.

3.2. Civil society organisations

The organizations listed below play vital roles in Poland's efforts to combat child trafficking, protect vulnerable children, and provide essential support services. Their collaborative work with national and international partners enhances the effectiveness of interventions aimed at safeguarding children's rights and well-being.

1. La Strada Poland ([FUNDACJA przeciwko HANDLOWI LUDŹMI I NIEWOLNICTWU](#))
 - Scope of work: Direct assistance i.e. legal, psychological, and social support to victims, operating two shelters, one specialized for adult women and another offering rotational housing for men and families, 24-Hour Helpline for victims, their families, and individuals seeking information about safe migration and work abroad, prevention and education i.e. awareness campaigns, educational sessions in schools, professional training programs for law enforcement, border control, social services, and education, advocacy and policy engagement. Currently runs the KCIK, providing specialised staff and a shelter for victims in Warsaw under a contract with Dialog Foundation.
 - Geographic reach: nationwide, with its headquarters in Warsaw. While its primary focus is on Poland, the organization also engages in cross-border initiatives and collaborations, particularly within the European context
 - Target Groups: people affected by or at risk of human trafficking, victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced labour, or other forms of modern slavery, Children and Youth, vulnerable to exploitation, Migrants and Refugees seeking work or asylum who may be susceptible to trafficking, Professionals and Institutions
2. Dialogue Foundation ([Fundacja Dialog](#))
 - Scope of work: Direct Assistance through legal, psychological, and social support to victims Operating from Białystok, focuses on regional support, particularly in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Currently runs the KCIK in cooperation with La Strada Poland, providing specialised staff and a shelter for victims.
 - Geographic Reach: headquartered in Białystok, with services across the Podlaskie Voivodeship and collaborates with national partners for nationwide reach.
 - Target Groups: Refugees and Migrants, Victims of Human Trafficking, Socially Excluded Individuals, Families and Children
3. "PoMOC" Association ([Stowarzyszenie PoMoc](#))
 - Scope of Work: support women and children victims of violence, exploitation, and human trafficking, operating a Consultation Point offering psychological, legal, and social assistance, providing safe housing for women and children escaping violence, conducting educational and preventive programs aimed at combating violence and trafficking, engaging in advocacy and awareness campaigns to promote human rights and gender equality.
 - Geographic reach: Headquartered in Katowice, primarily serves the local community. Their partnerships extend their influence in Poland.

- Target groups: Women and children who have experienced domestic violence or human trafficking, survivors of persecution including holocaust survivors, people at risk of social exclusion
4. Empowering Children Foundation ([Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Się – FDDS](#))
 - Scope of Work: Provides comprehensive services addressing violence and sexual abuse of children, including psychological, medical, and legal assistance. Operates child advocacy centers and offers support to children involved in legal procedures. Engages in educational campaigns and prevention programs.
 - Geographic Reach: Nationwide presence with headquarters in Warsaw.
Target Groups: Children and adolescents experiencing violence or abuse, their families, and caregivers.
 5. ITAKA Foundation – Centre for Missing People ([ITAKA](#))
 - Scope of Work: Specializes in locating missing persons, including children, and provides support to their families. Operates the 116 000 hotline for missing children in Poland.
 - Geographic Reach: Nationwide operations in Poland.
 - Target Groups: Missing children and their families, offering assistance in search efforts and emotional support.
 6. Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center, ([HNLAC](#))
 - Scope of Work: HNLAC provides free legal legal counseling, human rights monitoring, strategic litigation, advocacy, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting human rights standards. HNLAC also conducts outreach missions to refugee centers and detention facilities across Poland, ensuring access to legal aid for those in need.
 - Geographic Reach: headquartered in Kraków, HNLAC operates nationwide, with legal aid points in multiple Polish cities, including Kraków, Rybnik, Wrocław, Poznań, Sopot, and Rzeszów. They also provide legal assistance in reception centers for asylum seekers and guarded centers for foreigners
 - Target Groups: Asylum seekers and refugees, Stateless individuals, Victims of human trafficking, Unaccompanied children and vulnerable children, Foreigners facing legal challenges in Poland
 7. Siemacha Association ([Stowarzyszenie Siemacha](#))
 - Scope of Work: Provides care for children through day-care centers, orphanages, educational programs, therapy, and sports activities. Emphasizes peer-to-peer relationships and structured daily schedules to support child development.
 - Geographic Reach: Primarily based in Kraków, with facilities in other cities including Tarnów, Kielce, Rzeszów, and Wrocław. Wikipedia
 - Target Groups: Children and adolescents requiring social support, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 8. Polish Crime Victim Support Association ([Subvenia Victima](#))
 - Scope of Work: Supports crime victims, including children, through a federation of associations. Offers support services such as legal aid, psychological counselling, and advocacy.
 - Geographic Reach: Operates through a network of 14 associations across Poland.

- Target Groups: Victims of crime, including children affected by trafficking or exploitation.

3.3. Coordination and cooperation

The Polish Police carried out activities aimed at combating and preventing trafficking in human beings as part of the work of the various groups established under the EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats).

Particularly noteworthy is the creation of a special group in connection with the war in Ukraine, the Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) Platform. The task of the group is to identify and combat organised criminal groups involved in trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual, labour or other forms of exploitation within the EU, where the suspects and/or victims are from the countries of the South-Eastern Partnership (in particular Ukraine and, where relevant, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova). A particular focus of the work has been the exploitation of Ukrainian refugees.

The activities of the above group are supported by the work of other operational plans, including organization of an annual HACKATON event, during which Internet resources, both public and dark web, are scanned for sexually oriented job advertisements, suggesting the possibility of human trafficking. The information gathered is then passed on to analysts, who examine it and, on its basis, initiate new trafficking cases. Most of the checks carried out during the event concern Ukrainians.

In 2018 the National Prosecutor's Office (NPO) introduced a formal mechanism to improve the qualification of offenses as trafficking; law enforcement could refer discontinued or dismissed trafficking investigations and prosecutions for review to the prosecutor responsible for coordinating trafficking investigations.

Despite the above-mentioned efforts, interagency coordination in Poland is often weak, and border and reception centers lack the resources and training needed to detect trafficking indicators. The increase in displaced children has stretched child protection services to their limits, reducing the availability of individualized care, case management, and follow-up support¹⁶.

4. Child trafficking in context

4.1. Patterns and trends

The US State Department Trafficking Report 2020¹⁷ mentions overall increasing investigations from cases referred by police and border guards, while the agency report

¹⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. Poland: Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings. 2023. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/poland_en

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State. (2020). Trafficking in Persons Report: *Poland*. Washington, D.C.: Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

of 2024¹⁸ outlines that the government intensified investigations, particularly focusing on labour trafficking, with 79% of ongoing prosecutions related to this form of exploitation. The majority of identified victims were also associated with labour trafficking cases.

Child trafficking in Poland manifests in several forms, with varying patterns of prevalence and detection over time. Despite growing awareness and international pressure, comprehensive data collection remains a significant challenge due to the absence of a unified National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the fragmentation of statistics across different institutions, such as the Police, Border Guard, and National Prosecutor's Office¹⁹. Nevertheless, existing data and reports shed light on critical aspects of the phenomenon, particularly the forms of exploitation, statistical trends, and long-term developments.

