Follow the Money:

Two years on – the progress in using financial intelligence to disrupt modern slavery and human trafficking in South Africa

LSEG | SAMLIT

Contents

Glossary

DPCI	Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations (Hawks)
EU	European Union
MSHT	Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
NPA	National Prosecuting Authority
PACOTIP	Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act
SAPS	South African Police Service
STR	Suspicious and unusual Transaction Report
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
FIC	Financial Intelligence Centre
EWG	Expert Working Group
INTERPOL	The International Criminal Police Organization

About SAMLIT

The South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force (SAMLIT) was established in December 2019 as a collaborative public-private partnership between the regulatory authorities, represented by the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC), the Prudential Authority of the South African Reserve Bank, and the domestic and international banking institutions registered in South Africa. SAMLIT's objectives include assisting in combating financial crime and enhancing a collective understanding of financial crime trends. In March 2021, SAMLIT established an expert working group (EWG) on modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), with three primary objectives:

1. Understand fully the financial flows relating to human trafficking, including country of source and destination and the demographics of the various role players
2. Develop a list of indicators to assist the financial sector to strengthen their ability to identify MSHT
3. Build partnerships with stakeholders who would be able to provide meaningful information to the FIC and law enforcement agencies in South Africa on known targets and indicators.

The following EWG members are recognised for conducting the research needed to compile this report:

Members:
- Absa
- Financial Intelligence Centre
- FirstRand (EWG Chair)
- South African Reserve Bank's Prudential Authority
- South African Banking Risk information Centre
- Standard Bank
- Standard Chartered
- Tyme Digital
- Capitec
- Luno
- Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation
- National Prosecuting Authority
- Western Union

The following organisations are also recognised for providing valuable insights:

Collaborators:
- A21
- Brave to Love
- LSEG Risk Intelligence
- Save the Children
- Stronger Together

Additionally, the FIC is acknowledged for the insights generated through the mining of financial intelligence reports generated from suspicious and unusual transactions and activity reports, which supported this report significantly. The EWG expresses its appreciation for the FIC's contribution.

Research methodology
In compiling this report qualitative and quantitative sources were used, namely:
- Interviews with accountable institutions from the EWG
- Open source, local and international literature and media
- Interviews conducted with anti-trafficking organisations and organisations acting in protection of migrants and children
- Interviews with survivors of MSHT crimes
- Interviews with domestic law enforcement and prosecution members
- Insights from the LSEG World-Check database
- Suspicious and unusual transaction reports data mining conducted by the FIC.

Executive summary

Modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) remains a complex, adaptive and under-reported crime that is sustained by systems capable of moving people and money with speed, secrecy and impunity. South Africa is exposed to these dynamics as a source, transit and destination country, and as a relevant node in trafficking-linked financial flows. This report, **Follow the money: Two years on – the progress in using financial intelligence to disrupt modern slavery and human trafficking in South Africa**, assesses how MSHT operates in and through South Africa, how typologies are evolving, and how financial intelligence can support detection, investigation and disruption.

The report draws on global and South African research, open-source intelligence, survivor and stakeholder insights, prosecution outcomes, LSEG World-Check data analysis and FIC analysis of suspicious and unusual transaction and activity reports. It confirms that trafficking in South Africa is both domestic and transnational, involving organised networks, smaller groups and individual facilitators. Vulnerability is driven by unemployment, poverty, inequality, irregular migration status, weak labour protections, online recruitment, family or community-based deception and limited victim identification.

Global trends show that trafficking has intensified and diversified since COVID-19. UNODC data indicates that detected victims in 2022 exceeded pre-pandemic levels, with forced labour and sexual exploitation remaining dominant typologies and children representing a significant share of detected victims. Digital recruitment, artificial intelligence-enabled deception, online grooming, forced criminality and scam compounds have expanded the trafficking risk landscape. These developments are reflected in South African cases involving false employment, sexual exploitation, forced labour, large-group trafficking, child exploitation, forced criminality and cyber-enabled fraud.

- South Africa's trafficking risk is hybrid and transnational. The country functions as a source, transit and destination jurisdiction, with major urban centres, transport corridors, border routes and informal labour markets creating points of exposure.
- Typologies are evolving. Sexual exploitation and forced labour remain prominent, while child trafficking, forced marriage, forced criminality, large-group trafficking and scam-compound trafficking show how traffickers are adapting to social, economic and digital vulnerabilities.
- Perpetrator profiles are varied. South Africa-linked data shows both domestic and foreign-national perpetrators, material female facilitator participation, concentration in economically active age groups, and convergence with organised crime, kidnapping, illegal restraint, extortion, fraud and money laundering.
- Prosecution outcomes show progress but also challenges. NPA data shows an increase in charge-based TIP convictions from 44 in 2023–2024 to 146 in 2024–2025, with severe sentences in some matters. However, prosecutions remain low relative to estimated prevalence due to under-reporting, victim identification challenges, evidentiary complexity, corruption risk and co-ordination gaps.
- Financial intelligence is central to disruption. The FIC's analysis identified 85 MSHT-related financial intelligence reports linked to 225 STRs for 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2024, a 305% increase from Phase I. STR mining highlights recurring use of electronic funds transfers, cash deposits and withdrawals, remittances, unknown source parties, high-risk geographic touchpoints and emerging virtual-asset typologies.

The central conclusion is that effective anti-trafficking action must move beyond incident-based detection toward strategic disruption. Trafficking networks are sustained by profit, facilitators, payment channels and laundering pathways. By integrating financial intelligence earlier and more consistently into investigations, strengthening typology-led monitoring, improving information sharing and supporting parallel financial investigations, accountable institutions, the FIC, law enforcement, prosecutors and international partners can better identify networks, target proceeds, dismantle facilitators and protect victims.

Current trends and typologies

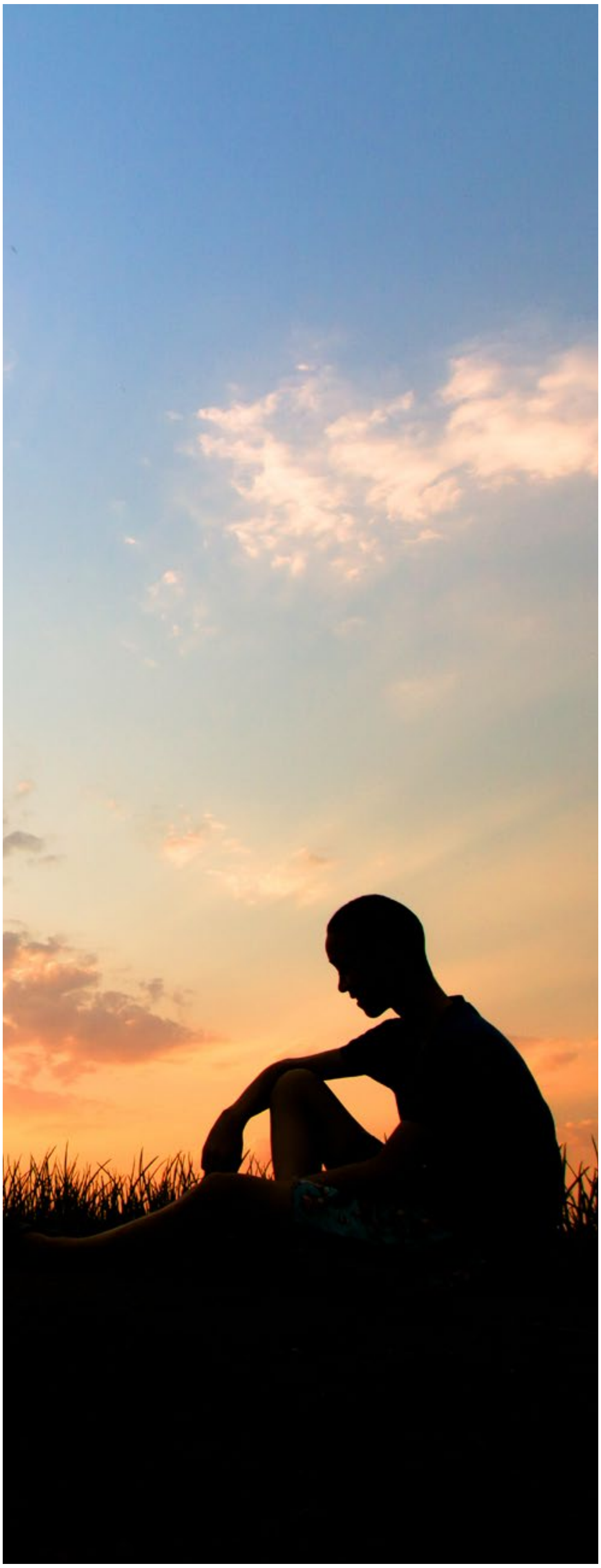
Global and local trafficking trends

Human trafficking patterns have shifted significantly since COVID-19. The UNODC 2024 Global Report records that identified victims in 2022 exceeded 2019 levels, with a 25% increase in detected victims compared with pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, 42% of victims were trafficked for forced labour and 36% for sexual exploitation. Children accounted for 38% of detected victims, with child victims increasing by 31% since 2019. Poverty, conflict, climate-related displacement and online recruitment continue to heighten vulnerability.[1]

Post-COVID trends

COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery period intensified online recruitment and exploitation, including child sexual exploitation material, live-streamed abuse, digital grooming and forced criminality. Traffickers increasingly use social media, messaging platforms and artificial intelligence-enabled tools to impersonate legitimate employers, tailor recruitment scripts and scale deception across language and cultural contexts.

Recent examples show how false employment and study opportunities are used to exploit economic vulnerability. The Alabuga Start programme reportedly recruited young African women via social media for supposed work and study opportunities in Russia, but some were allegedly forced into exploitative labour assembling military drones[2]. Separate reports indicate that South Africans were deceived into travelling to Russia for employment or security training and then coerced into military activity. These examples illustrate how traffickers exploit global crises, unemployment and online recruitment channels.[3]



1. UNODC. 2024. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Online. Available at: GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf

2. Business Human Rights Resource Centre. 2025. “Russia: Women from Africa recruited via ‘Alabuga Start’ programme on social media to work in weapons factories”. Online. Available at: Russia: Women from Africa recruited via ‘Alabuga Start’ programme on social media to work in weapons factories; incl. cos responses & non-responses - Business and Human Rights Centre

3. TRT Global. 2025. “South Africa probes human trafficking claims in Russian job offers”. Online. Available at: South Africa probes human trafficking claims in Russian job offers - TRT Afrika

South African overview of human trafficking

Role as a source, transit and destination country

South Africa operates as a source, transit and destination country. Victims are recruited locally, from neighbouring countries and, to a lesser extent, across continents. Women and children are commonly targeted for sexual exploitation, forced labour and forced criminality, while men and boys are also exploited in labour-intensive sectors. High unemployment, poverty, inequality, porous borders and social vulnerability create conditions for deceptive recruitment through fake job offers, education promises, social media manipulation and personal networks. South Africa's transport infrastructure, urban centres and border routes make it a key transit hub, while its economy and infrastructure attract traffickers seeking to exploit victims in commercial sex, domestic servitude, agriculture, mining, construction, hospitality, food services and illicit criminal activity.

Victim profiles

Victims in South Africa are predominantly trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labour, with most prosecutions involving sex trafficking. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, often aged between 12 and 25[1] and recruited through false job offers, personal relationships or coercion. Children, migrants, economically vulnerable youth and people with limited social protection are especially at risk. Men and boys are also targeted, particularly for labour exploitation, street vending and forced criminality. Official data is likely to undercount both victims and perpetrators.

Survivor testimony

"I met my trafficker through a female friend who told me he was a wealthy Nigerian man and that we would be in a relationship. Once we started seeing each other, he forced me to use strong drugs until I became addicted, and then he coerced me into prostitution on the streets. He controlled everything and took all the money I earned. I later became pregnant by one of his clients, but he did not want the baby. Desperate, I sought help from a shelter that supports pregnant women in crisis, and that is where I was connected to the A21 team.

My trafficker used to take the cash I earned and give it to a pastor at his church to deposit into a church bank account and then to another bank account which was not in his own name but which was registered to a woman he referred to as his "paper wife", making it appear as though he was being paid for legitimate work.

Now I am trying to rebuild my life and find a job so I can support myself."

Source: A21 interview with survivors of human trafficking, 2026.

1. Statistica. 2025. "Human Trafficking in South Africa from 2015 to 2024, by tier ranking". Online. Available at: Human trafficking tier ranking in South Africa | Statista

Trafficking activity is concentrated in major urban and transit hubs, including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Bloemfontein, with Gauteng and the Western Cape featuring prominently in reported cases. The 2025 United States TIP report[2] describes South Africa's trafficking environment as highly transnational, involving South African and foreign traffickers and victims from southern Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Reported cases include Thai nationals exploited in Gauteng, women from neighbouring countries such as Lesotho lured into sex trafficking, domestic servitude and labour trafficking, and foreign men exploited in mining, textiles, agriculture and fishing.

Illustrative cases include the rescue of seven Thai victims in Gauteng from sexual exploitation, four of whom were transgender[3], the exploitation of migrant workers through unregulated labour brokers, and two Indian nationals abandoned on an unseaworthy vessel in Durban Harbour[4] after fraudulent maritime recruitment. These cases show how traffickers use deceptive recruitment, debt, document confiscation, irregular migration status and isolation to maintain control. Large-group cases, including the rescue of Ethiopian nationals from properties in Gauteng[5], further demonstrate the organised and cross-border nature of trafficking networks operating through South Africa.

Trafficking methods and mechanisms of control in South Africa

Trafficking in South Africa is enabled by force, fraud and coercion. Common recruitment methods include fake jobs, education or accommodation offers, romantic relationships, social media grooming, messaging platforms and personal networks[6]. Control mechanisms include confiscation of identity and travel documents, threats of arrest or deportation, debt bondage, drug dependency, psychological intimidation, physical and sexual violence, and harm or threats directed at victims' families. These methods are consistently reflected in cases investigated and prosecuted by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA)[7].

