2025 KOK REPORT
DATA COLLECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND EXPLOITATION IN GERMANY

Data collection period: January to December 2024

KOK
German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND EXPLOITATION IN GERMANY – BASIC CONCEPTS

In Germany, trafficking in human beings and exploitation are present in numerous forms and areas. Since 2016, trafficking in human beings, forced prostitution, forced labour, labour exploitation, exploitation under unlawful restraint, and organ trafficking have been criminal offences under Sections 232 et seq. of the German Criminal Code. However, the German Criminal Code defines the term 'trafficking in human beings' merely as the recruitment, transportation and accommodation of a person for the purpose of exploiting them (Section 232 of the German Criminal Code). Exploitation and its various forms are defined in the following paragraphs.

The offences of forced labour and labour exploitation also include exploitation involving criminal activities and begging. The latter involves individuals being persuaded or forced to go out and beg and then to hand over all or most of the money they receive. In the case of forced criminal activities, individuals are persuaded to carry out criminal offences such as theft, debit card fraud or selling drugs. The financial gains from the offences are kept by the perpetrators. The most wellknown form of trafficking in human beings and exploitation among the general public is sexual exploitation, which has been a criminal offence since 1973. This has also been the case for labour exploitation since 2005. These are the two forms of exploitation of which we have the most knowledge.

Specialised counselling centres advise individuals affected by various forms of human trafficking and exploitation. However, due to the circumstances in which they were founded (mostly in the 1980s on the back of a women's rights and feminist platform), many of them focus on women. Some limit their services to women affected by sexual exploitation due to their funding situation and their mandate, but many also offer counselling to women who are subject to labour exploitation. Specialised counselling centres that are members of KOK also counsel those affected by other forms of exploitation, as well as, in some cases, men and trans people.

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OVERVIEW

With this new report, the German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings – KOK aims once again to provide a comprehensive insight into the work of specialised counselling centres supporting trafficked persons, thereby contributing to presenting trafficking in human beings in Germany through a humanrights lens. Thanks to the commitment demonstrated by KOK's member organisations, this report supplements in a very important way the Federal Situation Report published every year by the German Federal Criminal Police Office.

Unlike the enforcement authorities, KOK's focus is not on presenting the efforts made to combat crime from a purely penal point of view. Instead, KOK endeavours to understand how trafficked persons can enforce their rights and what support they receive from specialised counselling centres.

In particular, this analysis of the data provided by KOK's member organisations using a jointly developed piece of software offers a crucial insight into the situation of trafficked persons as regards their social and legal residence status, thereby also highlighting evidencebased gaps in policy.

KOK published its first data report in 2020, a year that also marked the launch of the data tool used by KOK to collect information about cases. The 2020 report describes in detail the participatory, civil society-based and human rights-focused approach and is highly recommended to first-time readers and anyone interested in learning more about how our data collection method was set up.[1]

This report, on the other hand, covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024.

1 Defining the Gap: Data Collection in the Context of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation in Germany – KOK's Civil Society Approach, KOK e.V., 2021, https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/serviceangebote/publikationen/detail/defining-the-gap-data-collection-on-trafficking-in-human-beings-and-exploitation-in-germany-the-civil-society-approach-of-the-kok

Data Collection in the Context of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation in Germany in 2024 at a Glance

22 participating specialised counselling centres

868 cases entered into the data tool in total

659 cases released for data analysis

198 cases newly opened in 2024

128 cases closed

84% of supported individuals were women

24% of clients came from Nigeria; overall, the largest group of clients was from West Africa (52%)

36% of clients were aged between 22 and 29; 34% were between 30 and 39

83% of cases were categorised as trafficking in human beings and 78% as forced prostitution by the specialised counselling centres

1

INTRODUCTION

For the fifth time now, the German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings – KOK is publishing this report to provide a comprehensive insight into the work of specialised counselling centres supporting trafficked persons and the number of cases they have handled.

There are many gaps in the data on trafficking in human beings, as once again evidenced by the monitoring report published for the first time in 2024 by the national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings set up within the German Institute for Human Rights. The report includes various datasets and sources on this phenomenon for the period from 2020 to 2022 and describes how trafficking in human beings has evolved in Germany since 2020. It also provides an overview of the measures taken by the state and the regions to comply with their obligations under European and human rights law. The data collected originates from ministries, authorities and civil society organisations, with additional publicly available statistics, documents and studies, including national and regional official journals. The monitoring report not only pools and reports on existing statistics on the scope of trafficking in human beings in Germany, it also outlines and evaluates the implementation status of human rights commitments under the Council of Europe Convention and EU Directive on the basis of certain indicators.

Every year, KOK provides the national rapporteur with insights derived from the data collection efforts carried out by civil society stakeholders to this end – a key contribution to the rapporteur's reporting. The collaboration between KOK and the German Institute for Human Rights is underpinned by a cooperation agreement.

Politically, 2024 saw key changes that will have a lasting impact on the situation of trafficked persons and the work of specialised counselling centres. The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive revision was completed, the scope of criminal offences constituting trafficking in human beings now including additional forms of exploitation. The revised directive provides for other changes, for example as regards the increasing digitalisation of trafficking in human beings. Germany now has until the summer of 2026 to transpose these provisions into national legislation.

In its 2024 Information Service, KOK issued its recommendations for a comprehensive transposition that would use the available leeway to

improve conditions for trafficked persons.[2] In December 2024, the German Federal Government adopted its first National Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, which is a major milestone towards strengthening the protection of affected persons and addressing trafficking in human beings. KOK explicitly welcomes the comprehensive cross-departmental consultation processes that will be launched under the plan, which will be key to ensuring transparent and consistent procedures.

Alongside these positive developments, there were also concerning policies, such as the tightening of asylum legislation following the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) reform, which has overlooked vulnerable groups. Trafficked persons are one of those groups, and KOK data reports have shown time and time again that specialised counselling centres handle many cases of trafficked individuals originating from third countries.

In practice, such tightening of asylum criteria will result in greater humanitarian hardship for these groups as well as an increased risk of human rights violations. This will only increase the need for programmes and projects designed to support trafficked persons, especially structural projects aiming to help involved stakeholders deal with trafficked persons or improve the cooperation between authorities and specialised counselling centres, for example through training. However, funding for many of these projects is being cut or phased out. This was the case for KOK's Refugee Movements and Trafficking in Human Beings project, which was one of the many female refugee empowerment programmes that were formerly funded by the Federal Government's Integration Commissioner via Diakonie Deutschland and that saw its funding dry up at the end of 2024.

KOK specialised counselling centres registered a total of 868 cases in 2024, i.e. 166 more than the previous year. Among these, 659 contained evaluable data that was released for analysis. The number of newly created cases has slightly decreased (198 cases in 2024; 230 in 2023) and the number of closed cases remained more or less stable (128 in 2024; 129 in 2023).

Specialised counselling centres therefore continue to handle a high number of cases and to offer a wide range of services.

2 Informationsdienst 2024 – Die Reform der EU-Menschenhandelsrichtlinie: Von guten Ansätzen und verpassten Chancen (KOK 2024 Information Service – The EU-Anti-Trafficking Directive Reform: Positive Approaches and Missed Opportunities) KOK e.V., 2024, https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/serviceangebote/publikationen/detail/informationsdienst-2024-die-reform-der-eu-menschenhandelsrichtlinie-von-guten-ansaetzen-und-verpassten-chancen.

The challenging situation reported on last year in many specialised counselling centres, with a large number of sometimes very complex cases and limited human and financial resources, has in part worsened. More counselling centres were forced to temporarily close their doors to new clients and had to refer them to other organisations within the KOK network.

It is everyone's wish and in everyone's interest to learn more about the actual extent and nature of trafficking in human beings and exploitation in Germany. From a civil society perspective, however, the primary objective is to collect human-rights-based data that provides an insight into the enforcement of the rights of those affected by trafficking and exploitation.

This is where KOK's data tool and annual reports come into play.

2

THE RESULTS FROM THE KOK DATA TOOL FOR 2024

Some general preliminary remarks on the underlying data are needed to better understand the findings of the data analysis performed for the year 2024 using the KOK data tool. In the period from 01/01/2024 to 31/12/2024, 868 cases were entered into the database by the 22 specialised counselling centres involved, 659 of which provided evaluable data.[3] Only data for which clients have given their consent can be used for data analysis and reporting.