The primary forms of child trafficking identified in Poland include sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, and criminal exploitation. Sexual exploitation remains a persistent issue, with both Polish and foreign children trafficked for this purpose within the country and abroad. Particularly vulnerable are girls from Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Romania, who are targeted for sexual exploitation in Poland and in other European countries.²⁰ Children, especially from Roma communities, are also trafficked for forced begging in urban centres, a form of exploitation that is often under-reported and hard to detect. Forced labour involving children, though less frequently identified, has been observed especially in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Moreover, children are increasingly being used for criminal activities, including benefit fraud and petty theft, further highlighting the multifaceted nature of trafficking in children.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has introduced new layers of vulnerability. Since 2022, Poland has received over 1.5 million Ukrainian children refugees, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from caregivers. This displacement has exposed them to heightened risks of trafficking due to their precarious legal status, language barriers, unfamiliarity with Polish child protection systems, and often unstable living conditions. UNICEF Poland's 2022 Country Office Report²¹ highlights the elevated risks of exploitation and trafficking, which underscores the importance of integrating child protection with migration and humanitarian assistance for refugee children.

In terms of statistical trends, child trafficking cases in Poland have remained consistently under-reported. According to the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Polish Police identified a total of 31 victims of trafficking in 2022, without disaggregating the number of child victims, while the Border Guard reported 110 victims that same year, again with unclear breakdowns by age. The National

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, 2024. The Impact of Trauma on Child Trafficking Survivors. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Available at: <https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-impact-of-trauma-on-child-trafficking-survivors/>

¹⁹ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). Evaluation Report on Poland: Third Evaluation Round – Access to Justice and Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Strasbourg, June 2023. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-poland-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-08-a/1680ab7039>

²⁰ Same as above.

²¹ UNICEF, Poland Country Office Annual Report 2022, Warsaw, 2023. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/143936/file/Poland-2022-COAR.pdf>

Prosecutor's Office identified 277 victims in 2022, compared to 447 in 2021, though child-specific figures were not consistently available.²²

In 2023 the National Prosecutor's Office recorded 1,043 victims, among them 11 children, which is a significant increase from previous years²³. In 2023, the Polish government continued to pursue trafficking cases, though challenges in data coordination remained. Law enforcement lacked a centralized system for consolidating statistics and did not consistently distinguish between sex and labour trafficking. Under Article 189a, police initiated 20 investigations (down from 23 in 2022), including cases of sex trafficking, labour exploitation, and forced begging. Prosecutors launched 18 investigations (26 in 2022) and prosecuted 45 defendants—more than double the previous year. Courts convicted 10 traffickers under this article, with most receiving prison sentences ranging from under three years to over five.

In contrast, only one case was initiated under Article 203 (sex trafficking) and three individuals were indicted, compared to 16 investigations and 11 indictments in 2022. Still, courts convicted 12 perpetrators under Articles 203 and 204.3, up from three the year before.²⁴

In 2024 however, courts convicted 12 perpetrators under Articles 203 and 204.3, compared with three in 2022. Seventy-nine percent of the ongoing cases the NPO prosecuted were for labour trafficking. Experts previously reported the government rarely prosecuted labour trafficking cases due to the difficulty in collecting evidence in these cases and the low number of victims who self-identified as forced labor victims. No information on child trafficking is available in regard to court convictions²⁵.

In its 2023 Human Trafficking Report²⁶ the Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration reported that 1,043 victims were identified, including 11 children, marking a significant increase compared to previous years. These findings align with the U.S. Department of State, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report²⁷ which recorded 88 identified victims in Poland, including 9 children, and noted an increase in funding for victim services, as well as the restructuring of the inter-ministerial team.

The KCIK provided support to 254 victims in 2022, with a reported increase to 295 in 2023, including 15 children, most of whom were foreign nationals²⁸. These figures suggest persistent under-identification of child victims, possibly due to the hidden nature of the crime, fear of reporting, and limited institutional capacity for age- and gender-sensitive victim identification.

²² Same as above.

²³ Human Trafficking Report 2023r, Department of Public Order, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Republic of Poland, p. 14. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2>

²⁴ U.S. Department of State. 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

²⁵ 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland – US State Department available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

²⁶ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Warsaw, 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia-en/combating-trafficking-in-human-beings>.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report - Poland, Washington, D.C., 2023. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>.

²⁸ Same as above.

Over time, the trends in child trafficking in Poland have evolved in response to geopolitical and socio-economic shifts. Historically, Polish children were trafficked primarily for sexual exploitation to Western and Northern Europe. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable decline in Polish nationals trafficked abroad for sexual purposes²⁹. This shift has coincided with an increase in the trafficking of foreign children into Poland, particularly from Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria, often for sexual exploitation and forced begging. Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Poland saw a massive influx of refugees, including a significant number of unaccompanied and separated children. This surge drastically increased the risk of trafficking, with confirmed cases such as the sexual exploitation of two Ukrainian girls reported in 2022³⁰. In addition, the 2021 migration crisis at the Poland–Belarus border further exposed migrant children to trafficking risks, with three children officially identified as trafficking victims during that period³¹.

Online child trafficking in Poland has shown a worrying upward trend in recent years, particularly in the realm of sexual exploitation without physical contact. Studies indicate that over a quarter (26%) of Polish youth aged 13–17 have experienced some form of online sexual abuse, highlighting how the internet has become a primary venue for victimization. The prevalence of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) has surged, with offenders increasingly leveraging file hosting services and encrypted platforms to distribute and share illicit content. Between 2017 and 2022, law enforcement data shows a marked increase in the volume and sophistication of online exploitation cases, with more perpetrators using digital anonymity and advanced evasion techniques to avoid detection³². Moreover, online trafficking patterns increasingly involve non-contact offenses such as grooming through social media and messaging apps, coercion into sharing explicit content, and blackmail. These forms of exploitation are less visible and harder to detect, complicating efforts to quantify the true scale but underscoring a shift from traditional trafficking to more insidious, technology-facilitated abuse. The combination of technological advancement, migration flows from conflict zones, and ongoing socio-economic vulnerabilities has thus contributed to evolving trends in Poland’s online child trafficking landscape.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has further exacerbated these trends. Poland, as a major host country for Ukrainian refugees, including large numbers of unaccompanied and separated children, has seen heightened vulnerabilities to online exploitation. Displacement and instability create conditions where traffickers exploit children's reduced supervision, psychological distress, and lack of digital literacy. Reports from UNICEF³³

²⁹ European Commission, Poland: Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Brussels, 2023. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/poland_en

³⁰ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). Evaluation Report on Poland: Third Evaluation Round – Access to Justice and Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Strasbourg, June 2023. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-poland-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-08-a/1680ab7039>

³¹ Council of Europe, GRETA 3rd report on Poland, Council of Europe, 2022 available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/news/-/asset_publisher/fX6ZWufj34JY/content/id/230175315

³² Polish Platform for Homeland Security, Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation – a Polish Perspective, 2023, available at <https://ppbw.pl/en/online-child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-a-polish-perspective/>

³³ UNICEF, Children fleeing war in Ukraine at heightened risk of trafficking and exploitation, UNICEF, 19 March 2022, available at <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-fleeing-war-ukraine-heightened-risk-trafficking-and-exploitation>.

and Human Rights Watch³⁴ suggest that Ukrainian refugee children are at increased risk of becoming targets for online grooming, coercion, and trafficking networks operating both within Poland and transnationally. This influx has coincided with a broader increase in trafficking cases involving Eastern European nationals, particularly for sexual exploitation.