2. United States Department of State. 2025, "2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Africa". South Africa - United States Department of State

3. Algoa FM (2024). 'Alleged Thai trafficker remanded in custody – seven women rescued'. Online. Available at: Alleged Thai trafficker remanded in custody - seven women rescued

4. Pinnock, D. (2025). 'Indian Sailors Saved from a dead ship in the Durban Habour'. Daily Maverick, 11 February. Available at: Indian sailors saved from a dead ship in Durban harbour

5. Williams, J. 2025. "Johannesburg Police Dismantle Human Trafficking Ring, rescuing 58 Ethiopian Victims. Available at: Johannesburg Police Dismantle Human Trafficking Ring, Rescuing 58 Ethiopian Victims - Briefly.co.za

6. Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. 2025. "Address by the Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development at the 2025 World Day Against Trafficking Stakeholders' Engagement" Online. Available at https://www.justice.gov.za/m_speeches/2025/20250730-TIP-DMin.html [Date Accessed: 12 September 2025]

7. TIP Prosecutions Statistics and Case Summaries of Convictions 2024-2025

Record Subject Profiles

Record subject profile analysis was drawn from the LSEG World-Check open-source database for January 2022 to June 2025. The analysis focused on MSHT-related categories relevant to financial crime and AML risk categories: human trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced and slave labour, and exploitation of children. Broader human rights and labour rights categories were excluded because they could not be attributed solely to MSHT.

The findings indicate that South Africa-linked MSHT is predominantly facilitated by adult subjects operating in urban centres, often in convergence with organised crime, violent crime, illegal restraint or kidnapping, money laundering, extortion and fraud.

South Africa recorded 170 incidents in the global dataset, placing it within the top tier of African jurisdictions and confirming that it is not a peripheral jurisdiction, but a relevant node in trafficking-linked financial flows, particularly as a transit and laundering economy[1].

Globally, male subjects dominate the dataset (81%), but female facilitators remain material (16%), particularly in recruitment, grooming, front-end transactions and financial intermediation. This is important because gender-based assumptions may weaken detection where women are used to create trust or manage visible customer-facing roles.

1. LSEG World-Check records, made up of individuals and entities, are sourced from the open domain, therefore, one needs to consider the variability of access to open source information, ie. some jurisdictions are more transparent with reporting MSHT cases than others. Countries that are not as transparent in reporting MSHT cases in their open media would have a lower percentage of reported cases, while still possibly having an actual high number of unreported cases.

1. Continental perspective (Africa) – LSEG World-Check data

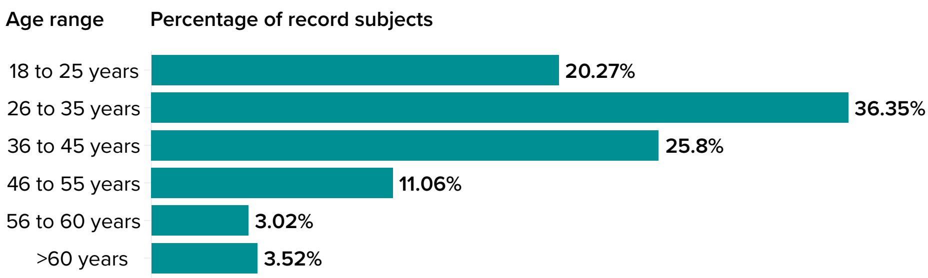
1.1. Gender

~ 67.86%
Male

~ 26.49%
Female

1.2. Africa Age Profile

Dominant subject age groups:



Key African Insight

87% of record subjects fall between **ages 18 and 45**, representing a relatively young group.

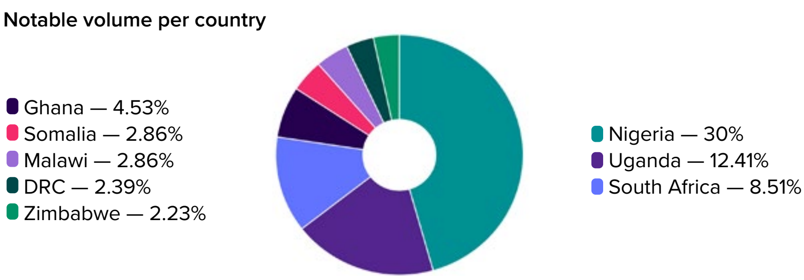
1.3. Scale and typology

1 769
Total African cases analysed

African data shows that human trafficking, exploitation of children and sexual exploitation account for the majority of incidents, while forced and slave labour appears lower in volume but remains highly relevant from an AML perspective because it may be embedded in apparently legitimate business activity such as recruitment, payroll, wage skimming, document fraud and labour brokerage.

1.4. Top African countries by case volume

Within the Africa-wide dataset, the countries with the highest record subjects concentrations in Africa of MSHT linked cases include:



Within Africa, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa feature prominently by case volume. Nigeria's prominence is significant from a compliance perspective because of its links with West African and South African urban hubs, while South Africa's ranking reinforces its role as both a domestic and cross-border trafficking environment.

2. South African case composition – LSEG World-Check data

170 Total South Africa cases analysed

76 Cases of **Human trafficking** (44.71% of total SA incidents)	**51** Cases of **Sexual exploitation** (30% of total SA incidents)	**42** Cases of **Exploitation of children** (24.71% of total SA incidents)	**1** Case of **Forced and slave labour** (0.59% of total SA incidents)

The South African case composition confirms human trafficking as a core predicate offence. Sexual exploitation and exploitation of children account for more than half of the analysed South African incidents, reflecting high-profit, repeat-revenue models that may involve cash turnover, intermediaries, third-party facilitators and prolonged victim control.

2.1 Record subjects profile – South Africa

2.2. Citizenship breakdown

- **50** South Africans (46.73%)
- **57** Foreign nationals (53.27%)

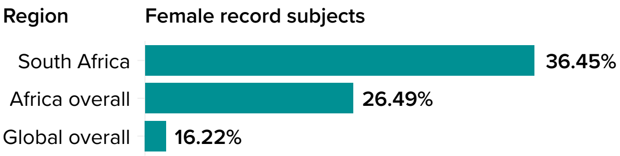
Key South African Insight
The near parity between South African and foreign-national record subjects indicates a hybrid offender ecosystem involving both domestic and non-South African actors. Risk frameworks should therefore focus on exploitation context, transaction behaviour, control mechanisms and repeat patterns rather than treating nationality as a primary risk factor.

2.3. South Africa gender breakdown

66 Males (61.68%)

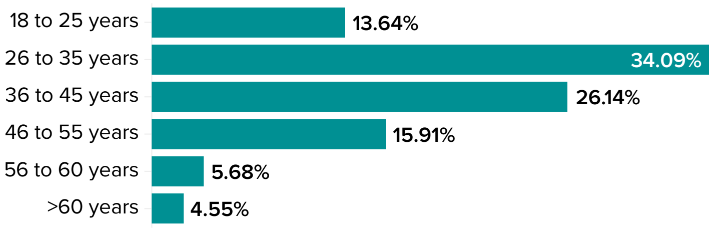
39 Females (36.45%)

2.4 Female record subject participation comparison



South Africa shows higher female record subject participation than both the African and global averages. This supports gender-neutral monitoring assumptions, as female-linked accounts may be used in recruitment, grooming, front-end transactions and financial intermediation.

2.5. South African age profile

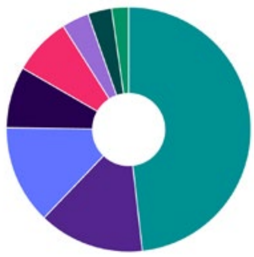


South African record subjects are concentrated in economically active age groups, with those aged 26 to 45 making up approximately 60% of the dataset. This supports closer attention to mobile banking, digital channels, online recruitment platforms and crypto-adjacent services as potential risk vectors.

2.6 Crime convergence

From the records extracted utilising human trafficking, sexual exploitation, exploitation of children and forced labour special interest categories, these were the top offences associated with MSHT records:

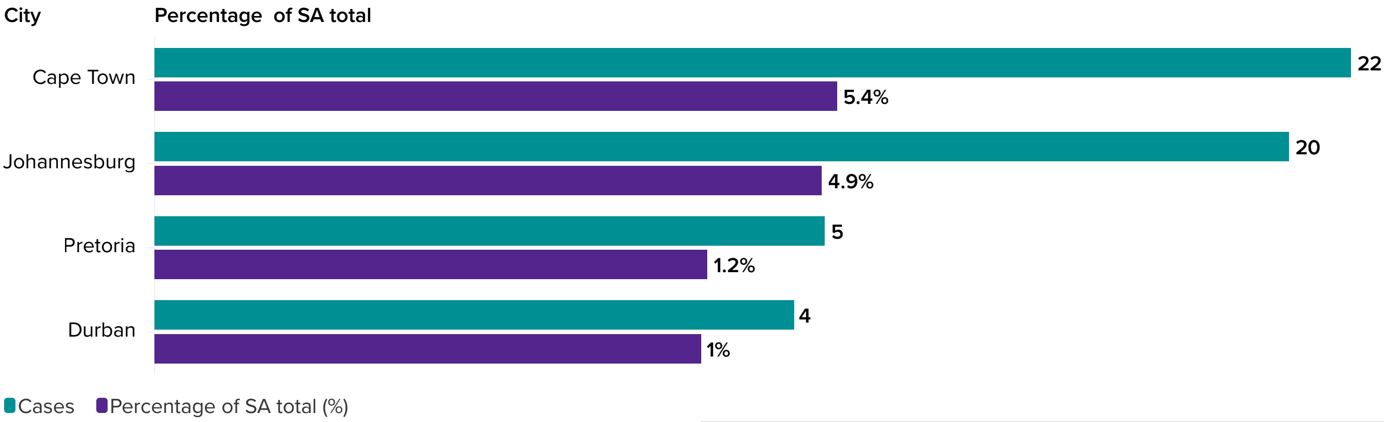
- Human rights violation — 42.46%
- Violent crime — 12.3%
- Illegal possession or sale — 11.51%
- Illegal restraint or kidnapping — 7.14%
- Organised crime — 6.75%
- Money laundering — 3.17%
- Extortion — 2.78%
- Fraud — 1.98%



Key implications
The linked-offence profile shows MSHT as a violent, exploitative and control-based crime that intersects with organised crime, kidnapping, illegal restraint, extortion, fraud and money laundering. Although financial crimes appear in a minority of linked records, this likely reflects charging and investigation practices rather than the absence of financial flows. The data supports parallel financial investigations and STR-driven detection.

2.7 Primary urban hotspots in South Africa – LSEG World-Check data

Major urban centres



Combined primary urban concentration

51 cases total (top four cities)

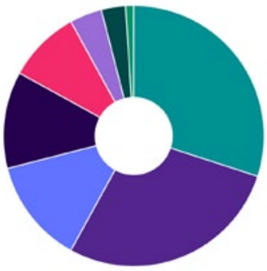
30% of national total cases

Interpretation
Just four cities account for one fourth of all recorded cases, making them priority zones for financial surveillance, typology testing, and inter FI co-ordination.

2.8 Provincial hotspots (South Africa)

Aggregated using all municipal references by province.

- **Western Cape — ≈30%**
- **Gauteng — ≈28%**
- **KwaZulu Natal — ≈13%**
- **Eastern Cape — ≈12%**
- Mpumalanga — ≈9%
- Free State — ≈4%
- Northern Cape — ≈3%
- Limpopo and North West — ≈1% combined



Key insight

Western Cape and Gauteng together account for nearly 60% of all South African cases, reflecting:

- High population density
- Transport hubs
- Tourism, services, and informal labour markets
- Financial access points used for laundering proceeds.

2.9 Secondary and emerging locations

- Mpumalanga (Nelspruit, Witbank, Middelburg)
- Eastern Cape (Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Zwelitsha)
- Northern Cape (Kimberley, Upington)

2.10 Cross-border references

61.52% United States

The most frequently referenced foreign location, potentially indicating destination country, online exploitation or prominent demand country.

15.38% Lesotho and **7.69%** Zimbabwe

Intra-regional southern African connectivity point and cross-border vulnerability.

7.69% United Kingdom and **7.69%** Australia

Each appears once in the dataset, indicating isolated, low frequency international associations. These should be interpreted as incident specific network or facilitation links, not as evidence of systematic trafficking corridors involving South Africa.

These associations indicate international connectivity linked to South African MSHT incidents. The dispersion across multiple US states suggests network, financial, digital, or facilitation linkages, rather than a single geographic trafficking route or confirmed victim movement.

Note: Any references to 'monitoring' or similar terminology are included to aid interpretation and support discussion for an AML audience, rather than to provide step-by-step or prescriptive compliance guidance.