When examining the results, it is important to remember that the findings presented in this report only represent a portion of the clients of specialised counselling centres and of the services they provide in cases of trafficking in human beings and exploitation. As pointed out, not all cases entered can be considered in the analysis. Moreover it is entirely possible for one person's basic information to be duplicated in the database as it is in theory possible for multiple 'cases' to be entered for a single person (e.g. if they seek help from a specialised counselling centre with regard to a different issue). That said, this is not believed to occur frequently at the current time. Moreover, not all specialised counselling centres have yet begun using the data collection tool.

Clients are always entitled to refrain from answering certain questions. This means that not all fields will be filled in to the same extent. In some cases, employees of the specialised counselling centres themselves may decide not to complete certain fields if the question is not relevant to a parti-

3 209 cases were newly created, but no additional data was entered.

cular client or if some pieces of information are not available. For the most part, all 659 cases were included in the basic population for data analysis when calculating percentages. According to the information provided by the data tool, 198 new cases were created in 2024 and all other cases were processed for the first time in the previous year(s). This demonstrates that many clients rely on the support of the specialised counselling centres over a longer period. There can be multiple reasons for this, such as lengthy investigations and criminal proceedings, or residence and asylum proceedings that can also take a long time[4] or simply the individual needs of clients being counselled. 128 cases were closed in 2024, nearly as many as the previous year (129 cases). Since 2022, the procedure has been to set all cases to 'inactive' at the end of the year. Specialised counselling centres can specify at the beginning of the following year if they are still handling the case or if it can be closed. The detailed overview of all cases that have been set to inactive or closed for over 18 months are deleted from the database every three months. This ensures that cases do not remain shown as 'active' in the database without any counselling actually taking place.

The KOK data tool contributes to expanding the existing knowledge base regarding exploitation and trafficking in human beings in Germany, even if it cannot claim to be representative of all trafficked persons. Whereas the annual Federal Situation Report published by the German Federal Criminal Police Office only discusses cases for which investigations have been launched and concluded, the KOK data tool covers a broader spectrum of cases. It can therefore provide some insight into those cases that would ordinarily slip under the radar. Among those who call upon the services of specialised counselling centres, there are individuals whose case has not (yet) been the subject of completed criminal investigations or has not (yet) been subject to investigations at all. It could also be that there are multiple investigations or criminal proceedings in various federal states. Specialised counselling centres also support many clients who do not (want to) enter into contact with law enforcement authorities. Moreover, the data tool has made it possible to map out the needs of those affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation whilst also highlighting the broad range of support services provided by specialised counselling centres. The approach adopted by KOK for its data reports is a human rights-based one, as the intention is for the information provided by the specialised counselling centres to reveal the extent to which their clients affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation are actually able to exercise their rights and access the protection and support they are entitled to in Germany. Data collection also helps identify the needs of those clients who seek out the support of

4 In 2024, it took 14.5 months on average for asylum applications to be processed and a final decision issued (see German Bundestag, Journal 20/15083).

specialised counselling centres, thereby helping understand if the regulations, rights and victim support services in place meet their needs and are comprehensive enough.

2.1 Information about the clients

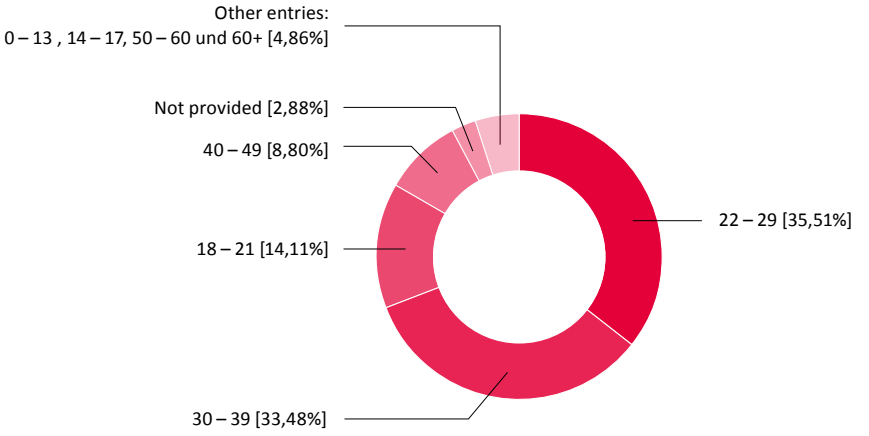
Persons affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation can have very different journeys and experiences. Various factors such as economic or personal hardship in their home country, crises and conflict as well as structural discrimination often prompt migrants to seek work abroad. Why people may be trafficked or exploited can also vary: while some were made false promises about their job and income prospects, others know too little about their rights and situation in Germany. Some individuals may end up in a relationship of dependency due to their desperate situation, a bind compounded by their lack or social networks and poor command of German. Perpetrators also resort to various ploys to put pressure on their targets and make sure they do not escape the exploitative situation they are in.

To comply with data protection rules and the right of individuals to decide what happens to their data, KOK only collects minimal information on the personal background of the individual seeking counselling. The results regarding the reported age, gender, nationality and parental status of trafficked persons are presented below.

Most individuals affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation supported by specialised counselling centres in 2024 were women and girls. Out of the 659 cases for which data was available, 556 individuals were female (84.37%), 42 were male (6.37%), two identified as gender-diverse (0.30%) and 59 (8.95%) provided no indication regarding gender.

As previously, counselling centre clients mostly fell into the age categories 22–29 (36%) and 30–39 (34%). 14% of clients were minors at the time the offence was committed.

Age



Source: KOK data tool

Many clients of the participating counselling centres came from West African countries (52%). In 2024, just under a quarter of clients were Nigerian nationals and 13% were from Guinea. 8% of clients had German nationality. While Romanian citizens made up the second largest group in 2023 with 8%, they only accounted for 4% in 2024.

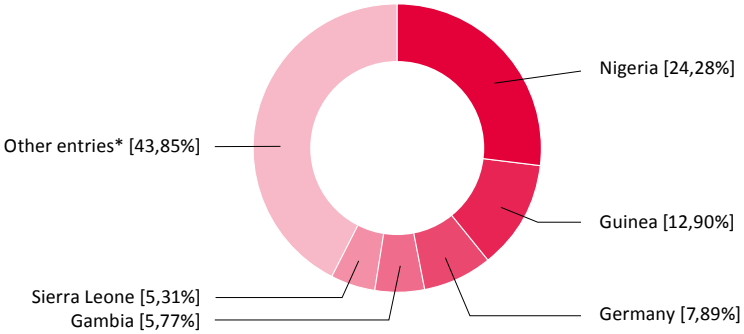
As in the previous years, the figures in the breakdown by nationality deviate substantially from those presented in the German Federal Criminal Police Office's Federal Situation Report on Human Trafficking and Exploitation, where once again, German citizens made up the largest group affected by sexual exploitation in 2024.

However, it does point out that German citizens affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation tend to be better informed of their rights and have more trust in law enforcement authorities. It can also be assumed that they have stronger social ties in Germany. All these factors can explain why they are more likely to go to the police to press charges.

In the West African region, Guinea is among the most frequently listed countries of origin in both the KOK report and the German Federal Criminal Police Office's Federal Situation Report on Human Trafficking and Exploitation. The German Federal Criminal Police Office has registered a striking increase in proceedings involving affected persons coming from South America, in particular Colombia. In the KOK data tool too, specialised coun-

selling centres have entered a number of cases of individuals from Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia. However, there is no marked rise as compared with the previous year, with figures for each country remaining in the single digits.