Since Russia's armed attack on Ukraine until the end of 2023, 7 cases of trafficking in human beings have been initiated for possible crimes against Ukrainian citizens. Trafficking in human beings was confirmed in only two of these cases. The first case concerned two Ukrainian children. They had arrived in Poland after the outbreak of hostilities in their country. They looked for work to improve their living conditions. The perpetrators manipulated them and forced them to provide sexual services, taking advantage of their young age and lack of life experience. The second case is a case of exploitation into slavery and was under investigation. Police officers located a group from Ukraine. They were forced to work in an illegal cigarette factory on the territory of Poland. In 2023, 30 presumed victims of trafficking were identified, including 24 adults and 6 children (3 women and 1 man from Moldova and 1 woman and 1 man from Poland). In 2023, the police issued 21 certificates to foreigners who were presumed to be victims of trafficking in human beings (according to Article 170 of the Act on Foreigners). The number of human trafficking offences registered in the National Police Information System as part of ongoing investigations in 2023 was 12 offences, of which 11 offences were registered under Article 189a §1 of the Criminal Code and only 1 under Article 189a § 2 of the Criminal Code. A total of 13 suspects have been charged in ongoing investigations over the past year. Most suspects were from Poland, in total 7 persons (6 women and 1 man). Accusations were also made against 2 Romanian nationals (1 woman and 1 man), 2 Ukrainian nationals (both men), 1 Moldovan national and 1 Pakistani national (both men)³⁵.

According to the same report, the alleged victims of human trafficking for 2020 were 17, of whom 1 child for sexual abuse or exploitation, for 2021 26 of whom 1 child for sexual abuse or exploitation, for 2022 31 of whom 3 children, 2 for sexual abuse or exploitation and 1 for begging, and for 2023 24 of whom 6 children, 1 for forced labour or compulsory services, 1 for sexual abuse or exploitation and 4 for begging.

In 2024 the police initiated one investigation and prosecutors indicted three persons under Article 203³⁶. In 2023 the Police initiated 13 proceedings concerning human trafficking and naming 12 crimes. 13 people were charged with the crime of human trafficking³⁷. In the same year, the Border Guard identified 58 victims of human trafficking in Poland, but

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, Poland: Trafficking, exploitation risks for refugees, HRW, 29 April 2022.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/29/poland-trafficking-exploitation-risks-refugees>

³⁵ EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum, Poland 2023, prepared by the Office for Foreigners acting as the coordinator of the NCP to the EMN in Poland. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/ae254d6b-c06a-45aa-b5ff-a90e1b8e6f44>.

³⁶ 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland – US State Department, available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

³⁷ Human Trafficking Report 2023r, Department of Public Order, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Republic of Poland, p. 14. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2>

no children among them. In 2021, 2 children were identified by the Border Guard and another 2 in 2022³⁸.

4.2. Victim profile and groups at risk

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Poland, and traffickers exploit Polish victims abroad. Traffickers exploit Polish women and children in sex trafficking within Poland and other European countries, notably France and Germany. Traffickers force men and women from Poland into forced labour in Europe, primarily Western and Northern Europe and in particular Germany, Norway, Sweden and the UK. Traffickers exploit women and children from South America and Eastern Europe, particularly Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine, in sex trafficking in Poland.

Labour trafficking is increasing in Poland; victims originate from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Traffickers increasingly exploit migrants in forced labour among Poland's growing Ukrainian, Belarusian, Filipino, and Vietnamese populations, particularly in restaurants and construction. Traffickers recruit children, particularly Roma, for forced begging in Poland.

Children trafficked from Poland face a complex array of vulnerabilities that come from socio-economic hardship, social exclusion, family instability, and systemic protection gaps, which make them particularly susceptible to exploitation both within Poland and beyond its borders. Poverty remains a core factor driving the vulnerability of children to trafficking. Many originate from marginalized families where economic deprivation forces children to contribute to family income, often through informal or exploitative labour. In these environments, neglect and abuse of children increases the risk of recruitment by traffickers. Particularly vulnerable are children residing in institutional care or foster systems, where inadequate supervision and lack of emotional support have been reported by organizations such as the KCIK, which highlights these settings as high-risk for trafficking exploitation. Ethnic minorities, especially Roma children, are disproportionately affected by trafficking due to entrenched discrimination and social exclusion. Segregated living conditions, limited access to education, and poor health services compound their vulnerability, with many subjected to forced begging and exploitative labour. The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) emphasizes that these systemic barriers effectively isolate Roma children from protective mechanisms, rendering them easy targets for traffickers.

Humanitarian organizations such as Save the Children Poland and Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę (FDDS) report that traffickers exploit these vulnerabilities by offering false promises of safety, education, or employment, luring children into exploitative situations. The war's disruption of family and community networks further compounds the psychological distress of these children, undermining their capacity to recognize and resist trafficking attempts. Gender also plays a critical role in shaping trafficking risks. Girls are disproportionately trafficked for sexual exploitation, both domestically and internationally, while boys are more often subjected to forced labour or coerced into criminal activities. Reports from the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons

³⁸ Same as above.

Report (2023 and 2024) indicate that Polish children trafficked abroad often end up in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and hospitality, while girls from Poland and Eastern Europe, particularly from Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, and Romania, are vulnerable to sexual exploitation within Poland.

4.3. Factors leading to vulnerability

The vulnerability of children to trafficking in Poland is driven by a complex interplay of structural, socio-economic, and psychological factors. These underlying conditions not only place children at risk but also limit their ability to access protection and resist exploitation.

Poverty remains one of the most significant factors contributing to child trafficking. In marginalized families, economic need can lead to early workforce participation, often under hazardous or exploitative conditions. Such environments expose children to traffickers who promise income, security, or mobility offers that can appear legitimate to families under financial strain³⁹.

Family instability, neglect, and abuse are closely linked to heightened trafficking risks. Children who lack stable, supportive family environments are more susceptible to emotional manipulation and coercion. Those in institutional care or foster systems face additional challenges: the KCIK reports that weak supervision and limited psychosocial support in these settings often leave children without the emotional resilience or advocacy networks required to resist exploitation⁴⁰.

Social exclusion and systemic discrimination are also key contributors. Roma children, for example, frequently grow up in segregated communities with poor access to health care, formal education, and legal protections. As highlighted by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), such systemic marginalization reinforces cycles of poverty and isolation, which traffickers exploit⁴¹. With limited contact with social services and mainstream institutions, Roma children often fall entirely outside the reach of prevention and protection frameworks⁴².

The displacement of millions of Ukrainians following the Russian invasion in 2022 has compounded existing vulnerabilities. Poland has become the host country for over 1.5 million child refugees, many of whom are unaccompanied or have become separated

³⁹ U.S. Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2023. Washington, D.C., p. 410. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

⁴⁰ National Consulting and Intervention Centre for Victims of Trafficking (KCIK). *About Us*. Government of Poland. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/kcik-en/about-us>

⁴¹ European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). *Roma in Poland, 2022*. Available at: <https://www.errc.org/reports--submissions/roma-in-poland>

⁴² Council of Europe. Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)1 on the Equality of Roma and Traveler Women and Girls, 2024. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-cm-rec-2024-1-on-the-equality-of-roma-and-traveller-wom/1680b21286>

from their families. These children face legal precarity, language obstacles, and unfamiliarity with Polish protection systems. Their often-unstable living conditions, frequently in overcrowded shelters or informal accommodations are ideal environments for traffickers to operate under the guise of offering help. Organizations such as Save the Children Poland and FDDS have emphasized how the breakdown of family networks and social cohesion increases psychological distress among refugee children, making them more susceptible to grooming and exploitation.