Law enforcement statistics and prosecution cases

National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) – TIP Prosecutions Overview (2023–2025)

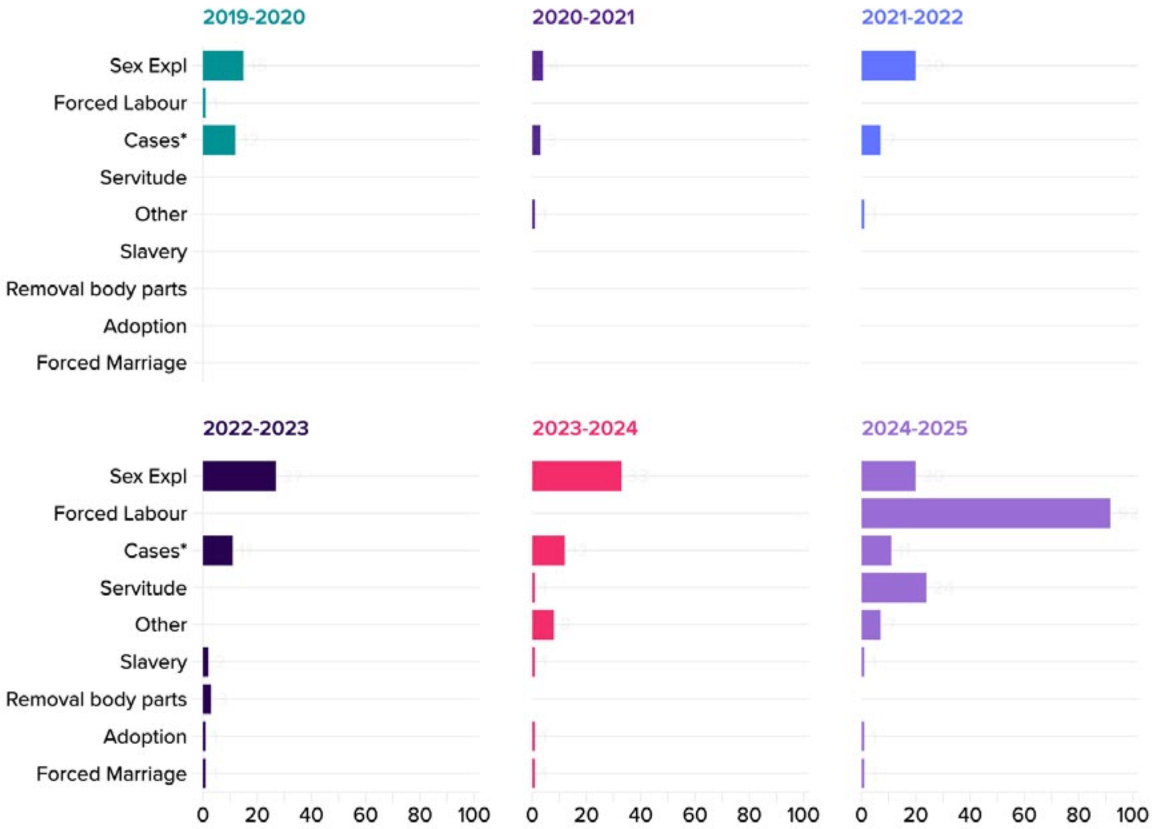
Reporting period	TIP cases investigated	Prosecutions instituted	Cases Resulting in TIP convictions	TIP convictions	Conviction methodology
2023–2024	107	603 prosecutions	12 cases	44 convictions	Charge based (number of TIP charges convicted)
2024–2025	90	419 prosecutions	11 cases	146 convictions	Charge based (number of TIP charges convicted)

Source: National Prosecuting Authority TIP convictions 2024-2025 and TIP Prosecution Statistics Case Summaries of Convictions 2024-2025.

Between 2023 and 2025, NPA data shows a reduction in TIP cases investigated and prosecutions instituted, but an increase in charge-based TIP convictions, from 44 in 2023–2024 to 146 in 2024–2025. The conviction figures reflect the number of TIP charges convicted, rather than the number of convicted individuals, meaning one accused may account for multiple convictions.

Sentencing outcomes demonstrate increased seriousness in the treatment of TIP offences: 34 life sentences were imposed on 10 accused, eight accused received 20-year sentences, two received 10-year sentences, and two received fines of R60 000 or five years' imprisonment. In total, 20 accused received sentences of 10 years or more for TIP convictions.

The following table reflects TIP convictions from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2025 broken down by type of TIP:



[1]Source: National Prosecuting Authority TIP convictions 2024-2025 and TIP Prosecution Statistics Case Summaries of Convictions 2024-2025.

A notable March 2025 case involved seven Chinese nationals convicted in Gauteng on 160 counts, including human trafficking, child labour, kidnapping and debt bondage, with sentences including 20 years' imprisonment for trafficking charges. The case illustrates the potential severity of court outcomes where trafficking is successfully investigated, charged and prosecuted[2].

However, prosecutions remain low relative to the estimated scale of trafficking. Under-reporting, limited data, victim identification challenges, corruption risk, law enforcement complicity, evidence-gathering difficulties and inter-agency co-ordination gaps continue to constrain the number of cases that progress to successful prosecution[3].

Regionally, UNODC data indicates that Sub-Saharan Africa recorded a significant increase in trafficking convictions in 2022 compared with 2019, but conviction patterns remain skewed towards sexual exploitation despite forced labour accounting for a large share of detected victims. This reinforces the gap between prevalence, detection, charging and prosecution outcomes[4].

---

1. Offences committed in contravention of Sections 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 18 and 19 would be regarded as Other TIP offences.

2. Department of Employment and Labour. 2025. "Long-awaited sentencing in the trial of seven Chinese nationals found guilty of human trafficking and child labour postponed". Online. Available at: [Long-awaited sentencing in the trial of seven Chinese nationals found guilty of human trafficking and child labour postpone]

3. Human Sciences Research Council. 2023. "HSRC released a new study on human trafficking in South Africa". Online, Available at: [HSRC released a new study on human trafficking in South Africa - HSRC]

4. UNODC. 2024. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Online. Available at: [GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf]

Trafficking typologies in South Africa

Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking remains one of the most prevalent trafficking typologies in South Africa and globally. Victims are commonly exploited through brothels, nightclubs, massage parlours, hotels, online platforms and private premises. Recruitment often relies on false employment opportunities, intimate relationships, drug dependency, coercion and abuse of socio-economic vulnerability. South African cases also show the involvement of both male and female traffickers, with women sometimes occupying recruitment, management or front-facing roles in exploitation venues. A May 2024 Sandton case involving South African and Nigerian suspects illustrates the continued link between sexual exploitation, drug abuse and organised facilitation[1].

Forced labour

Forced labour has increased globally, with UNODC reporting a 47% rise in detected victims between 2019 and 2022[2]. It now accounts for the largest share of detected trafficking victims globally, even though convictions remain disproportionately focused on sexual exploitation. Forced labour is often under-reported because it is hidden within legitimate or informal business activity and can be difficult to distinguish from labour exploitation without evidence of coercion, deception or control.

In South Africa, forced labour risks are concentrated in labour-intensive sectors including agriculture, fishing, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, domestic work and mining. Key risk drivers include informal labour brokerage, recruitment fees, absence of written contracts, poor understanding of employment terms, excessive overtime, discrimination, sexual harassment and weak oversight of seasonal or migrant labour.

Internal and cross-border movement often increases during peak agricultural and seasonal labour periods. Western Cape farms draw workers from other provinces, while Limpopo and Mpumalanga are exposed to cross-border recruitment from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho and eSwatini. Migrant and seasonal workers face heightened risk where transport, accommodation, documentation and wages are controlled by recruiters or employers.

1. Pienaar, E. 2024. "Three suspects arrested, woman rescued from Sandton house". Online. Available at: [Three suspects arrested, woman rescued from Sandton house]

2. UNODC. 2024. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Online. Available at: [GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf]

Financial control is a recurring feature of forced labour. Examples include wage skimming, debt-based recruitment, restricted access to pay, and allegations that workers are forced to withdraw wages at specific ATMs for handover to exploiters. Online recruitment has also extended forced labour risk beyond South Africa, including cases of South Africans trafficked into cyber-scam operations abroad. Protection gaps remain acute for male victims, children and victims in informal sectors.

In State v Modise and Another, the accused allegedly operated an illegal mine using forced labour by undocumented migrants and attempted to bribe police officials during the operation. The matter is part-heard in the High Court of the Mpumalanga Division[3].

Forced marriage

Forced marriage can constitute trafficking where children or adults are forced, coerced or deceived into exploitative unions involving sexual exploitation, servitude, domestic labour or debt bondage. Poverty, family debt, gender inequality and harmful practices can increase vulnerability, particularly for girls who cannot legally or meaningfully consent to such arrangements.

South African prosecutions confirm the presence of this typology. In State v Kadid Lukyamuzi and Others, the accused were convicted in a matter involving forced marriage, sexual exploitation and forced labour.[4]

Child trafficking

Child trafficking is increasing globally and is particularly acute in Sub-Saharan Africa, where children make up a substantial share of detected victims. Children are exploited for sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, forced criminality, illegal adoption, child marriage and, in extreme cases, removal of organs or body parts. Recruitment often occurs through family members, friends, community contacts or online platforms and is enabled by vulnerabilities such as poverty, weak protection systems and abuse of trust.

In South Africa, child trafficking includes commercial sexual exploitation, online abuse, domestic servitude, street vending, agriculture, forced begging, child marriage, illegal adoption and forced criminality. Recent examples include allegations that an Eastern Cape teacher trafficked teenage girls under the guise of schooling and accommodation[5], and a forced labour case involving Malawian adults and children brought into South Africa by Chinese nationals[6].

3. National Prosecuting Authority TIP convictions 2024-2025 and TIP Prosecution Statistics Case Summaries of Convictions 2024-2025.

4. Ibid.

5. Marais, R. 2025. "Eastern Cape teacher arrested for allegedly trafficking teenage girls for sex work". Daily Maverick,16 October. Available at: E Cape teacher arrested for allegedly trafficking teenage girls for sex work (Accessed: 28 October 2025).

6. Ngcobo, K. 2025. "Chinese nationals jailed over kidnapping and forced labour in South Africa". BBC. 10 September. Available at: Chinese nationals jailed in South Africa over kidnapping and forced labour of Malawians (Accessed: 28 October 2025)

Child trafficking for the purpose of illegal adoption

Illegal adoption is a recognised child trafficking typology where children are illicitly transferred, sold or concealed for exploitation or unlawful adoption. It may involve deception, coercion, corruption, abuse of socio-economic vulnerability or concealment from parents and guardians. In State v Mosedi and Another, illegal adoption for the purpose of slavery constituted the primary trafficking offence[7].

Child trafficking and the use of digital technology

Digital technology enables online recruitment, grooming, sextortion and commercial sexual exploitation. A Johannesburg case involving the exploitation of minor boys recruited through social media illustrates how traffickers use job promises, intimate images and threats of exposure to control children and compel sexual exploitation[8].

Child trafficking and kidnappings

Recent SAPS data indicates continued trafficking and kidnapping risk, with more than 4 500 kidnappings recorded in the first quarter of 2025 alongside reported human trafficking cases[9]. A high-profile case involving the trafficking and kidnapping of a six-year-old girl resulted in life sentences and drew national attention to the link between trafficking, kidnapping and family or close-contact involvement[10].

Child trafficking for removal of organs and body parts

NPA case summaries[11] confirm child trafficking for organ and body-part removal, including cases linked to so-called "muti" killings. Reported examples include an attempted sale of children's body parts in Tembisa, a KwaZulu-Natal case involving the planned kidnapping of a child with albinism, and a Soweto case involving the kidnapping and murder of two children by a sangoma[12]. These cases involved abduction, transport and exploitation for organ or body-part removal, highlighting the intersection between trafficking, ritual killings and extreme forms of child exploitation.

Forced criminality

Forced criminality is an emerging trafficking typology in which victims are compelled to commit crimes such as theft, drug trafficking, fraud, cyber scams or violent offences under threat, debt, violence or fear of being reported to authorities. It creates layered harm: victims are exploited while also being exposed to criminal liability, and secondary victims are harmed by the crimes they are forced to commit. This typology is increasingly linked to online fraud and scam compounds.

7. National Prosecuting Authority TIP convictions 2024-2025 and TIP Prosecution Statistics Case Summaries of Convictions 2024-2025

8. Mitchley, A. 2023. "Child abuse ring: Gerard Ackerman found guilty of porn charges, sex trafficking, grooming". News 24. 24 April. Available at: Child sex abuse ring: Gerard Ackerman found guilty of child porn charges, sex trafficking, grooming | News24 (accessed 24 October 2025).

9. SABC News (2025). Spotlight on the increase in kidnappings, human trafficking cases - Doctor Mpho Matlala weighs in [Video]. Available at: (1657) Spotlight on the increase in kidnappings, human trafficking cases - Doctor Mpho Matlala weighs in - YouTube [Date Accessed: 29 April 2026]

10. Chibelushi & Jones. 2025. "South African woman guilty of kidnapping and trafficking daughter aged 6". BBC. 2 May. Available at: Joshlin Smith trial: Mother Kelly convicted of kidnapping daughter in South Africa

11. NPA TIP prosecution case summaries 2022-2023

12. Traditional healer.

Emerging typologies

Trafficking of large groups

Large-group trafficking is an emerging concern involving organised movement and confinement of groups of migrants or vulnerable people for exploitation, often across borders. South African cases include 47 foreign nationals held in safe houses[1], 23 Somali nationals trafficked through Limpopo[2], a total of 192 Ethiopian nationals rescued from properties in Johannesburg in separate arrests[3] and other large groups moved through or into South Africa. These cases show how migrant smuggling can shift into trafficking when deception, debt, document control, threats or confinement are used to exploit migrants.

Scam compounds

A newer form of trafficking involves forced labour linked to organised cybercrime, with victims confined and exploited in so-called scam compounds, especially across regions of Southeast Asia.

In 2025, thousands of people, including South Africans[4], were reportedly rescued from scam centres in Myanmar after being lured by fake job offers and forced into online fraud such as "pig butchering"[5]. These compounds, also reported in Cambodia and Laos, combine forced labour, cyber-enabled fraud, confinement, violence and cryptocurrency-enabled laundering[6]. The typology demonstrates how trafficking networks are adapting to digital economies and requires international co-operation, financial intelligence and cybercrime expertise.