Countries of origin



* Romania, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Benin, Uganda, Hungary, Turkey, Albania, Ukraine, Georgia, Serbia, Colombia, Togo, Senegal, Slovakia, Brazil, Venezuela, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Ivory Coast, no information provided, Ghana, Kenya, Syria, Peru, Poland, Liberia, Somalia, Iraq, China, Zambia, Tanzania, Thailand, Czechia, Afghanistan, Philippines, North Macedonia, Iran, Yemen, Nepal, India, Libya, Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Spain, Vietnam, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, France, Kazakhstan, Burkina Faso, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russian Federation and United Kingdom

Source: KOK data tool

Case study: Sujata from Nepal

20-year-old Sujata (not her real name) from Nepal travelled to Croatia with the help of a Nepalese placement agency that organised both her trip and her visa on her behalf. Her work contract stated that she would be working 8 hours per day in catering. However, things turned out quite differently: Sujata was forced to work 16–18 hours, 7 days a week cleaning private homes and waiting tables at a restaurant without pay and she shared a cramped space with other Nepalese nationals in the same situation as well as being subjected to sexual abuse on the part of the perpetrators. Sujata and her companions filed a complaint with the Croatian police, but the offence was not recorded as trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. Sujata feared for her safety and fled to Munich, where her mother and her younger half-sister were based. Only a day after she arrived, the family contacted JADWIGA. The counsellors began by referring Sujata to an organisation providing healthcare for people without health insurance, as her physical as well as mental health were very strained. Over the following weeks, her condition stabilised thanks to the multidisciplinary support she was afforded and to the help of her family. She was able to move into a women's shelter. Because the local immigration authorities had sufficient awareness of the issues at stake and had been properly trained to enforce the rights of trafficked persons, she was given a border crossing permit on grounds of the reflection and stabilisation period she was granted and then, later, exceptional leave to remain. Over the course of several months, Sujata's state improved to the extent that she became more and more independent and was able to attend German classes and make plans for her future. Less than a year after arriving in Germany, she began a voluntary service in a kindergarten, which she very much enjoys.

Case study from counselling centre JADWIGA

2.2 Most common forms of exploitation

Trafficking in human beings and exploitation are present in numerous forms and are found in various industries in Germany, including prostitution, domestic work, care, agriculture, construction and meat processing. These phenomena are characterised by the use of force, deception or threat with the aim to exploit a person or group of persons financially and/or sexually. Forced prostitution, forced labour, labour exploitation, forced begging,

exploitation of criminal activities, and illegal removal of organs are all criminal offences.

The data tool offers specialised counselling centre staff the option to enter the specific areas in which the exploitation of clients occurred, with multiple answers possible. Exploitation in the field of sexual services undeclared under the German Prostitute Protection Act remained the most commonly listed (62%), with a 6% decrease on the previous year. 8% of cases were reported to have involved exploitation in the area of domestic work. Sexual services registered in accordance with the German Prostitute Protection Act was entered in 6% of cases. Forced criminal activities was entered in 3% of cases and another 3% for the cleaning industry.

Mr Devi wants to leave

It all started with an email. In May 2023, we received an email from an organisation representing the Indian diaspora explaining that a cook who was mentioned by name and reported to be working in a restaurant in the South of the region of Hessen was being exploited in unacceptable conditions. He was said to be prepared to testify, but only if his safety could be guaranteed. FIM's staff member who specialises in labour exploitation reacted immediately by contacting the local police as well as the German Federal Criminal Police Office due to the international nature of the case.

The business came under scrutiny. Investigations in such cases are often lengthy. They must be well prepared and conducted in the greatest secrecy, as criminal networks frequently operate transnationally and very professionally. A first inspection was carried out in the restaurant during the summer, then a second in December. Investigators found 17 staff members who reported being exploited and needing help. However, the group shrank due to hierarchical structures among these individuals, their belonging to the same caste as the perpetrators, their lack of prospects and their safety concerns. In the end, only one man was willing to testify. The police put him in touch with FIM, but the counselling centre found it difficult to support him: Avtar Devi (not his real name) continued working for the restaurant seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., with even longer hours on bank holidays.

When they managed to arrange a first meeting, Mr Devi told his story: 20 years prior to the events, his path crossed that of the trafficking network. Alongside many other men in various countries, he was made to work in exploitative conditions as a specialist cook. Over the years, he

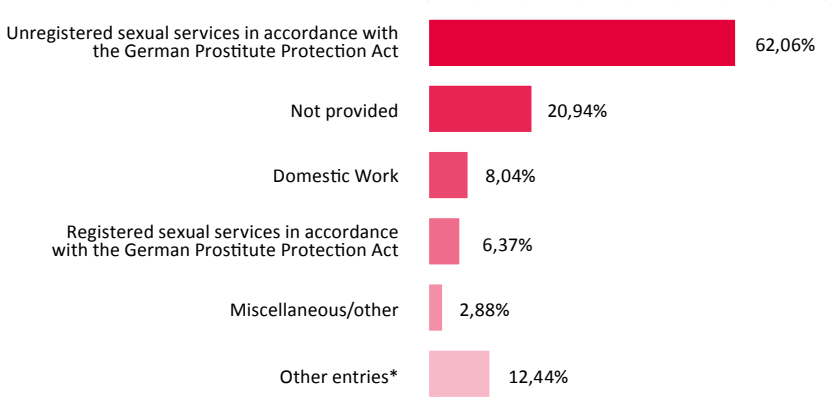
witnessed how individuals who rebelled were pressurised and beaten. They were told their family back home would experience violence and harassment if they did not comply. Some were even driven to suicide. Criminal proceedings in India came to nothing. Mr Devi was forced to work for up to 16 hours a day in the restaurant he was currently placed in. He had entered the country legally with a visa as a specialist cook and had a bogus work contract that was inaccurate and written in German, meaning that he could not understand it. His accommodation was organised by the perpetrators. He did not have any days off and could not go to the doctor when he was ill. His bank account, which he could not access, was managed by the traffickers. It was clear to him: this had to stop. Mr Devi wanted to escape this exploitative situation, but he feared for his safety.

But before his first interview took place and responsibility for his protection could be established on the part of the police, he decided to flee. We found him homeless, standing outside our door with a small bag. We were able to organise accommodation through the witness protection programme. After his interview, the prosecution against the network built up speed and was crowned with success: several proceedings were pending a few months later, with more abroad. The investigations focused on a 'big fish' exploiting Indian professionals all over Europe in an organised manner. A restaurant in Berlin had already been shut down and there were now more victims willing to testify.

What about Mr Devi? He was identified as a key witness for the proceedings by the customs authorities, which meant that he could remain in Germany legally and receive subsistence benefits. He now has a flat, is learning German and is looking for a new job. He managed to take the plunge, showing much courage. Key factors in his decision were the fact that the German law enforcement authorities took him seriously, never giving up on the proceedings, as well as the reliable support from FIM and the trusting relationship with his interpreter. Ultimately, he had also simply had enough: after 20 gruelling years, he was burnt out and ill, but had never lost hope that he could escape one day.

Case study from specialised counselling centre FIM (2024 Annual Report Schlaglichter)

Areas in which exploitation occurred



* Criminal activities, cleaning, general services, catering, agriculture, construction, care work, begging, other unskilled workers in production, au pair and not applicable

Source: KOK data tool

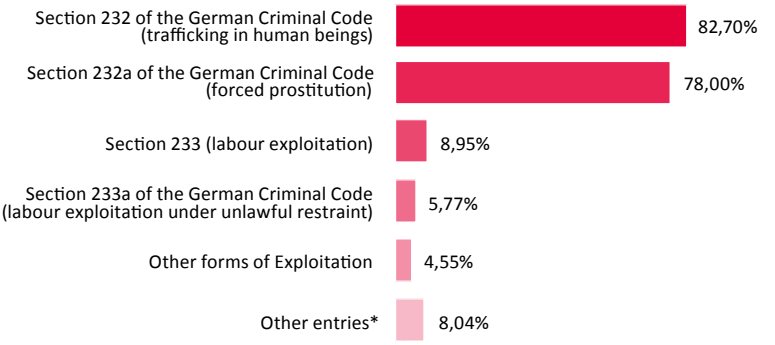
Multiple answers possible.

In many of the trafficking and exploitation cases documented in the dataset, recruitment took place in the country of origin (55%). In 12% of cases, recruitment (also) took place in Germany. 15% reported that they were (also) recruited in a transit country.

Germany was identified as the place of exploitation in 36% of cases. In a significant number of cases, exploitation (also) occurred outside Germany, with Italy (14%), Libya (14%) and France (6%) regularly listed. Additional or other places were named in 33% of cases.

Staff at the specialised counselling centres are able to enter the criminal offences related to a particular case into the KOK data tool. In each case, they may list multiple offences. According to the specialised counselling centres, 83% of cases meet the criteria for being classed as human trafficking (Section 232 of the German Criminal Code). In many cases, forced prostitution was also entered under the offences (78%). Labour exploitation was identified by counselling centres in 9% of cases and exploitation under unlawful restraint in 6% of cases. In 554 cases (84%), counselling centre staff reported that there were multiple offences involved.

Classification of offences by counselling centres



* Section 232b of the German Criminal Code (forced labour), not provided and not applicable

Source: KOK data tool

Multiple answers possible.