Gender-specific vulnerabilities also play a crucial role. Girls are more likely to be trafficked for sexual purposes, while boys are often exploited for forced labour or petty crime. This pattern is intensified in conflict or migration contexts, where gender-sensitive protection mechanisms are often lacking or overwhelmed⁴³.

Language and cultural barriers further obstruct access to legal, medical, and social assistance. Without translation services and culturally competent professionals, many at-risk children cannot navigate the systems designed to protect them. According to FDDS, such access gaps mean that trafficking cases are often missed entirely, leaving children vulnerable to ongoing abuse.

Finally, psychological trauma particularly among children fleeing war or conflict adds an invisible yet profound layer of risk. Many children experience fear, disorientation, and deep emotional distress, which traffickers exploit through coercion, manipulation, and false promises of safety. The lack of specialized psychological care for these children compounds their vulnerability, as trauma undermines their ability to assess risk, seek help, or trust authorities.

5. Practical aspects of anti-trafficking efforts

5.1. Detection, investigation and prosecution

Investigations concerning human trafficking and illegal adoption are coordinated by the Department for Organised Crime and Corruption. Within this framework, authorities investigate cases concerning offences under Article 189a §1 and 2 of the Criminal Code (human trafficking). Emphasis is placed on proceedings in which child victims are identified. Determination through formal procedures whether a person is a victim of human trafficking (formal identification) by qualified and authorized institutions i.e. the Police, the Border Guard and the Public Prosecutor's Office. These authorities collect evidence for the purposes of the investigation and for presentation in court proceedings: to prove or disprove the issue under investigation.

The Police and Border Guard always determine the specific aspects of the case in which a child being a migrant or a refugee becomes a victim⁴⁴. In this case, if the child travels

⁴³ International Organization for Migration (IOM). Human Trafficking in the Ukraine Crisis: A Rapid Assessment. *July 2023*. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/documents/2023-07/human_trafficking_in_the_ukraine_crisis-final2.pdf

⁴⁴ United Nations General Assembly. Trafficking in Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General. A/77/170, 15 July 2022. Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/77/>

without a guardian, or they do have a guardian but the case concerns, e.g., suspected sexual exploitation, law enforcement authorities undertake relevant action based on the procedures prepared. Formal identification is carried out on the basis of special algorithms prepared for the Police and Border Guard for identifying child victims of human trafficking, which especially takes into account potential sexual exploitation:

1. Algorithm of Conduct of Law Enforcement Officers in Case of Revealing a Crime of THB
2. Algorithm for Identifying and Dealing with a Child Victim of Human Trafficking for the Police and Border Guard officers,
3. By means of identification indicators included in the Algorithms. The reporting form of the (presumed) victim of human trafficking is sent to:
 - the Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Criminal Bureau of the National Police Headquarters.
 - Division I of the Operational and Investigative Board of the Border Guard Headquarters

The Algorithm for Identifying and Dealing with a Child Victim of Human Trafficking was developed by the Group for Supporting Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, first adopted in 2015 and updated in 2023. The Algorithm includes the most important information regarding the procedure in the event of revealing a child victim of human trafficking, such as the definition, the initial identification process, and the intervention process. This algorithm determines, among other things, which children are particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim (considering with particular emphasis those from abroad migrating without parents), difficulties in identifying child victims, circumstances and situations which require the attention of the authorities in the identification process, preliminary identification, and actions to be taken by the officers. Furthermore, the algorithm also touches on the problem of identifying potential child victims in transit. In addition, it contains useful advice regarding code of conduct for interacting with children, establishing representation of a child, procedural activities involving a child victim of trafficking in human beings. The algorithm is a basic guide indicating the scheme for procedure and response that should be followed by Police and Border Guard officers.

During the identification process, conducted prior to procedural actions, an interpreter is provided by the authority carrying out the action or by a non-governmental organization implementing KCIK.

A person presumed to be a victim of trafficking in human beings shall be considered a victim as soon as the competent authorities have the slightest indication that they have been a victim of a trafficking offence. The status of a presumed victim of trafficking in human beings is confirmed by the Prosecutor's Office, the Police and the Border Guard by issuing a certificate confirming the existence of a presumption that the person is a victim of trafficking in human beings. Similarly for foreigners, the Act on Foreigners regulates the issues of residence of foreigners in Poland, including the foreigners who were identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. Under the act, victims are entitled to a reflection period (3-month time permission of legal stay) as well as for a temporary residence permit (which lasts up to 6 months with the possibility of extension for another 6 months). For children it entitles legal residence on the territory of the Republic of Poland for a period of 4 months from the date of its issue.

For confirmed victims of human trafficking a certificate confirming that there is a presumption that a citizen of the European Union (as well as a citizen of the EEA or the Swiss Confederation) and a member of their family is a victim of human trafficking within the meaning of Article 115 § 22 of the Penal Code. Based on Article 41a a certificate confirming the existence of this presumption shall be issued to an EU citizen or a non-EU family member who is presumed to be a victim of trafficking in human beings within the meaning of Article 115 § 22 of the Penal Code.

The certificate referred to in Article 41a(1) is cancelled, in particular in the event that:

- the grounds for its issue have ceased to exist, or
- in the certificate issuance procedure the applicant:
 - a) filed an application containing false personal data or false information or attached documents containing such data or information to the application, or
 - b) they testified untruthfully or concealed the truth, or forged or modified a document to use it as an authentic one, or used such a document as an authentic one, or
 - c) it is required for reasons of national security or defense, the protection of public order and safety.

The authority that issued it can cancel the certificate. This makes it possible for foreigners and their family members to benefit from the right to social assistance benefits in the form of crisis intervention, shelter, meals, necessary clothing and targeted allowances, including for Nationals of the EU/EEA/Switzerland and their family members. A foreigner's stay is no longer considered legal once the minister for the interior enters information in their register that the foreigner:

- 1) actively, voluntarily and on their own initiative re-established contact with persons suspected of the crime referred to in Article 189a § 1 of the Criminal Code, or
- 2) crossed or tried to cross the border in contravention of the law.

For judicial proceedings a trafficked person needs to be fully aware of their rights and obligations when they decide or have to act as a witness/victim in criminal proceedings. Such a person is notified of their rights and obligations before the hearing begins. The victim has the right to attend hearings, to provide new testimonies and ask questions in court, to a closed hearing, to have a lawyer (if acting as a witness), to psychological support, and to security measures.

Voivodeship Chief Commanders of the Police and the Metropolitan Police Commander may provide assistance to victims of human trafficking in the event of a threat to the life or health of the victim/their family members, in the form of protection and assistance measures, including:

- protection for the duration of the procedural activity
- personal protection
- assistance with relocation.

Claims for damages is a procedure supporting the victim in obtaining material and moral compensation from the perpetrator and/ or the state for physical and psychological damage and lost earnings as a result of trafficking. Two pathways are envisaged: compensation and reparation.