INTERPOL has reported the expansion of scam-centre operations across multiple regions, including emerging hotspots in West Africa. A related Namibian case involving 88 youths forced into online scamming reinforces the broader regional risk and the need to monitor links between trafficking, forced criminality, cyber fraud and virtual-asset flows.[7]

1. Moromo, J. 2023. "Mom and son behind bars, charged with human trafficking and for leasing out property where 47 foreign nationals were kept" Online. Available at https://iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/2023-10-10-mom-and-son-behind-bars-charged-with-human-trafficking-and-for-leasing-out-property-where-47-foreign-nationals-were-kept/ [Date Accessed: 03 July 2025]

2. Moramo, J. 2023. "Look: Three South African men arrested, R415,000 seized from group accused of trafficking 23 Somalians through Limpopo" Online. Available at https://iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/2023-10-30-look-three-south-african-men-arrested-r415000-seized-from-group-accused-of-trafficking-23-somalians-through-limpopo/ [Date Accessed; 03 July 2025]

3. McCain, N. 2025. "44 foreign nationals, possibly trafficking victims, rescued from dire conditions in Joburg" Online. Available at https://www.news24.com/southafrica/news/44-foreign-nationals-possibly-trafficking-victims-rescued-from-dire-conditions-in-joburg-20250501 [Date Accessed: 15 July 2025]

4. Dube, M. 2025. "South Africans stranded after scam centre escape" Online. Available at https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africans-stranded-after-scam-centre-escape/ [Date Accessed: 28 October 2025]

5. TimesLive. 2025. "South Africans forced to work in 'fraud factory' due home from Asia" Online. Available at https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2025-03-27-south-africans-forced-to-work-in-fraud-factory-due-home-from-asia/ [Date Accessed: 03 April 2025]

6. Naing, S. 2025. "What are Southeast Asia's scam centres, and why are they being dismantled?" Online. Available at https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times-daily/world/2025-03-07-explained-what-are-southeast-asias-scam-centres-and-why-are-they-being-dismantled/ [Date accessed: 03 April 2025]

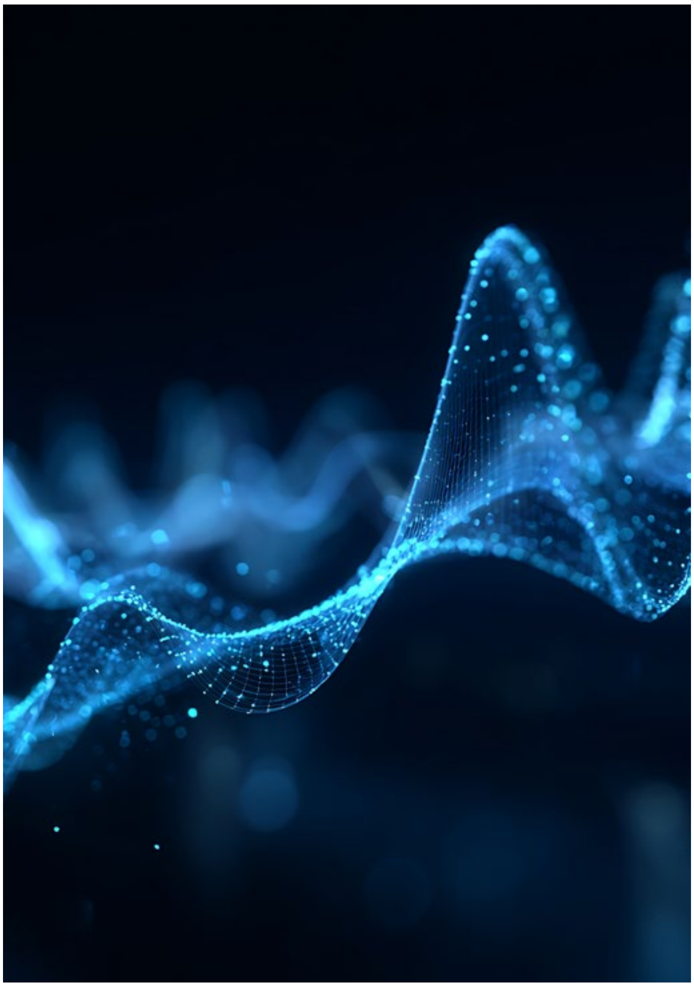
7. INTERPOL (2025). 'Interpol releases new information on globalization of scam centres' Online. Available at: INTERPOL releases new information on globalization of scam centres

Role of financial intelligence in detection and disruption

Financial intelligence is central to detecting and disrupting trafficking because recruitment, transport, control and profit extraction often leave transactional traces. Traffickers may use cash, remittances, electronic transfers, mobile channels, gambling, online platforms and virtual assets to move, disguise or extract value. Following these financial flows helps identify facilitators, networks, victims, proceeds and cross-border linkages that may not be visible through victim reporting alone.

This case reported by Capitec Bank illustrates this value: In 2025, Capitec identified scam operations linked to trafficking into KK Park, Myanmar, where South African victims were allegedly recruited via social media for false employment in Thailand and then forced into cyber-enabled fraud under coercive conditions. The investigation identified victims, recruiters, team leaders and crypto facilitators, with laundering patterns involving cryptocurrency channels, peer-to-peer payments and limited remittances into South African bank accounts.

The case demonstrates the convergence of forced labour, cyber fraud, virtual assets and transnational organised crime.



Financial Intelligence Centre Analysis of Human Trafficking and Linked Cases in Suspicious and Unusual Transaction and Activity Reports (STRs)

Purpose and background of the STR mining exercise

The FIC's STR mining exercise aimed to identify MSHT-related actors, sources of funds, financial flows, payment methods and behavioural indicators. The objective was to strengthen typology development, support accountable institutions in refining monitoring approaches, improve intelligence gathering and assist law enforcement with targeted analysis.

The sample was drawn from STRs submitted by accountable institutions and from MSHT-related financial intelligence reports, including cases already under law enforcement consideration.

The analysis recognises the South African and African context: poverty, unemployment and cash-based activity can obscure trafficking-linked financial flows, particularly where transactions fall below reporting thresholds or where victims and perpetrators are difficult to profile through formal financial records alone.

1. Methodology

1.1 Suspicious and unusual transaction and activity reports linked to MSHT proactive and reactive financial intelligence reports (cases).

The FIC assessed MSHT-related proactive and reactive financial intelligence products shared with law enforcement for the period **1 January 2022 to 31 December 2024**.

For this period, 85 MSHT-related proactive and reactive financial intelligence reports were identified on goAML[1]. Those 85 MSHT-related financial intelligence reports were linked to 225 STRs related to the suspected and investigated perpetrators.

These reports were reviewed to identify recurring trends, role players and transaction patterns.

Phase II shows a material increase in MSHT-related financial intelligence reports compared with Phase I: both proactive and reactive rose from 21 reports for 1 April 2016 to 31 December 2021 to 85 reports for 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2024. This 305% increase may reflect improved awareness, reporting quality, detection capability, investigative prioritisation and/or increased prevalence of MSHT-related activity.

1.2 Suspicious and unusual transaction reports with MSHT related keywords or indicators

For Phase II, MSHT-related keywords and indicators were searched against STRs received between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2024.

The reports were analysed and categorised as follows:
- MSHT related reports
- Reports potentially related to MSHT
- Reports not related to MSHT i.e. false positives.

Only 686 sampled MSHT-related STRs were used for trend and role-player analysis. Potential and false-positive reports were excluded because they lacked sufficient direct links to MSHT, even where some profiles or transaction patterns resembled confirmed cases.

Together, a total sample of **911 STRs** both extracted by keywords searches (**686 STRs**) and those linked to shared financial intelligence reports (**225 STRs**) were selected for profiling and transaction-pattern analysis.

It is important to note that the two methodologies produced some duplicate STRs across the case linked extracts and keywords and indicators based extracts. Before analysis began, these duplicates were identified, assessed and removed to improve the accuracy of the analysis.

1. UNODC (2026), goAML Anti-Money Laundering System. Available at: [goAML (Anti-Money-Laundering System)]

2. Limitation and scope

The analysis was limited to information lawfully available to the FIC under the FIC Act, including reported transactions and additional information obtained under relevant statutory powers. The FIC does not interview subjects, take statements, or use human or signal intelligence; it may, however, engage reporting entities for clarity and feedback.

Context was drawn from open-source information, government databases, affidavits, media, academic publications, trends and typologies, FIC databases, information requests and record searches.

3. Phase I and Phase II Profiling table comparison

Period:

Phase I	Phase II
1 April 2016 – 31 December 2021	1 January 2022 – 31 December 2024

Table 1: Phase I and Phase II period comparison

Nationalities ranked by prevalence:

Phase I	Phase II
South African	Malawian
Nigerian	Zimbabwean
Taiwanese	Zambian
Chinese	South African
American	Mozambican
Cameroonian	Tanzanian
Zimbabwean	American
Zambian	Ethiopian
Ugandan	Batswana
	Congolese
	British

Table 2: Phase I and Phase II role players Nationalities comparison

Industries:

Phase I	Phase II
Hotels/ taverns run as brothel	Restaurants and pubs
Religious institution	Religious institutions
Adult entertainment	Adult entertainment
Financial institutions	Financial services
Law enforcement agencies	Law enforcement agencies
Travel and tourism	Hospitality
Beauty spa	Hair and beauty salon
Textile industry	Engineering and construction
Immigration and logistics	Logistics and transportation
Sports betting	Sports
Imports and export	Sales and marketing
Farms	Property management
	Human resources and staffing
	Childcare services
	Used car dealer
	Health services

Table 3: Phase I and Phase II role players industries comparison

Occupations:

Phase I	Phase II
Director	Director
Manager/professional	Manager
Pastor	Pastor
SAPS Superintendent	Police
Waitress	Chef
Small-business owner	Self-employed
Unemployed	Unemployed
Judge	Internal systems control
Farmer	Industrial professional
Ambassador	Electrician
Pensioner	Student
Clerical	Salesperson
Cleaner	General worker
Housewife	Taxi driver
	E-hailing driver

Table 4: Phase I and Phase II role players occupation comparison

4. Phase II STR Data mining analysis and findings

4.1 Statistical analysis

The regulatory reports used for the STR data mining involved a total of **911 sampled reports** from **686 reports derived from keywords searches (keyword search reports)** and **225 reports that were linked to proactive and reactive financial intelligence products (linked cases reports)** shared with law enforcement agencies relating to MSHT investigations.

Reports relating to MSHT offences were received from various role players in the financial and non-financial industries:

Accountable Institutions	2022	2023	2024	Grand Total
Keyword search	**232**	**177**	**277**	**686**
Bank	73	77	216	366
Business entity with a reporting obligation in terms of section 29 of the FIC Act			1	1
Cross-border money or value transfer services provider – authorised dealer with limited authority	124	35	2	161
Crypto asset service providers – general	20	45	19	84
Estate agent		1	3	4
Foreign exchange agent or company	6		2	8
Gambling (betting)			1	1
Gambling (bookmakers)		2	1	3
Investment advisor or intermediaries	8	15	26	49
Legal practitioners (attorneys)		1	3	4
Money remitter	1			1
Motor vehicle dealer		1	2	3
Voluntary disclosure reporter			1	1
Linked cases	**72**	**88**	**65**	**225**
Bank	63	76	49	188
Credit providers		1		1
Cross-border money or value transfer services provider – authorised dealer with limited authority	2			2
Crypto asset service providers – general			1	1
Gambling (bookmakers)		1		1
Investment advisor or intermediaries	6	9	14	29
Motor vehicle dealer	1	1	1	3
Grand Total	**304**	**265**	**342**	**911**

Table 5: Number of suspicious and unusual transactions reports relating to MSHT

Total reported rand value of MSHT related reports per calendar year:

Rand value per year	2022	2023	2024	Grand Total
Keyword search	R27 423 194	R27 850 107	R206 588 847	R261 862 148
Linked cases	R291 740 112	R87 179 090	R204 809 287	R583 728 489
Grand Total	**R319 163 306**	**R115 029 197**	**R411 398 134**	**R845 590 637**

Table 6: Transactional value reported relating to MSHT

While the figures represent suspicious and unusual transactions reported by both financial and non-financial institutions, it is important to recognise their limitations. These monetary values do not necessarily correspond to proven criminal activity, rather they reflect patterns of transactions that may be associated with MSHT offences. Consequently, these numbers should not be interpreted as definitive measures of the scale, costs, or profits tied to MSHT crimes. Instead, they provide a partial glimpse into possible transactional behaviours connected to such offences.

Fluctuating rand values associated with MSHT-related suspicious and linked cases reveal a dynamic and evolving landscape in the detection and reporting of potential criminal activity. The noticeable decrease in linked case values during 2023, followed by a significant increase in 2024, suggests that there may have been changes in detection, reporting and investigative priorities that have shifted considerably. Several factors may account for these variations. The initial decline could be attributed to decreased detection rates, or perhaps under-reporting.

Analysis of the STR data in 2023 also noted an increased number of reports involving small amounts of funds received through money remittances from some European and North American countries to females primarily based in Johannesburg, with the nature of the relationships and reasons for the transactions unknown. The funds were suspected to be linked with sex exploitation and prostitution. However, the significant increase in 2024 points to possible enhanced investigative methods, expanded detection capabilities, or possibly a surge in more sophisticated or widespread MSHT offences related to financial transactions.

A notable increase in investigation was visible from the grounds of suspicion provided whereby many perpetrators were under investigation for related MSHT offences. This reflects a growing recognition of the complexity and adaptability of MSHT offences, necessitating robust, data driven approaches to both monitoring and intervention.

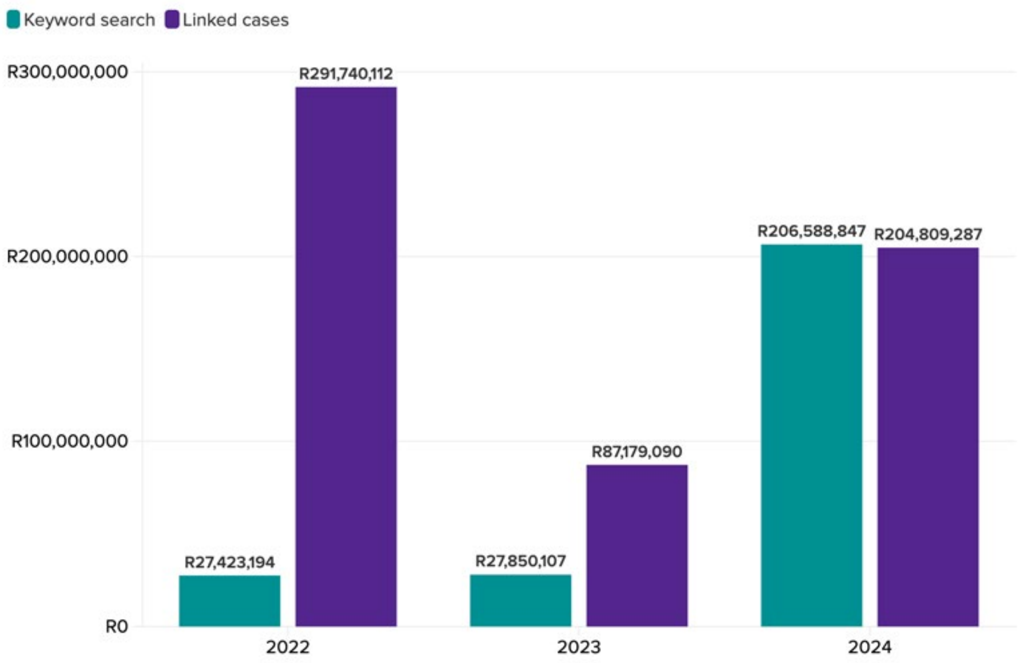


Figure 1: Reported transactional value by keyword search reports and linked cases reports per calendar year

The FIC provided both proactive and reactive financial intelligence reports to law enforcement agencies relating to MSHT offences. The following outlines the number of each type shared from 2022 to 2024.