A combined analysis of the offences and the nationality of the trafficked persons shows that clients from Nigeria, Guinea, Germany and Gambia were most frequently affected by trafficking in human beings (Section 232) and forced prostitution (Section 232a of the German Criminal Code). As regards the offence of labour exploitation, which was reported in 59 cases, clients from Romania and Georgia were particularly prominently listed (37%).

2.3 Access to specialised counselling centres

The situation in which persons trafficked or exploited find themselves makes it more difficult for them to access help and assistance. Very often, they are not familiar with support structures in Germany and are not allowed to leave the perpetrators' sides. In many cases, they are also traumatised. In addition to this, trafficked persons often do not have any financial resources and are afraid of being prosecuted. They therefore face barriers to access any stakeholders and support structures such as specialised counselling centres for persons affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation.

Case study: a client and her story

In her early twenties, Ms A. saw no future for herself in her home country, Romania. She lived with her sick mother and a younger school-aged sister. A distant relative convinced her to move to Germany, promising her good job opportunities. But mere days after she arrived in the country, she was asked to work as a prostitute for the first time. Her refusal earned her a beating.

Over the following two years, her life spiralled into fear, forced prostitution, control and brutal physical violence. She also became pregnant. Her wish to keep the baby changed nothing about her situation, as she funded her procuress' livelihood and drug habit. It is in this dire situation that her labour started and that her child was born prematurely. When her relative urged her to leave the hospital where her newborn was being treated as soon as possible, the nursing staff on the maternity ward became suspicious. Social services were contacted and they, in turn, got in touch with NADESCHDA.

Meeting Ms A. without her unrelentingly controlling relative, the support worker, who spoke the same mother tongue as her, was able to convince her to trust the Youth Welfare Office. Ms A. was finally able to disclose the precarious situation she was in and get help. To begin with, she was placed in secure accommodation so she could visit her baby in hospital regularly without having to fear for her safety.

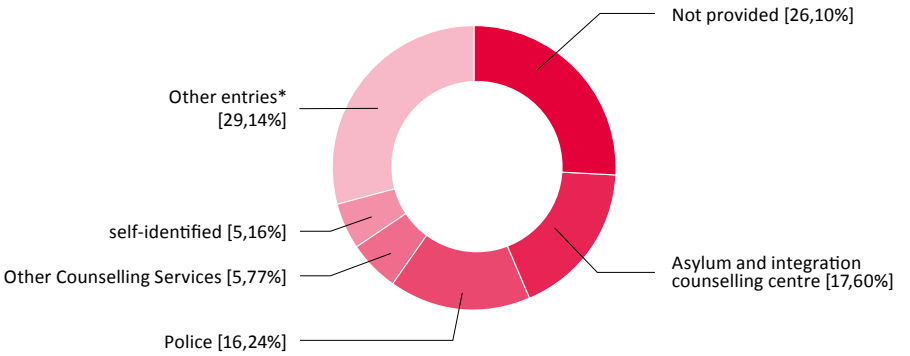
Once her baby was discharged, the traumatised young mother, moved into a residential family centre with her baby. After she gave comprehensive testimony to the police, her relative was incarcerated.

Case study from specialised counselling centre NADESCHDA

How the initial contact with the client was established is another piece of information counselling centre staff can enter into the KOK data tool. The largest group in 2024 were referred by asylum and integration counselling services (18%) or by other specialised counselling centres (14%). As compared with the previous year, their share increased by 4%. Initial contact between the client and the specialised counselling centres was established by the local and federal police force in 17% of cases. Initial contact was established by the customs authorities in only 1% of cases in 2024, much less frequently than the previous year (9%). Clients sought coun-

selling themselves as frequently as in the past year (5%). In 4% of cases, contact was made after the client was informed about the specialised counselling centres by their community. In total, other stakeholders, including doctors, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees or other key players acting as multipliers, were named in 13% of cases.

Initial contact



* Specialised counselling centre for trafficked persons, community, other, Federal Office for Migrations and Refugees, other multipliers, unknown, other authorities, women's shelter, initiatives and institutions, doctors and other medical professionals, streetwork, German Customs/Financial control of undeclared work, Federal Police, authorities under the German Prostitute Protection Act, client, social media, asylum- and integration counselling and 'Violence against Women' support hotline

Source: KOK data tool

In addition to the initial contact, counselling centre staff can also enter how the clients found out about the support and assistance services they offer. The findings for 2024 show that for 16% of clients, initial information came from the local or federal police force or customs. 14% were informed of the services by asylum and integration counselling services or through a refugee shelter. Others were provided information by another counselling centre (12%) or their community (5%).

2.4 Services provided by the specialised counselling centres and ability of their users to assert their rights and access services

Those affected by human trafficking and exploitation are entitled to advice and support. To be able to enforce their rights, they must be aware of existing services. Specialised counselling centres offer the necessary advice and assistance in this respect. Their services are free, anonymous and they are independent from authorities or other public bodies. Clients can access advice and support whether or not they are willing to press charges against the perpetrators.

KOK brings together approximately 60 specialised counselling centres for trafficked persons, both directly in the form of member organisations and via its offices. Some focus exclusively on this target group, though many provide counselling to female migrants and women who are generally victims of violence and offer counselling for trafficked persons as an additional service. All of these centres are NGOs working either independently or under the auspices of charitable organisations. The specialised counselling centres vary in terms of their size and resources; some have up to ten members of staff, whereas others can only employ one or two (sometimes only parttime) due to a lack of funding.

The specialised counselling centres offer a plethora of services ranging from outreach work, crisis intervention and initial counselling to longer-term psychosocial counselling and support, e.g. during asylum or criminal proceedings, support in returning home, or help building a new life in Germany. Awarenessraising, political campaigning and networking, and collaboration with a variety of stakeholders such as prosecuting authorities and social service providers are essential components of the work done by counselling centres. KOK‘s specialised counselling centres have all undertaken to observe shared guidelines and quality standards in their work.

Although not all specialised counselling centres are participating in data collection, the results of the analysis clearly show just how broad a spectrum of support and assistance services they offer to trafficked persons. The following table presents the services for the period from 2022 to 2024 in order to make visible any changes. As in the previous years, psychosocial counselling and support as well as sharing of information played a major role in 2024. In many cases, specialised counselling centres also provided crisis intervention (44%) and support during asylum proceedings (47%) in 2024. Regarding support during asylum proceedings, the KOK dataset provides additional information, according to which in 56% of these cases, the specialised counselling centres helped clients prepare their hearing,

and in 44% of cases they (also) offered support with their hearing before one of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees' special representatives for victims of human trafficking. In 17% of these cases, a member of staff (also) accompanied the client to the hearing. In 2 cases there was a written consultation only.

Providing further support with respect to official formalities (39%) and applying for subsistence benefits (36%) continue to be part of the work done by counselling centres in many cases, even if the corresponding share has decreased as compared to the previous two years. In 2024, just over half of clients were referred to other counselling centres (52%), who offered them specific support or took over entirely.

Half of clients stated that they had children (50%). In the majority of these cases, the children were also in Germany (64%). In 29% of cases, clients stated that they had no children, and in 20% of cases no information was provided on this subject. The specialised counselling centres also provide support in this respect. Cases where the children are not in Germany, in particular, can increase the counselling workload, e.g. when the centre has to organise family reunification or if it is feared that the children in the home country could be at risk (due to threats from perpetrators, for instance) or if they are already at risk.

In 131 cases (20%), the particular needs of pregnant women or children were said to have been a relevant aspect of the counselling provided.

As compared to other services, fewer cases involving the client being accompanied during criminal proceedings were reported. This share is more or less on par with help asserting other rights (see Section 2.4.3 for more details).