Circumstances indicated in the algorithm which the law enforcement authorities should pay attention to in contacting children affected by a migrant crisis, and which may give rise to suspicions that they are exploited sexually, include, among others, the express inconsistency between the physical features of the child and their guardian (if any), such as skin colour or complexion, the use of language different to that of their guardian, visible inconsistency between the child's image with that in their travel document, guardians' control of the child's behaviour, child's visible heightened fear in the presence of armed officers, embarrassment in providing information on what they are doing, where they live, whether the marks on their body may be evidence of prior physical violence. In preliminarily identifying a person as a potential sexual exploitation victim, the algorithm recommends interview (questioning session) with the victim in friendly conditions, with an interpreter, with questions that may not instil the feeling of guilt in the child, and actions performed by the same officer, so that mutual relations and trust can be developed. If sexual exploitation is suspected, it is also recommended that a psychologist take part and end questioning on circumstances of child exploitation (to be continued in court proceedings pursuant to Article 185a of the Code of Criminal Procedure). Per the algorithm, right from the start, the child should be separated from third parties (including family members) if there is a suspicion that they may be (co) perpetrators of criminal offences. Further, the algorithm also specifies actions to be taken later, such as informing the child of their rights and duties, contacting relevant victim assistance institutions, undertaking efforts to determine and confirm the child's identity, filing an application with a family court to establish a court-appointed guardian or probation officer, and placing the child in the relevant care centre or foster family.

The above updates were driven by the revised Act on entry into, residence in, and departure from the territory of the Republic of Poland of nationals of the Member States of the EU and members of their families and adding a provision on the possibility of issuing certificates on the presumption of being a victim of trafficking in human beings also to citizens of the EU and the European Economic Area Member States.

In addition, the Polish Police carries out activities aimed at combating and preventing trafficking in human beings as part of the work of the various groups established under the EMPACT THB platform. Specifically, a dedicated group is in place in connection with the war in Ukraine. The task of the group is to identify and combat organised criminal groups involved in trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual, labour or other forms of exploitation within the EU, where the suspects and/or victims are from the countries of the South- Eastern Partnership (in particular Ukraine and, where relevant, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova). The activities of the group are supported by the work of other operational plans, including organisation of an annual HACKATON event, during which Internet resources, both public and dark web, are scanned for sexually-oriented job advertisements, suggesting the possibility of human trafficking. The information gathered is then passed on to analysts, who examine it and, on its basis, initiate new trafficking cases. Most of the checks carried out during the event concern Ukrainians. In addition, representatives of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police Headquarters take part in cyclical meetings of the Europol Task Force (UATF), which monitors the situation of refugees as a group that may become victims of human trafficking.

Investigations concerning human trafficking and illegal adoption are coordinated by the Department for Organised Crime and Corruption. Within this framework, authorities investigate cases concerning offences under Article 189a § 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code (human trafficking). Particular emphasis is placed on proceedings in which child victims are identified. In 2021, within proceedings for offences under Article 189a § 1 of the Criminal Code, 30 child victims were identified, including 9 from Poland, 19 from Romania, and 2 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The findings were that these victims were used for forced labour (6 children), prostitution (6 children), and begging (18 children).

Data obtained through coordinated activities are then transferred to institutions involved in fighting human trafficking, and especially combating these offences where the victims are children. These data are elaborated on for such entities as GRETA or the US Embassy within the framework of cooperation in reporting under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

In the Border Guard, it is the operational and investigative division that identifies, prevents, and detects offences with the features of human trafficking. Within each of the nine organisational units of the Border Guard, there are coordinators for the prevention and suppression of human trafficking who perform their duties with the help of experts in this field at Border Guard posts. In turn, coordination of efforts in this respect at the central level lies with the Operational and Investigative Board of the Border Patrol Headquarters.

2023 was the first year in which the Ministry of the Interior and Administration decided to increase the funding for the National Intervention and Consultation Center for Victims of Human Trafficking (KCIK) by nearly 40% (to 1,500,000 PLN), to provide better and more effective assistance to the growing number of victims of human trafficking.

In addition, in 2023, Poland adopted the National Plan for Counteracting Crimes Against Sexual Freedom and Decency Involving Children for the years 2023–2026. The Plan was developed under the direction of the Minister of Justice and aims to implement high standards of protection for children against abuse, to safeguard all children from violence. Child nationals of third countries, who are (presumed) victims of human trafficking, will also benefit from the measures developed under this plan.

5.2. Victim support

Poland's approach to supporting child victims of trafficking has evolved over recent years, integrating both governmental initiatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide comprehensive assistance. Despite these efforts, challenges persist, particularly concerning unaccompanied children and refugee children. As mentioned above KCIK serves as the primary institution for victim support. Assistance to victims includes basic needs, a 24/7 helpline, emergency accommodation and providing accurate information about social and legal assistance, medical and psychological care, shelter, legal counselling, interpretation, welfare support, reintegration services, and referrals to orphanages and foster care for child victims. Information provision includes first aid, rights and responsibilities and consequences of breaching rules. Risk management is carried out to exclude potentially life-threatening situations. Social assistance comes in the form of monetary and non-monetary assistance to victims provided by social services.

KCIK also provides long-term assistance and social inclusion support through a tailor-made assistance plan for each victim laying out specific actions for their inclusion pathway. Such actions may include the above-mentioned services also including accompaniment in legal, social and health matters, language training, educational activities, vocational training, employment counselling, assistance in entering the job market, leisure activities, monitoring and evaluation of cases.

Legal assistance includes legal counselling, document support, court representation, and exemption from legal costs, based on a victim's written declaration of financial hardship. Importantly, assistance is available regardless of residence status, although irregular migrants are often excluded from some formal protections. Legal information is provided by law enforcement officers and lawyers. An interpreter is provided.

Poland's legal framework provides trafficking victims, including children, with access to legal assistance and free legal aid, primarily under the Law on Free Legal Aid and Legal Education (2015). Legal assistance to victims of trafficking is initiated from the moment the presumed victim of trafficking is identified. If a person is assisted by KCIK, the implementation of legal aid is provided by KCIK. Despite these provisions, access to legal support in practice remains limited. GRETA reports that many victims are not represented by lawyers during proceedings, and legal aid is typically provided pro bono by NGOs like La Strada and PoMOC through the operation of KCIK. KCIK provides legal consultations on criminal procedures, residence law (in the case of foreigners), and family law. These consultations allow the victim to understand their legal situation, make informed decisions, and to exercise their rights.

While these organisations provide advice, their legal staff cannot represent victims in court. Ex officio lawyers are assigned by the courts but are not always present during initial victim interviews, and there is a lack of specialised legal training on trafficking cases. Legal aid is also available in civil and administrative matters, including compensation claims and residence issues, but in practice, few victims pursue compensation due to barriers in accessing legal help. The Ministry of Justice's Justice Fund supports legal aid nationwide but its reach among trafficking victims is minimal, only six victims received such support in Poznań in 2022.

In the course of a criminal trial, the victim may, at any stage of the trial, appoint an attorney and benefit from his or her legal assistance (lawyer) ex officio subject to a request for inability to bear the costs of representation.

Children identified as victims of trafficking or children travelling unaccompanied are appointed a guardian through judicial proceedings. According to the Act of 5 August 2015 on Free Legal Aid, Free Counselling and Legal Education. Nationals are entitled to free legal aid, free counselling and legal education. Free legal aid and free civic advice are available to an entitled person who is unable to bear the costs of paid assistance. Foreigner victims are also entitled to temporary residence under the following conditions:

- if he/she resides in the territory of the Republic of Poland
- has cooperated with an authority competent to prosecute a trafficking in human beings offence and, in the case of a foreign child, has been granted the status of a victim in a trafficking in human beings offence, and
- has severed contacts with suspected trafficking offenders (Article 176 of the AOF).

The minimum validity period of a temporary residence permit is 6 months (Article 177 of the AOF). Part of the provisions on refusal to initiate proceedings for granting a temporary residence permit for victims of trafficking in human beings and most of the provisions on refusal to grant a temporary residence permit do not apply in proceedings for granting a foreigner a temporary residence permit.