The following is a yearly breakdown of the shared financial intelligence reports:

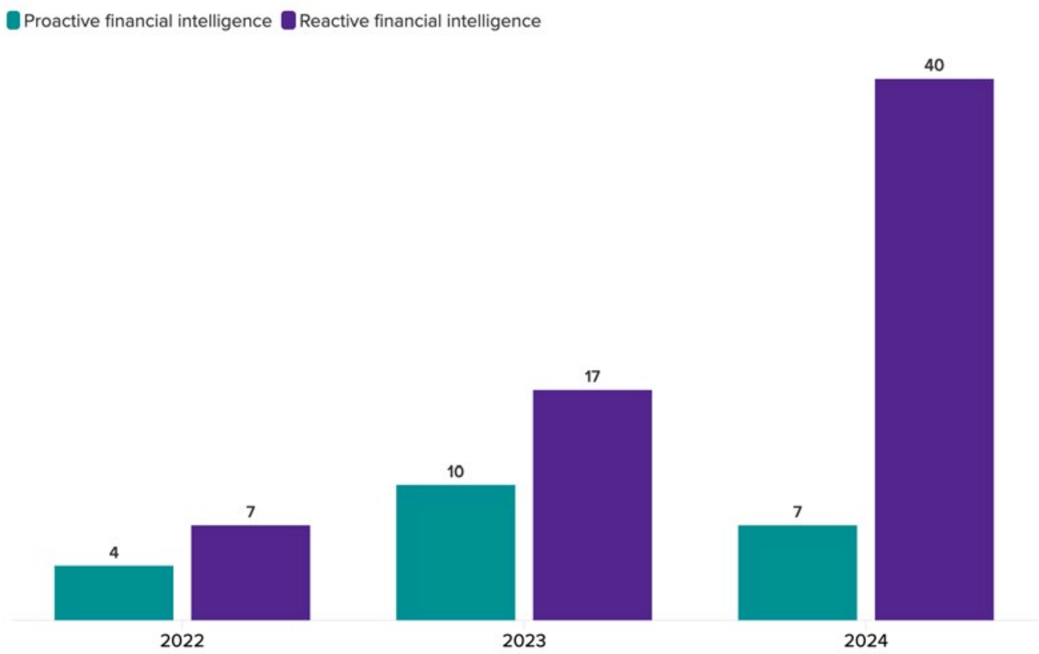


Figure 2: Number of linked proactive and reactive financial intelligence[2] reports per calendar year

2. Proactive financial intelligence: intelligence initiated by the FIC and sent to law enforcement for investigations.
Reactive financial intelligence: intelligence request initiated by law enforcement based on existing investigations.

4.2 Alleged reported crime types

Other alleged crimes linked to MSHT perpetrators were identified as intentional homicide, corruption, illicit enrichment, robbery, fraud, theft of motor vehicles, financing of terrorism, unlawful possessions of firearms, cybercrime, and romance scams.

In terms of the value of reported transactions, **sexual exploitation dominated the reports accounting for over 76% of the total**. Human trafficking dominated the reports in terms of the volume reported with human smuggling also showing significant contribution.

The alleged crime types by keyword searches reported regarding MSHT by value:

Alleged crime types by keyword searches	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
Human trafficking	R8 161 238	R12 512 476	R228 773 035	R249 446 749
Human smuggling	R160 823	R4 609 716	R1 597 126	R6 367 665
Sexual exploitation	R1 459 318	R1 750 072	R1 519 172	R4 728 562
Human trafficking syndicate	R62 801		R4 300 872	R4 363 673
Sex trafficking	R2 380 000	R457 000	R5 450	R2 842 450
Kidnapping		R399 000	R1 416 721	R1 815 721
Drug trafficking involving sex trafficking			R1 325 100	R1 325 100
Child sexual exploitation	R8 550	R31 050	R178 530	R218 130
Sexual extortion syndicate			R200 000	R200 000
Child trafficking		R182 640		R182 640
Labour exploitation			R113 800	R113 800
Grand total	**R12 232 730**	**R19 941 954**	**R239 429 805**	**R271 604 489**

Table 7: The alleged MSHT crimes by keyword search by value per calendar year

The alleged crime types by linked cases reported regarding MSHT by value:

Alleged crime types by linked cases	2022	2023	2024	Grand Total
Kidnapping	R58 115 338	R47 802 121	R197 618 147	R303 535 606
Human trafficking	R231 790 414	R39 376 969	R7 011 590	R278 178 973
Child sexual exploitation	R1 834 360		R154 550	R1 988 910
Sexual exploitation			R25 000	R25 000
Grand Total	**R291 740 112**	**R87 179 090**	**R204 809 287**	**R583 728 489**

Table 8: The alleged MSHT crimes by linked cases by value per calendar year

Trafficker profile

Males | **287** | **Females**

63% Male perpetrators

Male perpetrators were directors, self employed, police, managers, drivers, salespersons, pastor, electricians and notable contributors of unemployed individuals.

37% Female perpetrators

Females were directors, self employed, managers, general workers and notable contributors of unemployed.

Industries (Males)

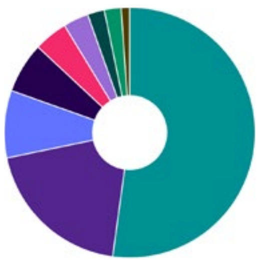
Engineering and constructions
Retail
Hair and beauty salon
Law enforcement
Logistics and transportation
Adult entertainment
Restaurants and pub
Travel and tourism
Religious
Sports
Motor vehicle dealer

Industries (Females)

Retail
Hospitality
Health services
Construction and mining engineering
Property management
Travel and tourism (travel agency and guest houses)
Human resource and staffing
Childcare services
Marketing
Financial services

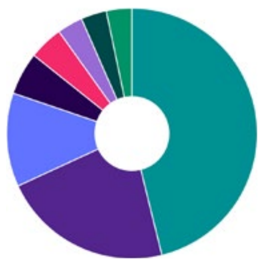
Nationalities (Males)

- Malawian
- Zimbabwean
- Zambian
- South African
- Mozambican
- Tanzanian
- Ethiopian
- Congolese
- British



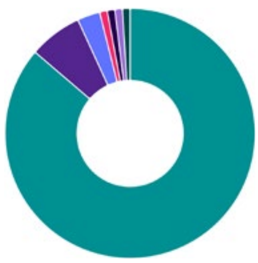
Nationalities (Females)

- Zimbabwean
- Zambian
- South African
- Mozambican
- Tanzanian
- American
- Batswana
- Malawian



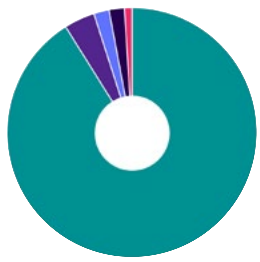
Source of funds (Males)

- Unknown
- Salary/Wages
- Business proceeds
- Other
- Interests
- Gifts
- Cash deposits



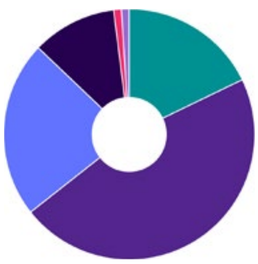
Source of funds (Females)

- Unknown
- Salary/Wages
- Business proceeds
- Other
- Allowances



Age (Males)

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+



Age (Females)

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+

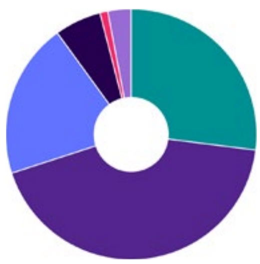


Figure 3: Financial Intelligence Centre - Trafficker perpetrator's profile

5. Perpetrators transacting behaviours

5.1 Transactions with unknown source party

The analysis of perpetrator transacting patterns demonstrates a recurring trend where a considerable volume of transactions involve unknown sources. The review of transaction data reveals complex patterns in both the movement and origin of funds. A significant amount of over R39 million, moved through electronic banking and cash methods. These transactions involved parties whose identities could not be verified, highlighting concerns about the traceability and transparency of these financial flows.

A closer look at transaction modes between 2022 and 2024 shows the following trends:

- Electronic fund transfers (EFT) (local) accounted for a considerable portion, increasing each year, with totals exceeding R10 million.
- Cash transactions remained substantial, surpassing R8 million across the period. These were facilitated through automatic teller machine (ATM) deposits and in-branch deposits.
- ATM transactions were frequently used, especially by parties with unknown sources. Key ATM locations included Sandton City, Tshwane Central, OR Tambo Airport, Springs Mall, and Stellenbosch. These areas were associated with activities such as sexual exploitation, human trafficking, kidnapping, and smuggling.
- Other transaction types, such as virtual currency methods, and internet transfers also contributed significantly to the overall sums moved.

The lack of transparency in the origin of these funds poses challenges for tracking, potentially obstructing efforts to identify the true beneficiaries and purposes behind the financial activity.

While EFT and cash channels dominate, the recurring use of ATMs by unidentified parties at high-risk locations signals an urgent need for improved monitoring systems to combat illicit financial flows and related MSHT criminal activities.

Category	Transaction mode	2022	2023	2024	Grand Total
Keyword search		**R2 031 855**	**R5 603 177**	**R13 255 944**	**R20 890 976**
	EFTs (local)		R841 932	R9 806 594	R10 648 526
	Cash	R2 001 805	R4 633 445	R1 486 090	R8 121 340
	In-branch			R1 181 900	R1 181 900
	ATM	R30 050	R127 800	R471 360	R629 210
	Internet			R310 000	R310 000
Linked cases		**R6 466 192**	**R10 287 755**	**R6 814 195**	**R23 568 142**
	Cash	R3 911 196	R8 894 485	R175 760	R12 981 441
	EFTs (local)	R1 993 360	R709 300	R5 390 850	R8 093 510
	In-branch	R296 836	R161 830	R820 000	R1 278 666
	ATM	R264 800	R522 140	R427 585	R1 214 525
Grand total		**R8 498 047**	**R15 890 932**	**R20 070 139**	**R44 459 118**

Table 9: Transaction modes employed by perpetrators involving unknown source party

5.2 General transaction modes

The data mining process across most MSHT related alleged offences noted EFT (57.82%) and money remittances (21.19%) as being most prevalent. It has been noted that cash (16.41%) was used involving ATM deposits and in-branch deposit. There were observations of increase in use of EFT throughout the years from 2.79% in 2022 to 80.60% in 2024. Money remittances showed a decline throughout the years from 88.01% in 2022 to 0.74% in 2024. These observations can also reflect changes in the composition of reported STR data over the review period. However, the available data does not conclusively indicate that perpetrators altered their modus operandi, as the observed trends may also be influenced by changes in reporting behaviour, reporting practices, monitoring capabilities, or sector-specific reporting patterns among accountable institutions. Consequently, caution should be exercised when interpreting these trends as evidence of behavioural change by perpetrators. Nonetheless, despite the observed decline in reported remittance transactions, money remittances remain a recognised risk area for MSHT-related activity due to their cross-border nature and the challenges associated with identifying the true origin, destination, and beneficiaries of funds.

Perpetrators often received large electronic credits and quickly disposed of the funds through withdrawals or purchases. Some crypto accounts had no associated bank accounts, complicating traceability. Several individuals were linked to multiple STRs, suggesting ongoing suspicious behaviour.

Transaction mode	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
EFTs (local)	2.79%	48.58%	80.60%	57.82%
Money remittance	88.01%	19.98%	0.74%	21.19%
Cash	6.47%	27.59%	13.05%	16.41%
ATM (Cash)	1.18%	0.84%	3.21%	2.15%
Internet	0.66%	0.88%	0.65%	0.72%
In-branch	0.51%	1.28%	0.28%	0.63%
Inter bank transfer	0.00%	0.00%	0.58%	0.31%
EFTs (international outbound)	0.00%	0.00%	0.56%	0.29%
Virtual	0.07%	0.16%	0.14%	0.13%
Point of sale	0.07%	0.32%	0.00%	0.11%
Electronic fund transfer (international inbound)	0.00%	0.12%	0.02%	0.05%
Telegraphic transfers	0.22%	0.00%	0.00%	0.04%
Forex transaction inwards	0.00%	0.00%	0.07%	0.04%
Cellphone banking	0.00%	0.08%	0.02%	0.04%
Forex transaction outwards	0.00%	0.12%	0.00%	0.04%
Unknown	**0.00%**	**0.04%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**
Account to cell number transfer	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%	0.01%
Retail vouchers	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%	0.01%
Grand total	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

Table 10: General transaction modes employed by perpetrators

5.2.1 Transactions modes for specific crime categories

Methods of transacting – Child sexual exploitation

Financial transaction patterns linked to child sexual exploitation show clear indicators of illicit activity, including heavy reliance on cash and electronic transfers with no identifiable source of income and behaviours inconsistent with declared employment. Investigations identified business accounts that remained dormant for extended periods which then suddenly experienced sharp increases in activity, suggesting their use as temporary conduits for criminal proceeds. Cryptocurrencies were also frequently used, particularly to transfer funds from perpetrators' digital wallets to websites hosting child sexual abuse material, complicating traceability. These financial anomalies have been closely associated with subpoenas and law enforcement investigations into the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material, highlighting the importance of transaction monitoring in detection and enforcement efforts.

The table below shows a notable increase in the use of cash over time, while EFTs and virtual currencies saw a decline in their share. The shifting patterns likely reflect both changing behaviours among perpetrators and increased scrutiny of certain transaction methods.