Table 1: Services provided by the specialised counselling centres (multiple answers possible)

	2024		2023		2022	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Psychosocial counselling and assistance	535	81%	534	89%	636	87%
Information	513	78%	516	86%	619	84%
Referrals to other counselling centres	343	52%	342	57%	347	47%
Crisis intervention	292	44%	327	55%	413	56%
Support during asylum proceedings	308	47%	300	50%	374	51%
Other official formalities (passport, certificates, etc.)	260	39%	280	47%	389	53%
Application for subsistence benefits	237	36%	259	43%	379	52%
Residence proceedings	206	40%	204	34%	317	43%
Support during pregnancy and with children	131	20%	138	23%	165	23%
Support during criminal proceedings	65	10%	112	19%	136	19%
Help asserting other rights (under the German Crime Victims Compensation Act, statutory accident insurance, wage claim, family reunion, etc.)	70	11%	98	16%	126	17%
Psychosocial support during court cases	20	3%	33	6%	51	7%
N (cases released for analysis)	659		597		733	

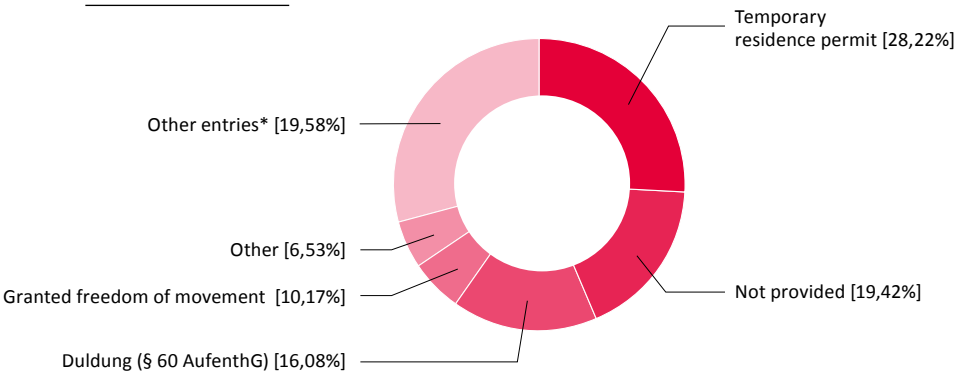
2.4.1 Access to protection

Persons affected by human trafficking and exploitation have experienced serious human rights violations. Due to the criminal offences committed against them they have certain rights, including the right to adequate accommodation, medical and therapeutic care or to be assisted by a legal counsel in criminal proceedings. However, many of these rights and benefits are contingent upon their residence status.

Persons affected by trafficking in human beings, forced labour, forced prostitution and labour exploitation who decide to cooperate with law enforcement authorities can, under certain conditions, be granted a residence permit in accordance with Section 25 para. 4a or 4b of the German Residence Act. The permit is initially issued for a period of one year and can be extended after the conclusion of criminal proceedings. The right of residence can also be secured via asylum proceedings. The possible routes are applying for a residence permit under Section 25 para. 2 of the German Residence Act in conjunction with Section 3 para. 1 or Section 4 para. 1 of the German Asylum Act or for a prohibition of deportation under Section 60 para. 5 or para. 7 of the Residence Act.

An examination of the cases entered into the KOK data tool reveals that clients' residence status is often precarious. 28% had a residence permit, while holders of an exceptional leave to remain made up another larger group (16%). In addition, 9% had been granted a residence permit on humanitarian grounds (Section 25 of the Residence Act), while Section 25 para. 4a (Trafficking in human beings) was the legal basis for only 16 of these clients, according to the KOK data tool. Consequently, the residence status of many of their service users was either not yet definitive or uncertain. 43% had been in Germany for less than a year, 13% for 1 to 3 years and 22% had been living in Germany for over three years. 40 of the clients in the latter group had been living in Germany since birth.

Residence status



* German citizenship, Section 25, para. 3 of the German Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz), Section 25, para. 4a of the German Residence Act (Trafficking in human beings), Section 25, para. 2 of the German Residence Act, Residence permit obtained through work, Training, Employment or family reasons, Section 4 of the German Asylum Act (Asylgesetz) Subsidiary protection, Not applicable, Residence permit for another EU country, Section 3, para. 1 of the German Asylum Act Protection of Refugees, Section 25, para. 5 of the German Residence Act, Section 24 of the German Residence Act (Granting residence for temporary protection) and Section 25, para 4b of the German Residence Act (German Act to Combat Undeclared and Illegal Employment or wage claims)

Source: KOK data tool

Trafficked persons who have managed to escape their predicament require time and support in order to recover. An older EU Directive (2004/81/EC) already stipulates that third-country nationals residing illegally in a country must be granted a reflection and stabilisation period, during which they cannot be expected to leave. In Germany, it is guaranteed by way of suspension of deportation as provided for in Section 59, para. 7 of the German Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*) and lasts at least three months. In many federal states, a document must be signed off by the police in order for this period to be granted and there must be a suspicion of trafficking in human beings.

In the data tool, 76 cases provide data on whether a reflection period was applied for (12%). A reflection period was granted to 61 clients in 2024 vs. 38 the year before.

Reports from the ground confirm that it remains very challenging to obtain a reflection period for trafficked individuals. Their issuance also differs vastly across regions. Obtaining a reflection period is subject to stringent criteria, especially when individuals were subjected to exploitation outside Germany or do not want to contact the police. Whether this explains the small number of documented cases in the data tool where a reflection period was applied for cannot be determined on the basis of the available data.

If persons affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation are to recover, they need adequate and secure accommodation. It must comply with certain security requirements to protect them from perpetrators. Depending on the situation, they may also need guidance and help finding their feet. It is worth noting at this stage that the existing system of accommodation for trafficked persons is severely lacking and is not harmonised at the national level. For women, there are essentially two options: accommodation in a women's refuge or in a safehouse or any another kind of secure accommodation provided by the specialised counselling centres. However, due to the limited number of places in women's refuges and the relatively small stock of safehouses, this often presents a challenge. In some cases, no accommodation is organised, for example because clients have already found accommodation. There is no accommodation system for men who are subject to trafficking in human beings, and as such solutions must be sought on a case-by-case basis. As for minors, child and youth welfare services are responsible for providing housing. However, the options they provide and the accommodation they offer are often not suitable for the special needs of children and young people who have been through trafficking in human beings. In 139 cases (21%), specialised counselling centre staff listed that accommodation was organised by their centre in 2024 – a lot more than the 81 documented cases the previous year.

Case study: Ms L.

Ms L. left her home country, Guinea, in her late twenties after having to endure forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). She first spent two years in Morocco, where she had to prostitute herself among other things to earn enough money to continue her journey to Europe. She was offered help to get to Europe from a man and he, in turn, established contact with a Guinean man in Germany who paid him to act as a middleman. Ms L. was taken to Spain, from where she travelled on to France and then Belgium with other women under the constant supervision of the perpetrators. In Belgium, Ms L. got a new passport and was driven to Germany, where she was put up by the Guinean contact. He then forced her to sell sex and made her pay a lot of money for her trip. He was often aggressive; he beat her and raped her.

After becoming pregnant, she managed to flee and got in touch with a specialised counselling centre that had suspicions of trafficking in human beings. Ms L., however, did not want to provide any further information. She applied for asylum and gave birth to her daughter. Because of her daughter's risk of forced marriage and FGM in the event of their return, she was granted subsidiary protection and her daughter refugee status.

About a year later, she was asked to cooperate with the authorities paying out her benefits and provide information about the perpetrator, who was also her daughter's father. The perpetrator was contacted by the paying agency, which enabled him to gain information about Ms L.'s whereabouts. When an argument escalated between him and Ms L., the police were called. This time, Ms L. decided to confide in a counsellor at the specialised counselling centre. After consulting a lawyer, Ms L. decided to go to the police, where she provided detailed information about how everything unfolded. The police station in charge deemed her and her daughter to be at risk, so they were forced to leave their home as soon as possible. The specialised counselling centre supported her in organising her move to a town located far enough away for her safety, made sure she would continue receiving benefits and put her in touch with a local specialised counselling centre. The perpetrator is still under investigation. Ms L. continues to receive support from the counselling centre regarding her integration. The impending trial against the perpetrator has been upsetting for her, which is why she is receiving psychological assistance.

Case study from a specialised counselling centre (anonymised)

2.4.2 Access to benefits

Once the exploitative situation is over, individuals affected by trafficking in human beings are often unable to provide for themselves. Another issue is that many clients have a precarious residence status. This often means that access to job opportunities and an independent income is fraught with obstacles. In only 41 cases was it reported that clients were earning their own income from employment. When asked about their current activities, 31% of clients responded that they were not in employment. 18% attended German lessons. 6% were in salaried employment. No information was provided for 213 cases (32%).