Similarly for Nationals of the European Union, the EEA and Switzerland and their family members in accordance with Article 41b(3) of the Act of 14 July 2006 on the Entry into, Residence in, and Departure from the Territory of the Republic of Poland of Nationals of the European Union Member States and their Family Members, in the form of the possibility to issue another certificate referred to in Article 41a(1) of that Act for a period of at least 6 months, but for no longer than 3 years.

A permanent residence permit is granted to a foreigner or refused to be granted by the voivode competent with respect to the place of residence of the foreigner, by way of decision. A foreigner staying on the territory of the Republic of Poland based on a temporary residence permit for victims of trafficking is entitled to:

- work permit exemption
- education in public post-secondary schools, public art schools, public teacher training institutions and public establishments
- benefits in the form of crisis intervention, shelter, meals, necessary clothing and targeted benefits
- Nationals of the European Union, the EEA and Switzerland and their family members are entitled to work on the territory of Poland without a work permit. Holders of the certificate referred to in Article 41a(1) of the Act on the Entry into, Residence in and Departure from the Territory of the Republic of Poland of Nationals of the European Union Member States and their Family Members are entitled to benefits in the form of crisis intervention, shelter, meal, necessary clothing and purpose-specific benefit.

A permanent residence permit is granted to a foreigner for an indefinite period of time, upon their application, on the basis of Article 195(1)(5) of the AOF if they meet the below conditions cumulatively:

- they are a victim of human trafficking within the meaning of Article 115 § 22 of the PC and they
- resided in the territory of the Republic of Poland, immediately before filing an application for a permanent residence permit, for a period of no less than 1 year, on the basis of a temporary residence permit for victims of human trafficking,
- cooperated with law enforcement authorities in criminal proceedings for an offence referred to in Article 189a § 1 of the PC,
- have a well-founded concern of being returned to the country of origin.

Assisted voluntary returns and reintegration are also available for foreigners including EU nationals, recognized as victims, after they declare their willingness to leave Poland. Such assistance is provided by IOM through the voluntary return and reintegration programme implemented based on the 2005 Agreement between the Minister of the Interior and Administration of the Republic of Poland and the International Organization for Migration on Cooperation in the Field of Voluntary Returns of Foreigners Leaving the Territory of the Republic of Poland (Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland of 2006, item 46) and

the provisions of the Act of 12 December 2013 on Foreigners. IOM implements the programme in cooperation with the Border Guard and the Office for Foreigners

In 2023, KCIK assisted 295 potential victims, including 15 children, with the majority being foreign nationals. Specialized shelters were provided to 70 victims, and 72 victims were accommodated through crisis intervention centres. The center also facilitated legal assistance for 175 victims and supported 46 foreign victims in obtaining residence permits.

5.1. Prevention

The Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy (MRPiPS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Administration (MSWiA), the Border Guard, and NGOs, conducts an annual series of trainings for employees of social assistance organizations. These trainings focus on supporting victims of human trafficking and include guidelines and information on cooperation with the National Intervention and Consultation Centre. MRPiPS provides participants of a specialised training course on “Supporting victims of human trafficking” with a training resource, a document titled Safe shelter standards for victims of human trafficking. It has been developed in the Team for Counteracting Trafficking in Human Beings as part of the implementation of the task called Implementation of standards to be met by institutions capable and entitled to assist victims/witnesses of trafficking in human beings, as well as facilities where victims of trafficking may be placed. The safe shelter standards presented are not binding standards but merely guidelines for possible use, and MRPiPS and MSWiA recommend them⁴⁵.

Public awareness is being raised through a variety of channels. Educational campaigns, school programs, and national competitions are aimed at children and youth, while job seekers, migrants, and their employers are reached through job fairs and digital campaigns. Awareness-raising events are also planned around key dates such as European Anti-Trafficking Day.

At the same time, it must be emphasized that within the framework of activities defined in the NAP, the Polish Police carries out several activities to combat and prevent human trafficking. In 2023, police officers in all voivodships continuously conducted educational and informational activities on the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings, which were addressed to the general public, including Ukrainian citizens residing within the territory of Poland. These activities included distributing posters and leaflets at family picnics, festivals and other events, giving advice and talking to residents. In total, more than 3,200 such events were held in Poland. In addition, information on the threat of trafficking in human beings was placed on the websites of police units. The information covered current threats, risk groups, recruitment methods and how perpetrators operate, as well as telephone numbers for assistance and a link to the website www.handelludzmi.eu.

⁴⁵ Human Trafficking Report 2023, Ministry of the Interior and Administration of the Republic of Poland, available

at:https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2&ved=2ahUKewjv8N-ezaCNAXpzwIHYY0PDIsQFnoECBEQAw&usq=AOvVaw2Ugfc-6JH4rlKfFgSBMF_b

In the period from 16 October to 2 November to 2023, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration conducted an online information and education campaign aimed at raising public awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking, particularly on forced labour. The campaign consisted of broadcasting of a 30-second clip on the topic of human trafficking with information on where to seek help on social media (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X), targeted at 16–45-year-olds, citizens of Poland, Ukraine and Latin American countries. The campaign reached an audience of more than 2 million people⁴⁶. In the same year, the Border Guard, in cooperation with the Dutch Embassy, the University of Wrocław, the Dutch Police and the National Police Headquarters, participated in the project developed in the framework of the established Human Trafficking Research Centre. The project was carried out in 3 cities Warsaw, Cracow and Wrocław with the participation of the media, secondary school students, the Police and Border Guard officers. It was primarily aimed at educating the public on how to prevent becoming a potential victim of human trafficking, increasing knowledge of the crime, and experiencing the same emotions as victims of human trafficking. The issue was presented in the form of an escape room prepared on a special truck designed for this purpose⁴⁷.

The Border Guard Training Center (Ośrodek Szkoleń Straży Granicznej) in Koszalin conducts regular courses on detecting trafficking victims, including children at border i.e. Children traveling with non-family adults, Fake documents or inconsistencies in stories, Indicators of coercion or fear, Cooperation with NGOs & International Partners including joint exercises with Frontex and other EU border agencies. The Polish Border Guard (Straż Graniczna) has online training manuals⁴⁸.

The Police officers in Poland receive basic training on human trafficking, including child trafficking, at the Central Police Training Centre (Centrum Szkolenia Policji, CSP) in Legionowo⁴⁹. Specialized units such as the Central Investigation Bureau (CBŚP) and Anti-Trafficking Teams receive advanced training focused on identifying child trafficking victims in cases including exploitation for forced begging, interviewing techniques for child victims (child sensitive approaches), cooperation with NGOs, international law enforcement agencies such as Europol, Interpol, and Frontex, sexual exploitation, and illegal adoption⁵⁰. The Central Police Training Centre also organizes basic and advanced courses on human trafficking, coordinating closely with Anti-Trafficking Units. The National Police Headquarters oversees specialized training modules and collaborates with Europol and INTERPOL⁵¹. NGOs including La Strada Poland provide workshops on victim identification, while the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports

⁴⁶ Department of Public Order, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, *Human Trafficking Report 2023*, Republic of Poland, 2023, p. 24. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2>

⁴⁷ Same as above.