Transaction mode	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
Cash	0.00%	33.33%	60.47%	54.72%
EFTs (local)	50.00%	33.33%	31.40%	32.08%
Virtual currency	50.00%	16.67%	5.81%	8.49%
ATM	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	1.89%
Money remittance	0.00%	5.56%	0.00%	0.94%
Internet	0.00%	0.00%	1.16%	0.94%
In-branch	0.00%	0.00%	1.16%	0.94%
Grand total	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

Table 11: Transaction modes employed by perpetrators in alleged child sexual exploitation offences

Methods of transacting – Sexual exploitation

Transaction data linked to sexual exploitation reveals multiple financial red flags, including unemployed young adults receiving large, unexplained deposits that were rapidly split into round amounts and distributed across multiple accounts, likely to avoid reporting thresholds. Funds were quickly spent through point of sale transactions, electronic and online transfers, and ATM withdrawals, with links identified to brothels, the adult entertainment sector, drug trafficking, and, in some cases, sexual extortion involving coercion and blackmail.

Transaction methods also shifted over time, with money remittances dominating in 2022 (over 73% of transactions), but electronic funds transfers (EFTs) becoming the primary channel by 2024 with over 88% surge, while cash usage remained consistently low and other banking methods played only a minor role.

Transaction mode	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
EFTs (local)	7.02%	4.90%	88.34%	65.68%
Money remittance	73.68%	76.02%	2.83%	22.69%
Cash	19.30%	5.99%	5.21%	5.91%
In-branch	0.00%	8.17%	0.09%	1.99%
EFTs (international outbound)	0.00%	0.00%	2.12%	1.54%
Internet	0.00%	2.45%	0.35%	0.84%
ATM	0.00%	0.00%	0.88%	0.64%
EFTs (international inbound)	0.00%	0.82%	0.09%	0.26%
Point of sale	0.00%	1.09%	0.00%	0.26%
Cell phone banking	0.00%	0.54%	0.00%	0.13%
Account to cell number transfer	0.00%	0.00%	0.09%	0.06%
Grand total	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

Table 12: Transaction modes employed by perpetrators in alleged sexual exploitation offences

5.2.2 Account types

The following account types were most frequently used by perpetrators:

Account types	Source account	Destination account	Grand total
Current	28.46%	36.13%	33.12%
Unknown	39.43%	10.47%	21.82%
Savings	16.26%	22.25%	19.90%
Cheque	6.50%	19.37%	14.33%
Business account	3.66%	6.54%	5.41%
Credit card account	2.44%	1.83%	2.07%
Investment account	1.22%	0.79%	0.96%
Commercial account	0.41%	0.79%	0.64%
Loan	1.22%	0.00%	0.48%
Retail	0.00%	0.52%	0.32%
Transmission	0.41%	0.26%	0.32%
Vehicle or moveable asset finance account	0.00%	0.26%	0.16%
Recharge	0.00%	0.26%	0.16%
Call account	0.00%	0.26%	0.16%
Trust account	0.00%	0.26%	0.16%
Grand total	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

Table 13: Types of accounts used by source account and destination account

Current accounts, savings accounts, cheque, and business accounts were most prevalently used accounts by perpetrators.

- Current accounts were most used for receiving and disposing funds rapidly.
- Savings accounts used for storing illicit proceeds temporarily.
- Business accounts were often linked to front companies or fake recruitment agencies. They were also used to simulate legitimate operations, such as travel and labour services.
- Credit cards were used for high value purchases as well as rapid disposal of funds.
- Trust accounts were also noted and suspected to have been used to obscure ownership and control of the funds.
- A substantial number of reports were identified with information relating to unknown accounts. The analysis noted that some of the accounts were linked to crypto-related activities increasingly used for anonymous transfers from various bank accounts. Most common transactions were related to funds associated with child sexual exploitation.

5.2.3 Incoming funds (money received)

The analysis of fund receipt methods identified multiple channels indicative of potential illicit activity, with larger transactions primarily received through EFTs, money remittances, cash deposits (ATM and in-branch), real-time clearing payments, interbank and internet transfers, and mobile payments. Cash deposits were often structured in round amounts, sometimes exceeding reporting thresholds and conducted across different regions—most notably Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu Natal. Some accounts received large sums as single transactions, while others showed frequent smaller remittance inflows from unrelated senders, with recurring entities using multiple account numbers, suggesting structuring and linked accounts. Most high volume transactions were tied to unknown sources of funds, alongside declared sources such as salaries, gifts, business income, allowances, and interest. Additionally, perpetrators moved funds across their own interconnected accounts to create complex transaction chains, with notable cryptocurrency activity involving mixing services, further indicating attempts to obfuscate fund origins.

5.2.4 Outgoing funds (money disposed)

Funds were primarily disposed of through local EFTs, which were the most common transfer method, alongside ATM cash withdrawals, point of sale and debit card purchases, debit orders, and mobile payment channels such as e-wallets, instant cash vouchers, prepaid transactions, and mobile SWIFT payments coded as gifts. Significant use of mobile banking was observed, with transfers made to multiple cellphone linked accounts. Many transactions carried generic or vague descriptions (e.g. “building material”) or alphanumeric references, suggesting attempts to mask the true nature of expenditures and simulate legitimate business activity. Additional patterns included money remittances to unknown recipients in countries such as Kenya and Zambia, rapid movement of funds following receipt, and frequent internet transfers between accounts held at the same financial institutions. Funds were also used for lifestyle and luxury spending, including high value purchases of vehicles and property, elevated spending on ride hailing and delivery services, and retail and pharmacy transactions, collectively complicating the tracing of links to modern slavery and human trafficking-related financial flows.

5.2.5 Unusual depositor's references identified

Category	Depositor reference or description
Explicit or illegal content indicators	Child porn
	Kidney harvesting deposit
	Gaping hole
Violent or criminal references	BLOED GELD
Legal or official looking references	court affidavit
Business or commercial names	FIELDMAN SECURITY
	Belle Social Club
	7riches Club Romee
	Club Ari
	Xenon transport
	House Supply
	Thibauit squaere Supply
	GREAT SPACES
	ALL4ONE
Financial or payment platform references	RTC Easyautofin
	LUM ZAR
	SMARTEFT
	CASHFOCUS EE WITHDRAWAL

Depositor references are a valuable contextual risk indicator in AML and human trafficking detection because they often reveal intent, underlying relationships, or attempts at obfuscation that are not immediately apparent from transaction amounts alone. Explicit or suggestive references (e.g. sexual, violent, or exploitative terminology) may directly signal illegal activity, while misleading business-like descriptions, generic terms, or structured alphanumeric codes can indicate efforts to disguise the true nature of transactions. Repeated use of similar references across multiple accounts, inconsistent references relative to the customer's profile, or references mimicking legitimate financial or legal terminology are common typologies linked to structuring, use of front entities, and layered fund movements. In trafficking related cases, such anomalies help investigators identify links between accounts, trace operational networks, and distinguish legitimate payments from those financing exploitation, making depositor references a critical qualitative red flag alongside quantitative transaction monitoring.

5.2.6 Unusual account activity and transaction behaviour

The following unusual transactional behaviours were identified in the accounts of perpetrators:

Cash and structuring
- Cash-based business
- Cash Deposit slip to avoid reporting threshold
- Round-amount deposits and withdrawals
- Large account turnover in short periods
- Repeated ATM use suggesting networked

Account behaviour
- Dormant business accounts with sudden spikes
- Frequent inter-account fund movements
- Layering and rapid fund cycling
- Accounts closed shortly after unusual activity

Crypto and digital abuse
- Extensive cryptocurrency usage
- 63 virtual cards used at gambling platforms
- Crypto logins inconsistent with declared location
- Possible VPN/proxy use and foreign phone numbers

Cross-border and payments
- Large multicurrency deposits (EUR, GBP, USD) with no source
- Frequent Low-value transfers to neighbouring countries with lack of justification
- Inward telegraphic transfers from unknown sources

Lifestyle and assets
- Spending exceeds declared income
- Unemployed person received multiple and large transactions from various sources
- Luxury vehicles bought via third parties
- Luxury property funded by questionable asset sales
- High-value lifestyle and gambling spend

5.2.7 Modus operandi

MSHT crimes are committed for a multitude of purposes. The main driver for these crimes is generally accepted as financial gain, but there are other instances where persons are trafficked for the perpetrators' personal gain (e.g., trafficking a minor for forced marriage).

The described cross-cutting modus operandi illustrates how **financial layering and laundering** are used to conceal human trafficking activities through seemingly legitimate arrangements and rapid fund movement. Properties used for trafficking are disguised as rental accommodations under legitimate tenants' names to evade regulatory scrutiny, while unrelated individuals, including students and reportedly complicit officials, receive **round amount payments or large remittances from unexplained sources**. These funds are quickly dispersed through multiple channels such as cash withdrawals, electronic payments, point of sale purchases, and e-wallets, indicating deliberate layering to obscure audit trails. Additional typologies include the use of **mule accounts, dormant accounts that suddenly activate following large inflows**, and **international multi currency remittances to young, unemployed recipients**, all reflecting co-ordinated efforts to disguise illicit proceeds and frustrate detection.

5.2.8 Money laundering red flags associated with MSHT

Crime type	Key financial red flags	Case study example (observed)	Recruitment and facilitation methods
Human smuggling	Bribery linked remittances; use of transport fronts; third-party payers	Low-value remittances sent to prison wardens in Zambia and Malawi to release Ethiopian nationals intercepted en route to South Africa; payments made by foreign nationals in South Africa on behalf of migrants. A freight company suspected of acting as a front paid clearing agents to allow trucks to cross borders.	Recruitment and facilitation through smuggling networks, intermediaries, and third party co-ordinators; migrants assisted by diaspora contacts already residing in South Africa. Once in South Africa, migrants are held hostage and ransom is demanded from family members and they may be exploited for labour or sex (trafficking).
Sexual exploitation	Extortion payments; ransom demands; property linked exploitation; cross border transfers	Syndicates drugged victims, recorded compromising material, and extorted large payments under threat of public exposure. Victims recruited for fake jobs were coerced into prostitution and drug trafficking; properties owned by perpetrators used as brothels and drug dens and female perpetrators recruited to lure women. A pastor who registered for a cryptocurrency account used a religious ministry as a front for a cult-like organisation. Under the guise of spiritual preparation, young girls were reportedly kept within the group and subjected to coercive and abusive practices, including forced sexual acts. Allegations further indicate that compliance or abuse was rewarded through promotion to senior leadership roles, reinforcing control and silence. Overall, the case highlighted a pattern of exploitation, grooming, and manipulation, where religious authority was deliberately used to conceal abuse and exert power over vulnerable individuals.	Social media recruitment, deception through fake job advertisements (cleaners, waitresses, receptionists); lure based recruitment using women; coercion, threats, and hostage taking; religious cover (e.g. cult-like structures masquerading as ministries).
Production and possession of child sexual exploitation content	Crypto transactions; Darknet links; dispersed low value remittances	A suspect used crypto currency funded by unknown wallets to purchase child abuse material via Darknet platforms and sent low value remittances to over 77 recipients across multiple corridors: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Cameroon, Nigeria, Zambia, and the Philippines. Non-co-operation during due diligence reinforced suspicion.	Online platforms, darknet communities, and digital peer networks; anonymous contact through encrypted or crypto enabled environments.
Trafficking for illegal labour practices	Cash intensive businesses; undocumented workers; exploitative housing	A supermarket purchased six properties in cash for R1.6 million and employed undocumented Bangladeshi workers living in overcrowded storerooms and working seven days a week. Similar patterns observed across a network of related Bangladeshi-run businesses, including employment of undocumented individuals, exploitative labour practices and cash-driven transactions. Conversations with the employees suggested that they were unaware that their work conditions were indicative of potential trafficking for labour exploitation.	Deceptive labour recruitment, often cross border; workers misled about job conditions; recruitment via community networks or labour brokers.
Kidnapping for financial exploitation	Forced digital transfers; rapid account depletion; fraud proceeds	Victims were hijacked and forced at gunpoint to make banking app transfers. In another case, a perpetrator ran a fake job for money scheme targeting 259 young people while also facing kidnapping and assault allegations.	Fraudulent job offers, physical coercion, and direct abduction; exploitation of job seekers' economic vulnerability.

Money laundering red flags associated with MSHT (continuation)

Crime type	Key financial red flags	Case study example (observed)	Recruitment and facilitation methods
Human trafficking (cross cutting)	Layering; shell companies; rapid fund cycling; crypto account abuse	A foreign national originating from a high-risk jurisdiction, operated a modelling agency and was flagged after purchasing property valued at nearly R4 million. The declared sources of funds included proceeds from a previous property sale and the sale of a luxury vehicle. However, bank statements revealed multiple large incoming and outgoing transactions between the individual's accounts, along with frequent references of "winnings" from gambling institutions. These questionable sources and the pattern of transactions raised suspicions of human trafficking involvement, as modelling agencies are frequently associated with such risks. Additionally, the unusually high gambling winnings suggested possible use of casinos to launder illicit funds. In another case, a shell company operating under the guise of software development and Ethereum trading that exhibited strong indicators of financial layering and potential exploitation risks. Despite declaring modest turnover, the company processed more than R176 million within a year, receiving funds from only seven customers and transferring nearly all proceeds to a related company in Malta owned by the same director, with no reinvestment locally. The entity had a limited legitimate digital footprint, with websites linked to adult entertainment software, and showed connections to companies targeting students in high-risk regions such as Bangladesh and parts of Asia, raising concerns about vulnerability and trafficking exposure. The use of premium cross-border transactions, opaque ownership structures, and concentration of flows through related parties collectively suggests possible illicit activity and deliberate financial layering.	Social media, modelling agencies, entertainment fronts, deceptive business propositions

6. Geographical distribution of crime locations reported

Analysis of the MSHT cross-border suspicious and unusual transactions patterns is depicted below and shown as inbound transactions and outbound transactions. The cross-border financial flows can help identify high-risk corridors relating to MSHT suspicious and unusual transactions.