During the reflection and stabilisation period or the asylum proceedings, third-country nationals are entitled to benefits under the German Asylum-Seekers Benefits Act (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz*). Holders of a residence permit under Section 25 para. 4a or para. 4b of the Residence Act and EU citizens are eligible for benefits in accordance with the German Social Code, Part II (SGB II) or Part XII (SGB XII). However, experience in practice shows that accessing benefits often proves challenging for one group in particular, namely EU citizens having been trafficked. Specialised counselling centres begin by checking with the client which benefits they are entitled to by law. The majority (403 cases, i.e. 61%) received subsistence benefits. In 2024, 71% of clients received benefits under the Asylum-Seekers Benefits Act, whilst 13% received unemployment benefits under the Unemployment Benefits II scheme (*Arbeitslosengeld II*) and 12% Long-term Job Seeker's Allowance (*Bürgergeld*).

As well as access to subsistence benefits, help getting into training and further education or finding a job plays a key role in helping these individuals regain their autonomy. The specialised counselling centres helped clients get into training and further education and/or accompanied them in 109 cases (17%). In 60 cases (9%), clients were given assistance and/or were accompanied on their journey to finding employment.

Tabelle 2: Referral and support provided by specialised counselling centres

	2024		2023		2022	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Legal counsel	364	55%	384	64%	441	60%
Medical treatment	374	57%	338	57%	426	58%
German lessons	199	30%	188	31%	261	36%
Training and further education	111	17%	93	16%	118	16%
Work	64	10%	63	11%	66	9%
Literacy	36	5%	47	8%	69	9%
N (cases released for analysis)	659		597		733	

As noted previously, many of the clients were not German nationals and 43% had been in Germany for less than a year when they were asked. It is therefore likely that most of them spoke little or no German. On the path to regaining autonomy, literacy and language courses can thus be an essential gateway to becoming an active member of society. Specialised counselling centres helped clients find and get onto the relevant courses, and sometimes accompanied them during those courses in 35% of cases, which shows how crucial this is.

The health implications of trafficking in human beings and exploitation are huge. Those affected have often been subjected to years of grave threats, isolation and deprivation of liberty as well as physical, psychological and sexual violence. This can have a severe impact on physical and mental health; many clients are diagnosed with serious mental after-effects such as (complex) PTSD, serious stress-related symptoms or adjustment disorders as well as affective disorders (in many cases depression). This is why quality healthcare and psychotherapy are highly needed by individuals affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation. Specialised counselling centres provide help and support through psychosocial counselling and facilitating access to healthcare, among other things. The KOK data tool indicates that clients received help to get medical care and/or were accompanied to appointments in 374 cases (57%).

Case study: Aishatu, Sierra Leone

Aishatu (not her real name) was identified as having been trafficked at the refugee reception centre in Munich. In her home country, she was married by force at the age of 15 to a 60-year-old man, prior to which she was subjected to FGM. She fled from her marriage after experiencing a lot of violence. Left without the support of her family, she became homeless. In a state of vulnerability, she was recruited by a female trafficker and was then exploited for years into forced prostitution in several countries. After arriving in Germany, Aishatu was highly traumatised and was treated on a psychiatric ward to begin with. JADWIGA then took over psychosocial counselling and set up regular meetings. Initially, Aishatu was not very responsive and showed clear signs of dissociation. Thanks to ongoing psychiatric care as well as support from JADWIGA, her state gradually stabilised. As part of an initial risk assessment, it was decided with her that the tattoos she was forced to have by her trafficker would have to be removed to ensure she remained safe, as they made her very easy to recognise. JADWIGA organised their removal pro bono. The counselling centre also accompanied Aishatu to her hearings at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees as well as to specialised medical facilities such as an FGM/C clinic and a gynaecologist. Because of her great vulnerability, her deportation was prohibited under Section 60, para. 5 of the German Residence Act. Aishatu is currently learning to read and write and is delighted to be able to access education for the very first time.

Case study from counselling centre JADWIGA

Regarding legal counsel, specialised counselling centres referred their clients and/or accompanied them to appointments in 364 cases (55%), i.e. 20 fewer than the previous year. This high number underlines the key role of specialised counselling centres in helping their clients to understand and exercise their rights.

2.4.3 Support during criminal proceedings

Trafficking in human beings and exploitation are defined as criminal offences in Division 18 of the Special Part of the German Criminal Code ('Offences against personal liberty'). Criminal law makes it a punishable offence to recruit persons and to subsequently exploit them and subject them to forced prostitution and forced labour and other exploitative acts. Investigations and criminal proceedings can be, in many respects, a source of stress, uncertainty and worry for people who have been trafficked or exploited. Some of the many concerns they may have are linked to their lack of knowledge of their rights and how the proceedings will unfold, the possibility of incriminating themselves, of putting their families at risk or of meeting with the perpetrators.

The German Federal Criminal Police Office's Federal Situation Report on Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation reported that in 2024, 364 proceedings were completed regarding sexual exploitation and 41 regarding labour exploitation.

In the field of labour exploitation, the German Federal Criminal Police Office has registered a constant increase in the number of investigations, 2024 being a record year.

Investigations into labour exploitation entered into the tool by specialised counselling centres in 2024 stood at 16 vs. 65 in 2023.

There are many unreported cases, however, as is evidenced by the KOK data tool. The specialised counselling centres reported that investigations had been launched in only 206 of the 659 cases entered into the KOK database – a decrease from 41% to 31% as compared with the previous year. Investigations aim to cast light upon facts pertinent under criminal law, thereby establishing if there are sufficient grounds for suspicion to justify bringing charges.

In 110 cases (53%), the investigations entered into the KOK data tool were instigated by a complaint on the part of the client. In 82 cases (40%), investigations were launched ex officio. The most frequent grounds for investigations entered into the data tool were forced prostitution (148 cases) and/or trafficking in human beings (143 cases). Investigations on grounds of labour exploitation/forced labour were entered in 35 cases and 26 on grounds of a sexual offence. The information provided suggests that investigations were instigated both on grounds of trafficking in human beings and forced prostitution in many of the cases entered.

Using the KOK data tool, it is also possible to examine whether the purpose of the investigation matched the counselling centre staff's assessment of the offences committed. Counselling centre staff reported that trafficking in human beings was involved in 545 cases. However, investigations on these grounds were only carried out in 143 of them (26%). Specialised counselling centres entered 514 cases classified as forced prostitution, while only 148 cases were investigated into as such.

If a trafficked person decides to make a statement and are consequently expected to testify during criminal proceedings, they are able to rely on the support of the specialised counselling centres. According to the KOK data tool, clients gave a statement during investigations in 169 cases in 2024.

Case study: Hanna

Hanna (not her real name) was 17 when she met two men in their mid-twenties. They asked her if she would be interested in some work; she said yes. She assumed it would be a part-time job working in a pub or something like that. The perpetrators waited until she turned 18 and she one day found them waiting for her in front of her home, as they knew her address. They got her to follow them to their car and told her they would take her to an appointment with a punter. Prostitution had never been on the cards and she had never agreed to engaging in it. She was taken by surprise, felt overwhelmed and found the perpetrators aggressive. She had to service her first punter that very same day. The perpetrators created profiles for her on various websites selling sexual services. All Hanna was told was when her next appointment would be. She had to be reachable at all times and was not allowed to take a day off. The perpetrators continued to be pushy and even threatened her at knifepoint once. On some days, she serviced up to six men and was allowed to keep only 10% of her earnings on average. She was required to hand over the rest. As well as forcing her into prostitution and exploitation, Hanna was subjected to mental and physical violence on the part of the perpetrators, who also threatened her and her family.

After about a year, Hanna found the courage to turn to the police, with the help of a friend. She pressed charges. Her case was handled by the local State Office of Criminal Investigations, which contacted specialised counselling centre IN VIA. The counselling staff supported Hanna, stabilised her psychologically, made safety arrangements with the State Office of Criminal Investigations and organised a legal counsel for her.

Her ordeal had a massive effect on Hanna: she did not dare leave the house, lived in isolation and had lost any trust in people.

After a lot of work, she managed to begin an apprenticeship, as she wanted to look to the future. Five years after pressing charges, Hanna received a letter informing her that the proceedings against the two perpetrators would take place and that she was expected to testify. At that point in time, she was no longer in touch with the specialised counselling centre, but nevertheless contacted IN VIA again. News of the impending trial knocked the wind out of her. She started sleeping very badly, having panic attacks and experiencing flashbacks. She could no longer go to vocational school. She was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The perpetrators offered her €20,000 in damages and suggested to her that she would no longer have to testify if she accepted. Hanna initially refused, as she wanted to make sure the perpetrators were held accountable and were punished.