⁴⁸ "Detection of Child Trafficking at Borders" (Frontex-coached, 2023) Available at: [EU Handbook PDF](#) (Search for "Terra Operational Handbook")

⁴⁹ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, *Human Trafficking Report*, Warsaw, April 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2>

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland*, Washington, D.C., June 2024. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

⁵¹ Interpol, Poland – Member Country Information, 2024. Available at: <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Member-countries/Europe/POLAND>

training on cross-border trafficking⁵². EMPACT projects facilitate joint training with other EU law enforcement agencies^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}. The Central Police Training Center maintains online training materials for reference⁵³. Training materials provided by the Central Police Training Centre include the 2023 “Guidelines on Child Trafficking Identification” and a 2024 webinar on interviewing child victims of trafficking, available upon registration⁵⁴.

Recent Police trainings and curricula from 2023-2024 include “Identification and Protection of Child Trafficking Victims,” organized by CSP and La Strada Poland, focusing on psychological manipulation tactics used by traffickers, child-sensitive interviewing techniques, and case studies from Poland and across the EU, such as Romanian child begging networks⁵⁵. The EU-funded “EMPACT Operational Action on Child Trafficking” conducted joint training with Europol and German/Austrian police, concentrating on cross-border investigations involving trafficking for sexual exploitation in Germany⁵⁶. Additionally, the National Police Headquarters offered a “Cyber Trafficking of Children” course in 2024 addressing online grooming, fake job offers and forced child labour via social media⁵⁷.

The National School of Judiciary and Public Prosecution (Krajowa Szkoła Sądownictwa i Prokuratury, KSSiP) is the main body responsible for training judges and prosecutors. It provides specialized training for judges and prosecutors on child trafficking issues. Training includes the Polish legal framework (specifically articles 189a-189b of the Penal Code), EU directives such as Directive 2011/36/EU, victim protection measures including anonymity and psychological support, handling child victims in court, and best practices for handling child witnesses to avoid re-traumatisation^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}. International cooperation forms a key component of the training, with input from Eurojust and guidelines from the Council of Europe’s GRETA reports and Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing trafficking⁵⁸. The National School of Judiciary maintains an e-learning platform offering courses such as “Child Witness Protection in Trafficking Cases” (2024),

⁵² International Organization for Migration (IOM) Poland, Training Programme, 2024. Available at: <https://poland.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11346/files/documents/2024-06/training-programme.pdf>

⁵³ “Guidelines on Child Trafficking Identification” (2023, in Polish), [Download PDF](#) (Check “Publikacje” section), Webinar: “Interviewing Child Victims of Trafficking” (2024) [Recording available here](#) (Requires registration)

⁵⁴ Central <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/> Training Center (Centrum Szkolenia Policji), Training Programme, 2024. Available at: <https://csp.edu.pl/download/6/34969/PTCinformationbookletANG.pdf>

⁵⁵ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Training on the Identification and Protection of Victims of Trafficking Amid the War in Ukraine with a Focus on Children, Warsaw, March 2025. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/586002>

⁵⁶ Europol, 1,426 Potential Victims Identified in Global Operation Against Human Trafficking, 2023. Available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/1-426-potential-victims-identified-in-global-operation-against-human-trafficking>

⁵⁷ Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Human Trafficking Report, Warsaw, April 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4e38905b-d243-44a8-bdfb-7530c871a1a2>

⁵⁸ Council of Europe, GRETA Reports on Poland, Strasbourg, 2022. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/poland>

accessible to judges and prosecutors⁵⁹. Additionally, a 2023 public report titled “Best Practices in Child Trafficking Trials” is available online⁶⁰.

Recent KSSIP courses from 2023 to 2024 include “Child Victims in Court: Best Practices,” which features virtual reality simulations of child testimony aimed at reducing re-traumatization and is funded by the Justice Fund (Fundusz Sprawiedliwości)⁶¹. The “EU Directive 2011/36/EU Implementation Workshop” in 2024 included case law analysis such as the Polish Supreme Court ruling III KK 12/22 on child exploitation⁶². Another 2023 course focused on “Trafficking for Forced Criminality,” addressing cases of children forced into criminal activities like theft or begging by organized crime groups and was delivered in cooperation with Eurojust⁶³. KSSIP’s maintains an e-learning platform on human trafficking⁶⁴.

Frontex provides joint exercises and training on human trafficking detection at borders. Frontex-led "Operation Terra" implemented in 2023 focused on detecting child trafficking at Warsaw Chopin Airport and eastern borders (Belarus/Ukraine) through techniques such as document fraud detection (fake family visas) and behavioural analysis (child distress signs).

The Blue Heart Campaign aims to increase awareness initiatives like the UN’s Blue Heart Campaign Against Human Trafficking, which includes training components.

NGOs play a significant role in training on human trafficking. La Strada Poland offers expertise and conducts training sessions for law enforcement⁶⁵, while the Nobody’s Children Foundation focuses on training related to child sexual exploitation within trafficking contexts⁶⁶. Human rights NGOs such as the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights provided legal training on victim rights in 2023, “Safe Border for Children”. The training programme focused on legal rights of child victims such as no deportation if there is a risk of re-trafficking⁶⁷. EU-funded projects like TRM-OPS also facilitate cross-border training.

⁵⁹ Krajowa Szkoła Sądownictwa i Prokuratury, *E-learning Platform*, Warsaw, 2024. Available at: <https://ekSSIP.kSSIP.gov.pl/>

⁶⁰ Krajowa Szkoła Sądownictwa i Prokuratury, *Best Practices in Child Trafficking Trials*, Warsaw, 2023. Available at: <https://www.kSSIP.gov.pl/>

⁶¹ European Judicial Training Network (EJTN), *Annual Report 2023*, Brussels, 2024. Available at: https://ejtn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/new_web_EJTN_Annual-Report_2023.pdf

⁶² European Commission, *Directive 2011/36/EU on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims*, Brussels, 2011. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011L0036>

⁶³ Eurojust, *Annual Report 2023*, The Hague, 2024. Available at: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/sites/default/files/assets/eurojust-annual-report-2023-en.pdf>

⁶⁴ Course: “Child Witness Protection in Trafficking Cases” (2024) [Access via KSSIP portal](#) (Login required for judges/prosecutors). Public Report: “Best Practices in Child Trafficking Trials” (2023) Available at: [Download PDF](#).

⁶⁵ La Strada Foundation Against Human Trafficking and Slavery, *What We Do*, Warsaw, 2024. Available at: <https://strada.org.pl/what-we-do/>

⁶⁶ Nobody’s Children Foundation, *Blue Room Protocol: Interviewing Trafficked Children*, Warsaw, 2023. Available at: <https://fdn.pl/blue-room-protocol/>

⁶⁷ Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, *In Search of Justice: The Rights of Victims and Survivors of Serious Violations*, Warsaw, 2023. Available at: <https://hfhr.pl/en/publications/in-search-of-justice/>

NGO-led practical training includes La Strada’s “First Responder Training” (2024), a 72-hour curriculum for police and social workers featuring role-playing exercises on topics such as “Safe Harbour” procedures for suspected child victims and cooperation with foster care systems⁶⁵. Nobody’s Children Foundation implemented “Child Friendly Interview Rooms” in 2023 through which it has trained over 500 officers on the use of child-friendly interview rooms, such as Warsaw’s “Blue Room”⁶⁶.

Open access NGO training materials include La Strada Poland’s “First Responder’s Handbook for Child Trafficking” (2024), webinar series “Protecting Child Victims in Poland” (2023-2024)⁶⁵, and the Empowering Children Foundation’s “Blue Room Protocol: Interviewing Trafficked Children” guide and e-learning course on child sexual exploitation in trafficking⁶⁶.

Several measures have been taken to raise awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking by organising information sessions for schoolchildren and jobseekers. In 2023, 7,824 such sessions were held. More than 215,000 people (218,650) attended these sessions.