6.1.1 Cross-border transactions

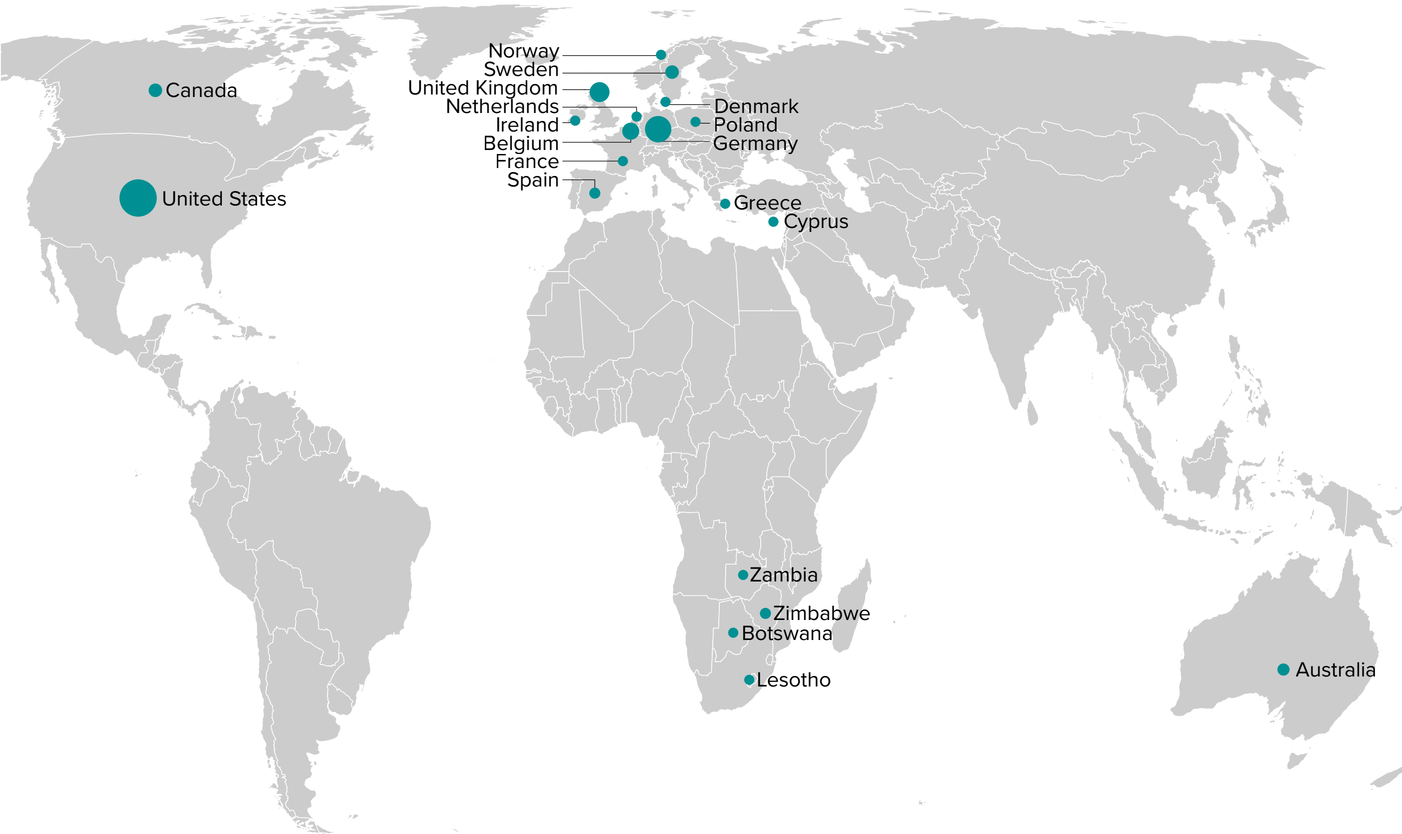
Inbound transactions

Analysis of inbound transaction flows identified remittance-based payments originating primarily from North America (the United States and Canada) and European countries (Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Belgium), largely received by female individuals in Johannesburg, particularly in Johannesburg CBD, Yeoville, and Jeppestown. These females received repeated low to medium value payments from multiple older foreign male nationals, with the nature of the relationships remaining unclear and undefined. While recipients alleged involvement in online pornography or digital content activities, they declined to provide substantive details, raising concerns regarding possible concealment of exploitative arrangements.

Similar patterns were observed among males in their thirties residing in Johannesburg, who also received funds from older European males and described the payments as originating from boyfriends. Given the transactional patterns, anonymity of relationships, and concentration of funds from foreign senders, it cannot be ruled out that these flows are linked to sexual exploitation, network-based recruitment, and potential human trafficking activities, rather than consensual personal relationships alone.

Countries from which cross-border transactions originated by number of transactions:

Inbound Transactions Relating to MSHT Reports



Legend

Number of inbound transactions

59 - 119 | 33 - 58 | 15 - 32 | 6 - 14 | 1 - 5

N

Figure 4: Map viewing countries from which cross-border transactions originated from

Countries from which cross-border transactions originated from by value:

Countries	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
United States of America	**R5 451**	**R301 324**	**R21 954**	**R328 729**
Sexual exploitation	R5 451	R301 324	R21 954	R328 729
Germany		**R125 551**		**R125 551**
Sexual exploitation		R125 551		R125 551
Sweden		**R105 486**		**R105 486**
Sexual exploitation		R105 486		R105 486
Netherlands		**R9 883**	**R89 919**	**R99 802**
Human trafficking			R89 919	R89 919
Sexual exploitation		R9 883		R9 883
Spain		**R66 593**		**R66 593**
Sexual exploitation		R66 593		R66 593
United Kingdom	**R4 835**	**R58 641**		**R63 477**
Human smuggling		R500		R500
Sexual exploitation	R4 835	R58 141		R62 977
Belgium		**R53 157**		**R53 157**
Sexual exploitation		R53 157		R53 157
Canada	**R507**	**R6 881**	**R17 000**	**R24 388**
Sexual exploitation	R507	R6 881	R17 000	R24 388
Zambia	**R1 000**	**R23 321**		**R24 321**
Human smuggling		R22 975		R22 975
Human trafficking	R1 000			R1 000
Sexual exploitation		R 346		R346
Zimbabwe	**R6 271**	**R11 490**		**R17 761**
Human smuggling	R3 500	R3 060		R6 560
Human trafficking	R1 271	R4 900		R6 171
Sexual exploitation	R1 500	R3 530		R5 030
Lesotho			**R13 510**	**R13 510**
Human trafficking			R13 510	R13 510
France		**R11 665**		**R11 665**
Sexual exploitation		R11 665		R11 665
Australia		**R8 047**		**R8 047**
Sexual exploitation		R8 047		R8 047
Botswana		**R5 596**	**R1 181**	**R6 777**
Human trafficking		R1 809		R1 809
Sexual exploitation		R3 787	R1 181	R4 968
Ireland		**R2 710**	**R2 500**	**R5 210**
Sexual exploitation		R2 710	R2 500	R5 210

Countries	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
Norway		**R2 604**		**R2 604**
Sexual exploitation		R2 604		R2 604
Poland		**R1 459**		**R1 459**
Sexual exploitation		R1 459		R1 459
Denmark		**R631**		**R631**
Sexual exploitation		R631		R631
Greece		**R291**		**R291**
Sexual exploitation		R291		R291
Cyprus		**R19**		**R19**
Sexual exploitation		R19		R19
Grand total	**R18 064**	**R795 353**	**R146 064**	**R959 480**

Table 15: Countries from which cross-border transactions originated from by value

Outbound transactions

Financial analysis identified outbound transactions from South Africa primarily to Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Tanzania, linked to alleged MSHT crimes including human trafficking, trafficking syndicates, sexual exploitation, and human smuggling. Funds were often remitted by or on behalf of third country nationals, notably Ethiopians, Congolese, and Somalians, frequently to facilitate the illegal movement of individuals into South Africa without proper documentation. Some transactions were also associated with the bribery of Malawian and Zambian prison wardens to secure the release of Ethiopian nationals transiting through Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, indicating organised smuggling and trafficking routes. Separately, transactional analysis identified four adult entertainment businesses linked through common directorships to a single business account, which transferred funds exclusively to Belgium, Ukraine, the United States, and Germany. This account recorded a turnover exceeding R49 million within 57 days, with high value international transfers, round amount salary and expense payments, and alleged commission payments to foreign agents supplying dancers, collectively raising strong indicators of human trafficking linked to adult entertainment networks.

Countries that received cross-border transactions originating from South Africa by number of transactions:

Outbound Transactions Relating to MSHT Reports

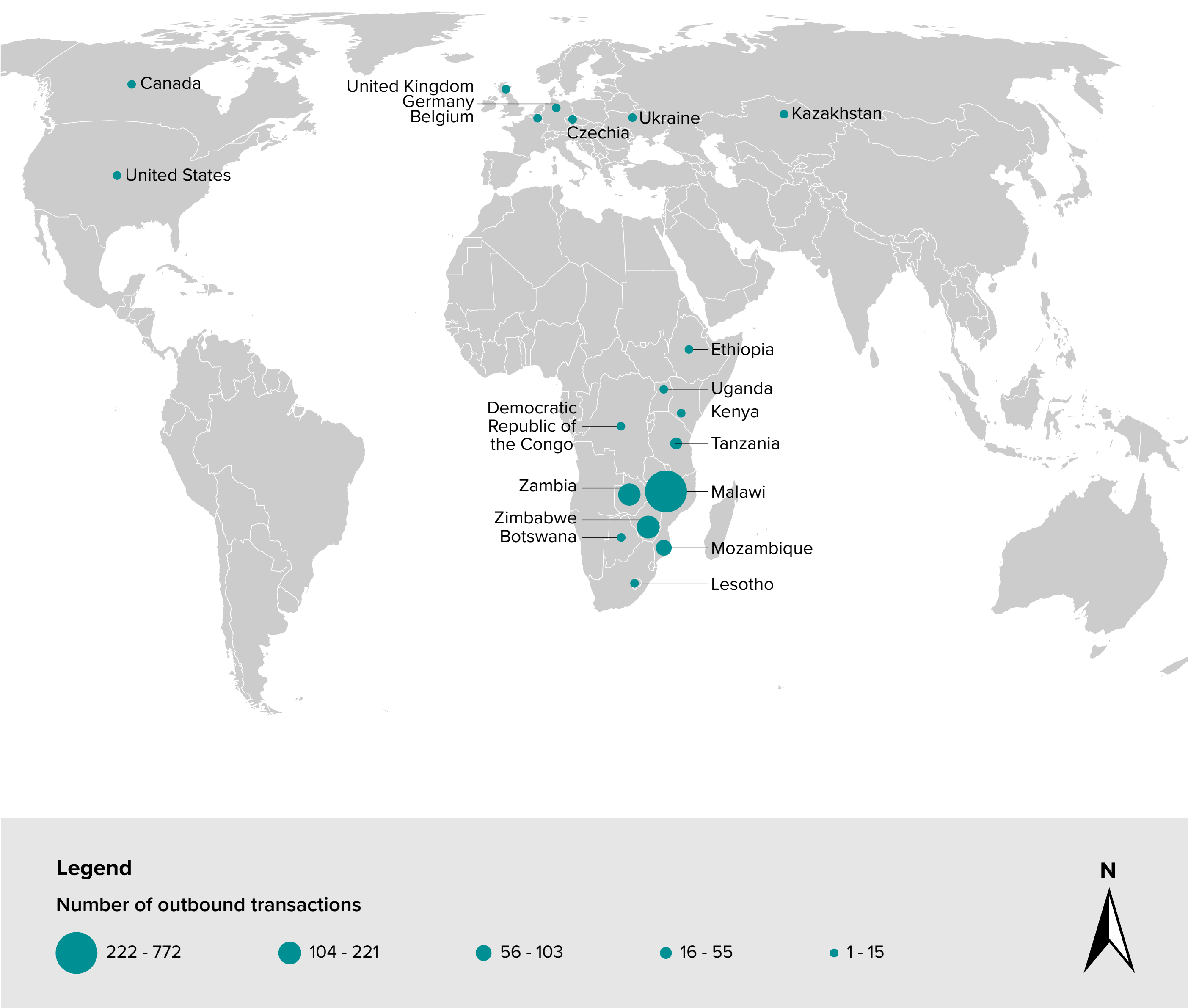


Figure 5: Map viewing countries that received cross-border transactions originating from South Africa

Countries that received cross-border transactions originating from South Africa by value:

Countries	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
Malawi	**R461 394**	**R112 235**		**R573 629**
Human smuggling	R97 534	R112 235		R209 769
Human trafficking	R363 860			R363 860
Zambia	**R270 221**	**R122 359**		**R392 580**
Human smuggling	R9 962	R98 301		R108 263
Human trafficking	R260 259	R21 233		R281 492
Sexual exploitation		R2 825		R2 825
Zimbabwe	**R205 813**	**R123 600**	**R3 917**	**R333 330**
Human smuggling	R27 459	R61 649		R89 108
Human trafficking	R157 792	R19 565		R177 357
Human trafficking syndicate	R13 107			R13 107
Sexual exploitation	R7 455	R42 386	R3 917	R53 758
Belgium			**R286 784**	**R286 784**
Human trafficking			R286 784	R286 784
Ukraine			**R178 796**	**R178 796**
Human trafficking			R178 796	R178 796
Tanzania, United Republic of	**R66 549**	**R103 611**		**R170 160**
Human smuggling		R103 611		R103 611
Human trafficking	R66 549			R66 549
Mozambique	**R82 860**	**R5 430**		**R88 290**
Human smuggling	R21 873	R5 430		R27 303
Human trafficking	R42 185			R42 185
Human trafficking syndicate	R18 802			R18 802
United States of America			**R74 052**	**R74 052**
Human trafficking			R74 052	R74 052
Germany			**R60 590**	**R60 590**
Human trafficking			R60 590	R60 590
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	**R8 516**	**R44 630**		**R53 146**
Human smuggling		R44 630		R44 630
Human trafficking	R8 516			R8 516
Pakistan	**R49 600**			**R49 600**
Kidnapping	R49 600			R49 600

Countries	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
Botswana	**R36 510**			**R36 510**
Human trafficking	R14 891			R14 891
Human trafficking syndicate	R8 501			R8 501
Sexual exploitation	R13 118			R13 118
Kenya	**R33 892**			**R33 892**
Human trafficking	R10 500			R10 500
Human trafficking syndicate	R20 300			R20 300
Sexual exploitation	R3 092			R3 092
Canada			**R31 440**	**R31 440**
Human trafficking			R31 440	R31 440
Czech Republic			**R3 420**	**R3 420**
Human trafficking			R3 420	R3 420
Lesotho	**R3 179**			**R3 179**
Human smuggling	R 495			R495
Human trafficking	R2 684			R2 684
United Kingdom	**R2 091**			**R2 091**
Human trafficking syndicate	R2 091			R2 091
Ethiopia	**R1 900**			**R1 900**
Human trafficking	R1 900			R1 900
Uganda		**R130**		**R130**
Human smuggling		R130		R130
Grand total	**R1 222 525**	**R511 995**	**R638 999**	**R2 373 519**

Table 16: Countries that received cross-border transactions originating from South Africa by value

6.1.2 Domestic transactions

The MSHT STR transaction location map identified where suspected transactions related to MSHT are concentrated across South Africa.