However, another year would pass between that letter until the date of the trial and sentencing. During that time, Hanna lived in fear – of the proceedings, of the perpetrators.

She was mentally very strained and did not know what sentence to expect for the perpetrators. She ended up taking their settlement offer to put an end to this period of uncertainty. She no longer had to testify during proceedings.

The two men were sentenced to a suspended prison sentence – 2 years in one case, 1 year and 11 months in the other. Hanna felt it was too little in view of what she had experienced and the ever-lasting effects of her ordeal.

Case study from IN VIA specialised counselling centre for women affected by trafficking in human beings, Berlin

Particularly vulnerable persons subjected to trafficking in human beings or other offences are entitled to professional assistance and counsel during the entire criminal proceedings in accordance with Section 406g of the German Penal Procedure Code (*Strafprozessordnung*). This is known as 'psychosocial support during court cases' under the German Act on Psychosocial Support During Criminal Proceedings (*Gesetz über die psychosoziale Prozessbegleitung im Strafverfahren*).

Some of the specialised counselling centres have staff who are certified to provide psychosocial support during court cases, and who take on this task. In most, however, this is not the case, meaning that they either have to bring in external psychosocial support professionals,[5] or trafficked persons are accompanied by specialised counselling centre staff acting as 'person of trust' under Section 406f of the German Code of Criminal Procedure. As those affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation are eligible to bring an accessory prosecution when testifying as a witness, they are also entitled to have a lawyer to represent them with respect to this accessory prosecution.

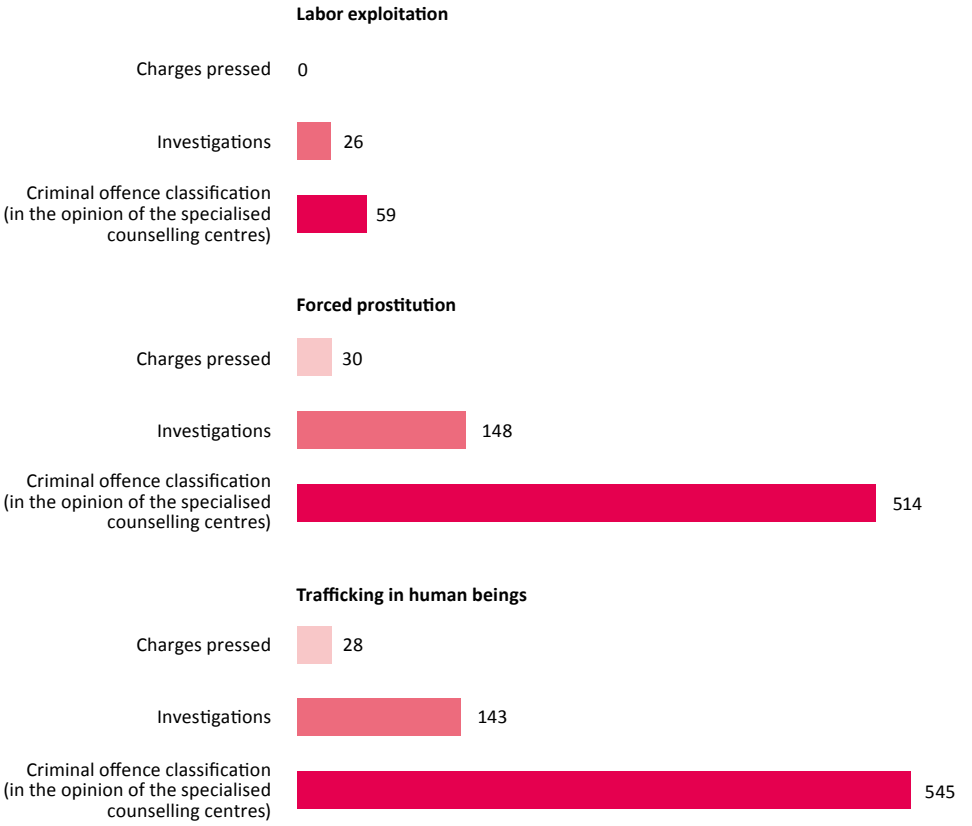
The KOK data tool has only 20 entries for cases where psychosocial support during court cases as provided for by the German Act on Psychosocial Support During Criminal Proceedings was performed. In 4 of these 20 cases, the clients had (already) testified as a witness in criminal proceedings. Clients were allowed to join the proceeding as a private accessory prosecutor in 48 of the 206 investigations (23%) entered into the KOK data tool for the year 2024.

Charges were brought in 38 of the 206 cases entered as having been investigated into (18%). Because proceedings can be instituted on multiple grounds, the total number of criminal offences entered can exceed the total number of charges listed in the data.

In 24 cases, the investigations were discontinued due to failure to identify the perpetrator, and in 5 cases they were discontinued due to there being insufficient grounds for suspicion. Charges were pressed most frequently on grounds of offences against personal freedom (forced prostitution, trafficking in human beings, unlawful restraint).

5 This tends to occur only rarely, as they are not qualified to accompany trafficked persons in all federal states.

Criminal offence classification, investigations and indictment



Source: KOK data tool

In 2024, it was reported in the KOK data tool that clients testified as witnesses in 49 cases. Persons affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation are often unfamiliar with German criminal law and are themselves at risk of having to face criminal proceedings, for example because they are residing in Germany illegally or because they are in breach of residence restrictions, the German Narcotics Act or tax regulations. This is why it is paramount that they are informed of their rights and obligations during investigations and criminal proceedings. The specialised counselling centres provided support during criminal proceedings in 65 cases, thereby helping their clients to exercise their rights.

2.4.4 Access to compensation

Persons affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation are often physically and mentally damaged by the violence they were subjected to. Furthermore, their wages for the activities they used to perform are often withheld in full or in part.

Victims of violence or exploitative working conditions may be entitled to compensation, which can take the form of damages, compensation for pain and suffering or payment of withheld wages. Claims for compensation for pain and suffering or for damages are often dealt with as part of civil proceedings, although it is also possible to have entitlement established during criminal proceedings. Up until the end of 2023, in cases where a person's health had been impaired as a consequence of the offence, they were able to claim compensation from the State under the Crime Victims Compensation Act. However, the new Social Compensation Legislation (German Social Code, Part XIV) entered into force on 1 January 2024, thus replacing the Crime Victims Compensation Act.

Entering claims under the new Part XIV into the KOK data tool will be possible as soon as it is established practice and there are relevant cases, which should be from 2026. This report cannot determine whether and to what extent this new legislation will grant better access to compensation for people who have experienced trafficking in human beings and exploitation.

Those affected by trafficking in human beings and exploitation are also eligible to claim compensation for the injuries they have suffered under statutory accident insurance or by filing a claim for compensation for unpaid wages or damages during civil or consolidated civil and criminal proceedings.

Wage compensation was only claimed in 9 cases and victim compensation in only 4, according to the data entered into the tool.

These low numbers corroborate the claim made in other reports that it is very difficult in practice to enforce such claims filed by trafficked persons. In addition to various bureaucratic hurdles to overcome (e.g. the question of who is liable to pay lawyers' fees or uncertain, short-term residence permits), those affected often have insufficient knowledge about the different compensation options available through statutory accident insurance or during a consolidated civil and criminal procedure. Another issue is that even if a consolidated civil and criminal/penal procedure is successful, there is no guarantee that the trafficked person will actually receive the money from the perpetrator. The latter often have no above-board assets.

3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report once again highlights that access to protection and support for trafficked persons and enforcing their rights are absolutely central to anti-trafficking action, and these are tasks that essentially fall to specialised counselling centres.

In 2024 too the demand for the wide range of services they offer to affected clients remained high. The specialised counselling centres continue to carry out this demanding work in line with high professional requirements and joint quality standards. This demonstrates once again the urgent need highlighted in previous reports for specialised counselling centres to have access to sustainable resources. However, this is not always the case: on the contrary, they are expected to do more and more, but without the necessary funding to do so. Some centres are at risk of cuts or have already been affected. This is particularly true for projects directed at (potential) trafficked individuals among refugees, many of which have had to be discontinued.

Yet the report underscores that many cases of trafficking in human beings, exploitation and violence occur in the context of migration movements and asylum. Helping clients sort out their residence situation and supporting them through asylum proceedings remained a very time-consuming task in 2024.