The public awareness campaign titled “Don’t Be Indifferent” was launched in Poland in 2021 to address the critical issue of human trafficking and the humanitarian situation at the Poland–Belarus border. Organized by a coalition of non-governmental organizations, activists, and concerned citizens, the campaign aimed to raise awareness about the plight of refugees and migrants, particularly those stranded in border zones. One significant demonstration occurred on 10 October 2021 in Sopot, where participants gathered before a banner with the campaign’s name to protest the treatment of asylum seekers, including children, pushed back into forested areas. The campaign employed methods such as public demonstrations, social media activism, and media engagement to reach a broad audience. While no official figures were published on total reach, the campaign received national coverage and was instrumental in prompting public discourse on refugee protection and the links to trafficking risks⁶⁸.

6. International cooperation mechanisms

Counteracting trafficking in human beings is also one of the priorities of the Council of Baltic Sea States (hereinafter CBSS). A Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings operates within the framework of the CBSS to strengthen the cooperation of the Member States, actions to improve the protection and support of victims and the development of legislative measures.

In the framework of the Polish Presidency of the Council of Europe the Plenary meeting of the European Judicial Network took place on May 7-9, 2025. The event was attended by over 140 EJN representatives of EU MS. The International Cooperation Office of the National Prosecutor's Office, supported by the EJN Secretariat, was responsible for organizing the meeting. The meeting was opened by the Minister of Justice, Attorney General who stressed the importance of trust and effective cooperation among judicial

⁶⁸ Médecins Sans Frontières, Poland-Belarus Border Crisis: ‘We Don’t Want People to Die in the Forest’, Brussels, October 2021. Available at: <https://www.msf.org/poland-belarus-border-crisis-we-don%E2%80%99t-want-people-die-forest>.

authorities in the EU. He even recalled the motto of EJM “Connecting Justice” as the Polish presidency focuses on strengthening practical cooperation in criminal matters. The use of legal instruments, such as the European Arrest Warrant, the European Investigation Warrant or the conduct of joint investigations within the framework of the Joint Investigation Teams (JIT), is intended to ensure an effective fight against serious cross-border crime, as well as to protect the rights of citizens of EU Member States. The meeting included three thematic groups:

- the future of the European Union's criminal justice system,
- obtaining electronic evidence in the context of data disclosure by providers of electronic services,
- ongoing cooperation with countries outside the European Union on the example of the United Kingdom (extradition, transfer of convicted persons) and the United Arab Emirates (extradition, legal assistance in criminal cases).

The Criminal Investigation Department of the Police Headquarters take part in cyclical meetings of the Europol Task Force (UATF), which monitors the situation of refugees as a group that may become victims of human trafficking. In May 2023, the Polish Border Guard established a special unit to analyze online criminal activity, including human trafficking, and established cooperation with foreign wire transfer companies to collect evidence and analyze illicit financial flows.⁶⁹

As part of the Polish Police's participation in the 2023 pan-European JAD (Joint Action Days), op Chain and JAD Labour Exploitation, the police carried out checks on the whereabouts of potential victims of human trafficking, including refugees from Ukraine. Special attention was given to children, their family situation and possible irregularities, including the possibility of sexual exploitation of children, exploitation for begging or criminal activities.

In 2023–2024, the Polish National Police strengthened its international cooperation against trafficking in human beings. It took part in two major operations coordinated by EUROPOL under the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats—one aimed at identifying child victims and Ukrainian refugees at risk, and the other targeting labor trafficking among migrant workers. The police also participated in five Joint Investigative Teams (JITs), including two newly formed ones with the UK and Germany. One JIT investigated an organized criminal network exploiting Polish nationals for forced labor in the UK. In early 2024, Poland joined a new international taskforce focused on Ukrainian women trafficked for sexual exploitation in Western Europe. Additionally, in March 2024, Polish and Spanish authorities cooperated in dismantling a trafficking network, arresting 17 suspects and identifying 13 sex trafficking victims.⁷⁰

The RENATE Network (Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation) is a European coalition of religious and lay organizations dedicated to combating human trafficking and exploitation. Established in 2009, RENATE operates across 31 countries, including Poland, where it collaborates with local organizations to

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of State. 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State. 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

provide support and rehabilitation services to victims of trafficking. In Poland, RENATE partners with Stowarzyszenie PoMOC, an association offering assistance to victims through shelter, counseling, and reintegration programs. RENATE's activities encompass awareness-raising campaigns, educational initiatives, and advocacy efforts aimed at preventing trafficking and supporting survivors. The network also engages in research and policy development to address the root causes of human trafficking and to promote systemic change across Europe.

7. Conclusion

This report has brought into focus the pressing challenges and evolving dynamics in the fight against human trafficking. Despite important strides in legal frameworks and institutional coordination, several systemic and operational weaknesses persist that hinder the full effectiveness of national referral mechanisms and victim protection strategies.

One major obstacle remains the **underreporting of trafficking cases**, often rooted in victims' fear of retribution, distrust toward authorities, and lack of awareness about their rights and available support systems. To address this, outreach efforts must be expanded, and awareness campaigns need to be tailored to at-risk communities, emphasizing confidentiality and protection assurances for those who come forward.

Equally concerning is the issue of limited resources for victim protection, which constrains access to safe housing, psychological care, and long-term reintegration services. While the KCIK plays a pivotal role in providing assistance, recent evaluations indicate that the scale of needs often exceeds current capacities. GRETA has urged Polish authorities to ensure continuous access to public health care for all victims and to increase the number of places in specialised accommodation. These findings highlight the necessity for stable funding and the expansion of victim support services across both urban and rural areas, with particular attention to vulnerable populations

A critical emerging trend is the **rise of online trafficking**, facilitated by deceptive job advertisements and manipulative relationships formed through dating platforms. This underscores the urgent need to strengthen digital monitoring capabilities, foster collaboration with tech companies, and incorporate digital safety education into national prevention strategies.

In terms of prevention, gaps in the identification of child victims persist, particularly in less obvious or non-traditional contexts. Despite several training initiatives, there remains a clear need for specialized child-focused training for frontline professionals, including social workers, educators, and law enforcement personnel. GRETA has noted that the number of identified child victims of trafficking in Poland remains low and has urged authorities to enhance the detection capacity of professionals who may encounter such children. Additionally, the 2023 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report highlighted that NGOs reported instances where judges interviewed children without receiving training on child-friendly, victim-centered, or trauma-informed interviewing techniques. These findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive, specialized training programs to ensure that all professionals are equipped to identify and assist child victims of trafficking effectively. There is a clear need for specialized child-focused training for frontline professionals, including social workers, educators, and law enforcement

personnel. At the same time, improving coordination between social services and law enforcement remains a key priority. Mechanisms for timely information exchange, joint protocols, and multi-disciplinary case management should be institutionalized to enhance responsiveness and ensure comprehensive care.

In light of these findings, the following actions are recommended:

- Strengthen victim outreach and awareness programs tailored to local contexts.
- Secure consistent funding and expand protection services for all identified victims.
- Develop targeted responses to online trafficking threats, including preventive digital literacy campaigns.
- Institutionalize specialized training on child trafficking indicators.
- Formalize and streamline coordination frameworks between agencies involved in prevention, identification, and care.

Sustained commitment to these priorities, underpinned by inter-sectoral collaboration and victim-centered practices, will be essential to improving national responses and safeguarding those most at risk of exploitation.