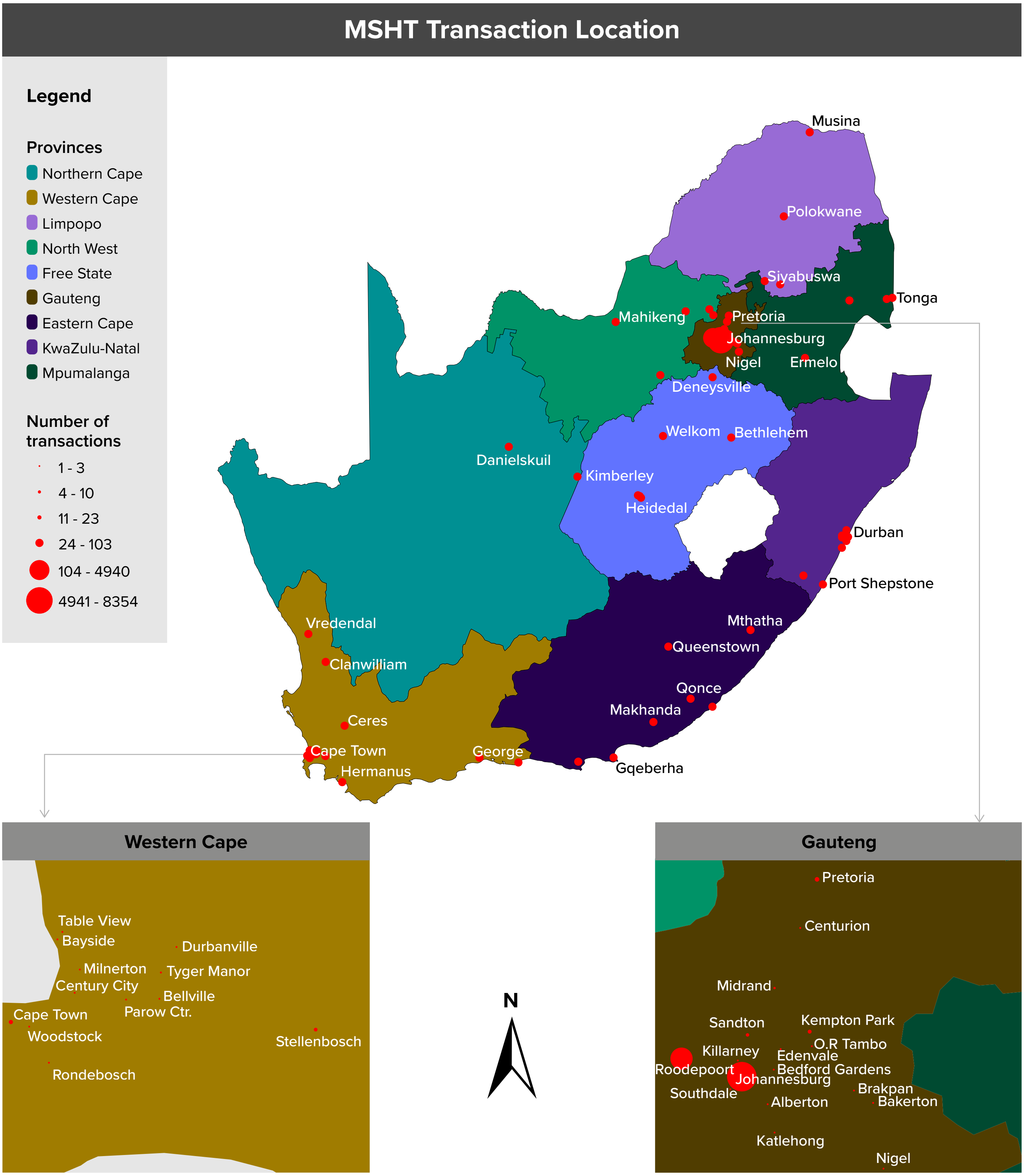


Figure 6: Map viewing MSHT STR domestic transaction's location

- High transaction density areas are Gauteng (cities such as Johannesburg, Roodepoort, Pretoria, Kempton Park and Sandton) and Western Cape (cities such as Cape Town and Stellenbosch). This can also align with Gauteng being a major urban and economic hub. KwaZulu-Natal (Durban) also shows significant activity suggesting moderate to high transaction volumes.
- Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, and Free State indicated moderate transaction volumes.
- Northern Cape, North West and Limpopo showed minimal activity, possibly due to lower population density or fewer urban centres.
- Urban centres were noted as hotspots for MSHT-related suspicious and unusual transactions, suggesting a need for targeted surveillance and intervention in these areas.
- Border provinces like Mpumalanga and Limpopo, although not very prevalent, may still require further scrutiny due to potential cross-border trafficking routes.

7. Conclusion

The Phase II MSHT STR data mining exercise revealed clear patterns in actors, industries, and financial behaviours associated with modern slavery and human trafficking, offering actionable insights for accountable institutions, regulators, and law enforcement. MSHT activity was found to span a wide range of sectors and nationalities, with perpetrators exploiting multiple transaction types including EFTs, cash, remittances, and cryptocurrencies, to obscure illicit flows through front businesses, structuring, layering, and rapid fund movement. Urban centres in Gauteng, the Western Cape, and KwaZulu Natal emerged as key hotspots, while cross border corridors linking Africa, Europe, and North America were frequently associated with trafficking, sexual exploitation, and smuggling typologies.

Challenges to detection and prevention

The US TIP Report (2025)[1] cites the South African government as having faced significant shortcomings in protecting trafficking victims, including inconsistent and inadequate screening that led to widespread under-identification, particularly in high-risk sectors such as mining and among foreign nationals It refers to the following aspects specifically:

- Although standard operating procedures existed, they were unevenly implemented, and a lack of trauma-informed, victim-centered approaches, compounded by poor interpretation services, fear of deportation, and discrimination, discouraged victims from coming forward.
- Weak inter-agency co-ordination, insufficient training, and delays in Department of Social Development victim certification impeded timely access to care, with some victims unlawfully required to cooperate in investigations to receive assistance.
- Limited shelter capacity, inadequate government funding, reliance on NGOs, and the expiration of the only male-victim shelter further undermined protection efforts.
- During judicial proceedings, victims feared retaliation due to traffickers being granted bail, while courts failed to order restitution or compensation, and the government did not seize traffickers' assets for victim benefit.
- Despite legal provisions guaranteeing equal treatment, foreign victims faced systemic barriers to services and justice due to the non-implementation of PACOTIP regulations, lack of visas and documentation, exclusion from shelters, inability to work lawfully, and failures to protect and repatriate vulnerable adults and children.

Under-reporting and victim distrust

Under-reporting of incidents remains a significant barrier, often due to victim fear or distrust of authorities. Corruption undermines law enforcement and judicial processes, allowing traffickers to operate with impunity. Under-reporting is a major issue, as victims often fear retaliation from traffickers, stigma within their communities, and mistrust authorities, especially among migrant populations who worry about deportation or legal consequences. This victim distrust results in many trafficking cases remaining hidden, thereby obscuring the true scale of the problem and limiting effective intervention. Additionally, there are several factors contributing to re-trafficking, including structural issues such as low prosecution rates, under-resourced law enforcement, and policies not prioritising or adequately providing victim protection, creating an environment where traffickers often act with impunity. Vulnerability for re-trafficking is also heightened by individual and contextual factors, including gender, age, nationality and mental health issues, which can make victims susceptible to re-trafficking[2].

Social and economic inequalities, poverty, a lack of education and employment opportunities, and discrimination further exacerbate the risk, especially for women and children who are often targeted due to these vulnerabilities. A notable example included that of South African citizens lured abroad with false promises of legal employment, who were trafficked to Myanmar for forced labour and cybercrime exploitation. There is also the trauma and psychological control exerted by traffickers, which could include threat to family members, physical violence, manipulation and psychological bonds inhibiting the victim from escaping or reporting re-trafficking[3].

1. United States Department of State (2025) 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Africa. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State. Available at: https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/south-africa/ (Accessed: 9 September 2026)

2. University of Nottingham Rights Lab & Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. 2021. "Re-trafficking: The current state of play" Online. Available at https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/ylgczjb3/iasc-and-rights-lab-re-trafficking-report-november-2021.pdf [Date Accessed: 29 October 2025]

3. Toney-Butler, T., Ladd, M. & Mittel, O. 2023. "Human Trafficking" National Library of Medicine. 11(2):1-25.

Corruption and law enforcement challenges

Anti-trafficking training has been provided to some law enforcement agencies, with efforts including the collaboration with international organisations. However, law enforcement still requires additional and sufficient training and resources to investigate all reported trafficking cases, especially in trauma-informed interviewing and victim care. Lack of adequate training and resourcing results in cases of investigators re-traumatising victims or not taking their statements. There is also a lack of clarity on case statuses, a low prospect of success, and delays in cases that have dissuaded some victims from participating in trials. Allegations of corruption within law enforcement and related agencies further complicates the response. Some officials have been found to be complicit or negligent, facilitating traffickers' operations and undermining investigations. Scarce resources, poor inter-agency co-ordination, and systemic weaknesses exacerbate these enforcement challenges. Additionally, there is a critical shortage of specialized training and resources for police, social workers, healthcare providers, and other frontline responders, which limits their ability to properly identify trafficking victims, investigate cases thoroughly, and provide adequate victim support.

Resource constraints and lack of specialised training hinder effective detection and prosecution. These challenges are interconnected and require a holistic response, combining capacity-building, anti-corruption measures, and community engagement to improve detection and support for victims.

Difficulty in distinguishing between human trafficking and other crimes

The complexity of distinguishing human trafficking from related crimes such as human smuggling, illegal immigration, and sexual offences poses difficulties in appropriate legal classification and response. This often results in victims being treated as criminals rather than protected individuals, undermining prosecution efforts and victim care. Combined, these factors create a challenging environment for the effective detection and prevention of human trafficking in South Africa, demanding enhanced training, anti-corruption measures, victim-centred reporting protocols, and clearer legal frameworks to address the crime comprehensively.

Recommendations

For financial institutions

- Within six months from publication of this report, the Expert Working Group should provide training to financial institutions via a SAMLIT webinar. The training will focus on strengthening transaction monitoring, refining keyword and behavioural analytics, and improving KYC and due diligence for high-risk sectors and accounts.

For SAMLIT

- Following the completion of the EWG and publication of its report, it is recommended that the SAMLIT Steering Committee approve the establishment of a dedicated Taskforce to continue research into MSHT. The Taskforce would focus on identifying emerging trends, typologies, challenges, and developments relating to MSHT, drawing on local, regional, and international sources. It would also ensure the continuation of public-private collaboration and support a deeper understanding of MSHT networks and their evolution.

For government agencies

- The EWG should initiate three training sessions for the Law Enforcement and the National Prosecution Authority to increase the use of financial intelligence to trace and block illicit financial flows tied to trafficking, complementing enforcement with asset recovery and anti-money laundering efforts,
- The EWG should engage the Department of Labour to promote the integration of a trafficking indicator screening into Labour inspections to enhance the identification of forced labour and labour trafficking cases, which are often under-detected.

Conclusion

The global landscape of human trafficking from 2023 to 2025 reflects persistent and emerging challenges that require concerted and co-ordinated efforts at local, regional, and international levels. Human trafficking has deeply entrenched roots in socio-economic vulnerabilities, combined with the exploitation of technological platforms and porous borders, complicate detection and disruption efforts.

While significant progress has been made in victim identification and prosecution, these remain insufficient relative to the scale of trafficking operations and the complexity of victim experiences. Regional variations highlight the need for context-specific strategies, including strengthened legal frameworks, enhanced victim support services, and increased cross-border co-operation. Addressing trafficking effectively also demands tackling underlying drivers such as poverty, inequality, displacement, and demand for exploitative labour and services. The UNODC and partner organisations continue to emphasise integrated, survivor-centred approaches to dismantle trafficking networks and protect human dignity. Continued vigilance, evidence-based policy responses, and sustainable funding are pivotal to turning the tide against a crime that exploits millions and undermines global security and human rights.

This report demonstrates that trafficking in persons is not only a grave human rights violation, but a complex, profit-driven crime that intersects financial systems, labour markets, migration dynamics, and organised criminal networks. Addressing it effectively requires sustained collaboration across financial institutions, law enforcement agencies, prosecutorial authorities, regulators, and civil society organisations, each bringing distinct yet complementary capabilities.
Financial intelligence, when combined with victim centred investigations, strong regulatory frameworks, and informed prosecutorial strategies, has proven critical in disrupting trafficking networks, identifying victims, and holding offenders accountable.

Continued progress will depend on deepening information sharing, strengthening public-private partnerships, and adopting adaptive, risk-based approaches that respond to evolving trafficking typologies, including cyber-enabled exploitation and forced criminality. Equally important is ensuring that enforcement and financial disruption efforts are aligned with victim protection, prevention, and long term reintegration. The advances reflected in emerging legal standards, investigative outcomes, and survivor empowerment initiatives signal meaningful momentum; however, sustained vigilance, innovation, and institutional commitment are essential to translating these gains into durable impact. By acting collectively and decisively, the anti trafficking community can reduce victimisation, dismantle criminal incentive structures, and contribute to more resilient systems that uphold justice, accountability, and human dignity.

lseg.com