Just under a fifth of all cases were referred to specialised counselling centres by stakeholders working in the field of asylum and support for refugees. These are key paths to reaching potential clients, with awareness-raising work and cooperation urgently needed.

The projected implementation of the Common European Asylum System reform in Germany is a concerning development that will hinder these outreach opportunities because of restrictive asylum and migration policies such as outsourcing and expediting asylum proceedings.

Urgent action continues to be needed to improve the human rights situation of trafficked persons in Germany, as has been regularly underlined by KOK in its data reports.

The adoption of the National Action Plan Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and the impending implementation of the revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive offer new opportunities to make the needed changes.

On the other hand, political headwinds are reducing spaces to discuss social issues; and civil society stakeholders are under increasing pressure due to budget cuts and the rightward shift in public and political discourse. The fact that the national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings still has no legal underpinning speaks volumes.

The political status quo *must* change. Political action must be guided by a human rights-based approach and the German Federal Government must urgently address and implement the vital improvements described in this report as well as the measures laid down in the National Action Plan.

4

APPENDIX

Selected tables / Source: KOK data tool

Table 3: Age

	Number	Percentage
22–29	234	35,51
30–39	223	33,84
18–21	93	14,11
40–49	58	8,80
Not provided	19	2,88
Other entries: 0–13, 14–17, 50–60 und 60+	32	4,86
All evaluable cases (N=659) are used as a reference.		

Table 4: Nationality

	Number	Percentage
Nigeria	160	24,28
Guinea	85	12,90
Germany	52	7,89
Gambia	38	5,77
Sierra Leone	35	5,31
Other entries: Romania, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Benin, Uganda, Hungary, Turkey, Albania, Ukraine, Georgia, Serbia, Colombia, Togo, Senegal, Slovakia, Brazil, Venezuela, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Ivory Coast, no information provided, Ghana, Kenya, Syria, Peru, Poland, Liberia, Somalia, Iraq, China, Zambia, Tanzania, Thailand, Czechia, Afghanistan, Philippines, North Macedonia, Iran, Yemen, Nepal, India, Libya, Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Spain, Vietnam, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, France, Kazakhstan, Burkina Faso, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russian Federation and United Kingdom	289	43,85
All evaluable cases (N=659) are used as a reference.		

Table 5: Areas in which exploitation occurred

	Number	Percentage
Unregistered sexual services in accordance with the German Prostitute Protection Act	409	62,06
Not provided	138	20,94
Domestic Work	53	8,04
Registered sexual services in accordance with the German Prostitute Protection Act	42	6,37
Miscellaneous/other	19	2,88
Other entries: criminal activities, cleaning, general services, catering, agriculture, construction, care work, begging, other unskilled workers in production, au pair and not applicable	82	12,44
All evaluable cases (N=659) are used as a reference. Multiple answers possible.		

Table 6: Criminal offence classification
(in the opinion of the specialised counselling centres)

	Number	Percentage
Section 232 of the German Criminal Code (trafficking in human beings)	545	82,70
Section 232a of the German Criminal Code (forced prostitution)	514	78,00
Section 233 (labour exploitation)	59	8,95
Section 233a of the German Criminal Code (labour exploitation under unlawful restraint)	38	5,77
Other forms of Exploitation	30	4,55
Other entries: Section 232b of the German Criminal Code (forced labour), not provided and not applicable	53	8,04
All evaluable cases (N=659) are used as a reference. Multiple answers possible.		

Table 7: Initial contact made via

	Number	Percentage
Not provided	172	26,10
Asylum and integration counselling centre/ Accomodation for Refugees	116	17,60
Police	107	16,24
Other Counselling Services	38	5,77
Self identified	34	5,16
Other entries: specialised counselling centre for trafficked persons, community, other, Federal Office for Migrations and Refugees, other multipliers, unknown, other authorities, women's shelter, initiatives and institutions, doctors and other medical professionals, streetwork, German Customs/Financial control of undeclared work, Federal Police, authorities under the German Prostitute Protection Act, client, social media, asylum- and integration counselling and 'Violence against Women' support hotline	192	29,14
All evaluable cases (N=659) are used as a reference.		

Table 8: Residence status

	Number	Percentage
Temporary residence permit	186	28,22
Not provided	128	1942
Exceptional leave to remain	106	16,08
Granted freedom of movement	67	10,17
Other	43	6,53
Other entries: German citizenship, Section 25, para. 3 of the German Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz), Section 25, para. 4a of the German Residence Act (Trafficking in human beings), Section 25, para. 2 of the German Residence Act, Residence permit obtained through work, Training, Employment or family reasons, Section 4 of the German Asylum Act (Asylgesetz) Subsidiary protection, Not applicable, Residence permit for another EU country, Section 3, para. 1 of the German Asylum Act Protection of Refugees, Section 25, para. 5 of the German Residence Act, Section 24 of the German Residence Act (Granting residence for temporary protection) and Section 25, para 4b of the German Residence Act (German Act to Combat Undeclared and Illegal Employment or wage claims)	129	19,58
All evaluable cases (N=659) are used as a reference.		

Table 9: Outcome of preliminary proceedings

	Number	Percentage
Not provided	114	55,34
Charges filed	38	18,45
Discontinued due to failure to identify perpetrator	24	11,65
Not applicable	20	9,71
Disontinued due to insufficient grounds to suspicion	5	2,34
Other entries: Discontinued on grounds of insignificance, Conditionally discontinued	5	2,34
Cases in which there was an investigation (N=206) are used as a reference.		

Table 10: Charges brought for: Offences against personal freedom

	Number	Percentage
Forced prostitution	30	78,95
Trafficking in human beings	28	73,68
Unlawful restraint	7	18,42
Exploitation under unlawful restraint	6	15,79
Not provided	6	15,79
Other entries: Abduction abroad and coercion	6	15,79
The field 'Outcome of investigations' with value 'Charges brought' (N= 38) is used as reference. Multiple answers possible		

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Lützowstr. 102–104
10785 Berlin

Phone: (+49) 030 / 263 911 76
fax: (+49) 030 / 263 911 86
info@kok-buero.de
www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/en

Authors: German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings KOK, Zentrum für Evaluation und Politikberatung – ZEP (Centre for Evaluation and Policy Advice)

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CONTEXT AS REGARDS DATA PROTECTION

Specialised counselling centres working with trafficked persons have always had to deal with sensitive data in their work. The data is collected as part of their counselling activities, but also for statistical purposes as well as to provide evidence to donors, as the funding for their work tends to be contingent upon certain conditions. Dealing with such sensitive data is risky. Increasing digitalisation (including with respect to the KOK data tool) requires great care to be taken with data security and data protection.

KOK and the specialised counselling centres adhere to stringent legal data protection standards when collecting case data as well as in connection with the development and maintenance of the KOK data tool.

In all cases, the voluntary consent of the client is required before their data is entered into the tool by the specialised counselling centre, and a cooperation agreement must be concluded between the specialised counselling centres and the KOK office. This is also when data protection agreements are secured.

In order to live up to its own high standards in relation to data protection and data minimisation, KOK has an external service provider perform a data protection impact assessment on a regular basis, using a different provider every time. The assessments cover various aspects, including the data collection environment (the technical and organisational data protection measures in place to ensure data protection) provided by KOK, its IT contractor 3plusX and participating specialised counselling centres, which are randomly checked. The software used and the server are also regularly scrutinised. If any risks are identified, measures are put into place to fix them or at least minimise them. This means that risks are regularly reassessed and addressed in collaboration with counselling centres and the aforementioned stakeholders.

The data protection impact assessment is made available to all cooperating counselling centres.

The specialised counselling centres' numerous years of experience in handling sensitive personal data and the ongoing monitoring of data protection in relation to the KOK data tool guarantee that the highest possible standards are met and at the very least that the GDPR is complied with. Indeed, the data tool aims to go further than the prevailing European standards in some respects, thereby setting the benchmark in terms of data collection methods that are mindful of fundamental rights, thanks to the use of supporting tools like structured checklists for a secure working environment, a user manual for the data tool, and declarations of consent for data processing in numerous languages, including plain German.[6]

6 The data protection measures and requirements applicable to data collection are set out in detail in KOK's first report published in 2020: Defining the Gap: Data Collection in the Context of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation in Germany – KOK's Civil Society Approach, KOK e.V.

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Trafficking in Human Beings – KOK

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10785 Berlin
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