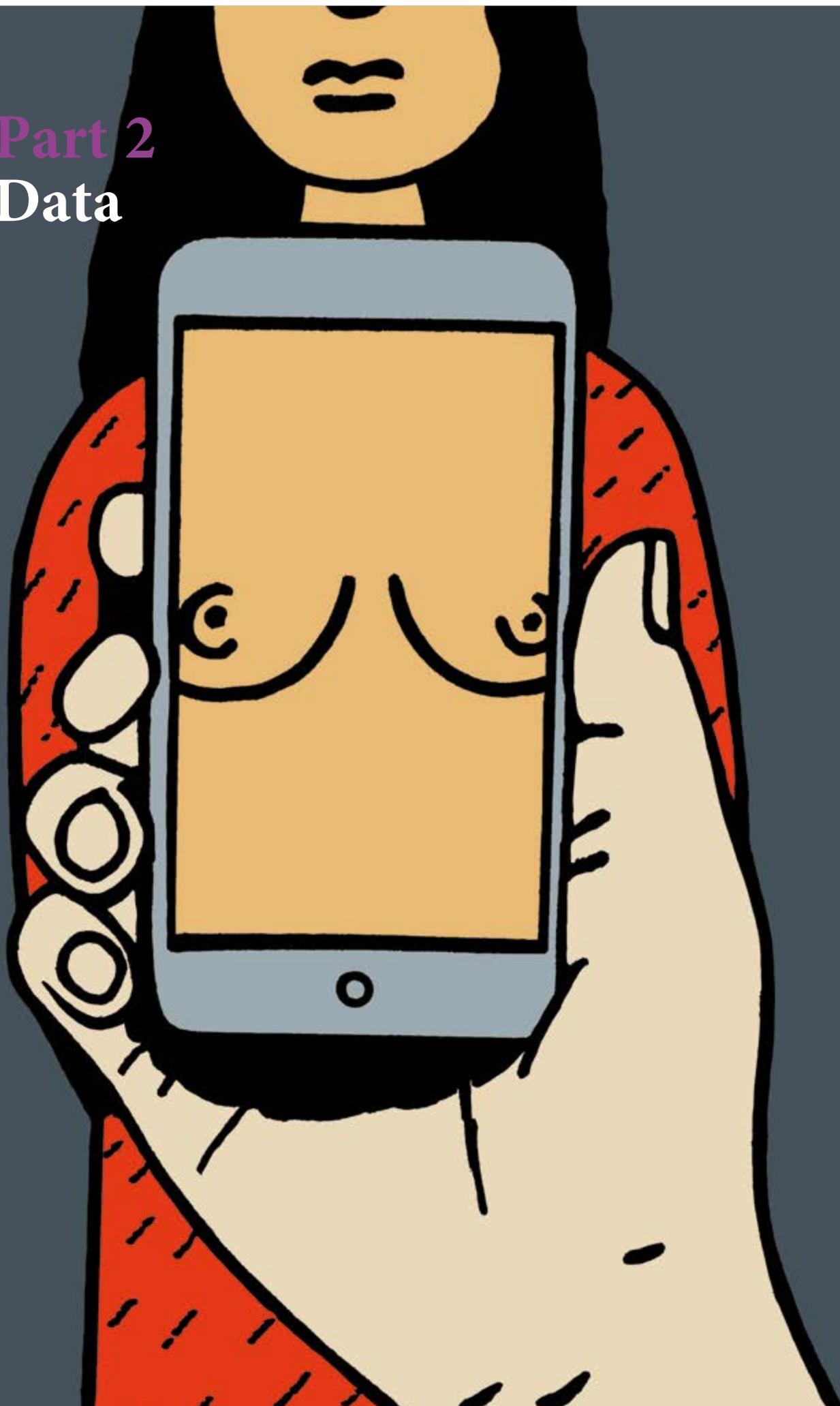


Part 2
Data



Introduction

This part of the report contains the key figures given to Myria by the six stakeholders likely to play a role in a human trafficking or human smuggling case in Belgium. It presents the most recent data on human trafficking and human smuggling. The chapter ends with an external contribution by the NSSO inspection department.

The six stakeholders who provided this data are:

- the police, with information from the National General Database (NGD);
- the NSSO inspection department (Thematic Directorate for Trafficking in Human Beings, ECOSOC teams);
- the College of Prosecutors General, with information
- on the prosecutions made by the public prosecutor's offices and the labour prosecutor's office;
- the Immigration Office (IO);
- PAG-ASA, Payoke and Sürya: the specialised victim reception centres;
- the Criminal Policy Service of FPS Justice, with information on the convictions.

There is a lack of harmonisation between the figures from these stakeholders. Therefore, they aren't sufficient as a basis for policy evaluation or to support strategic analyses. This lack of harmonisation also significantly restricts the possibilities of reporting to the European institutions. Myria works with these stakeholders on a daily basis in order to obtain the figures of the best possible quality.

Warning

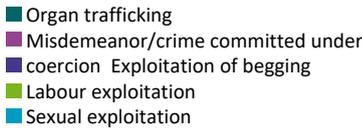
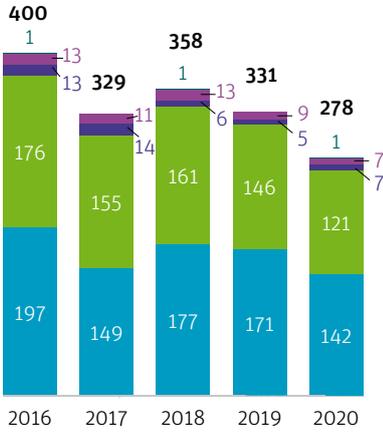
- The figures in this report don't reflect the true extent of the phenomenon of human trafficking and smuggling. They only indicate the acts and the victims identified by the authorities. There are currently no estimates on unidentified acts and victims.
- These figures and their evolution provide information on the actions of the authorities to combat human trafficking and smuggling rather than on the phenomena as such.
- Except for the ECOSOC teams, every stakeholder has reported a downward trend compared with 2019, in particular owing to the measures taken to combat the pandemic. During the lockdowns, detection efforts were limited owing to other priorities, which may have made phenomena such as human trafficking and smuggling less visible.



The figures available on human trafficking and smuggling only show the visible tip of the iceberg. The real extent of the phenomenon is unknown.

1. Human trafficking

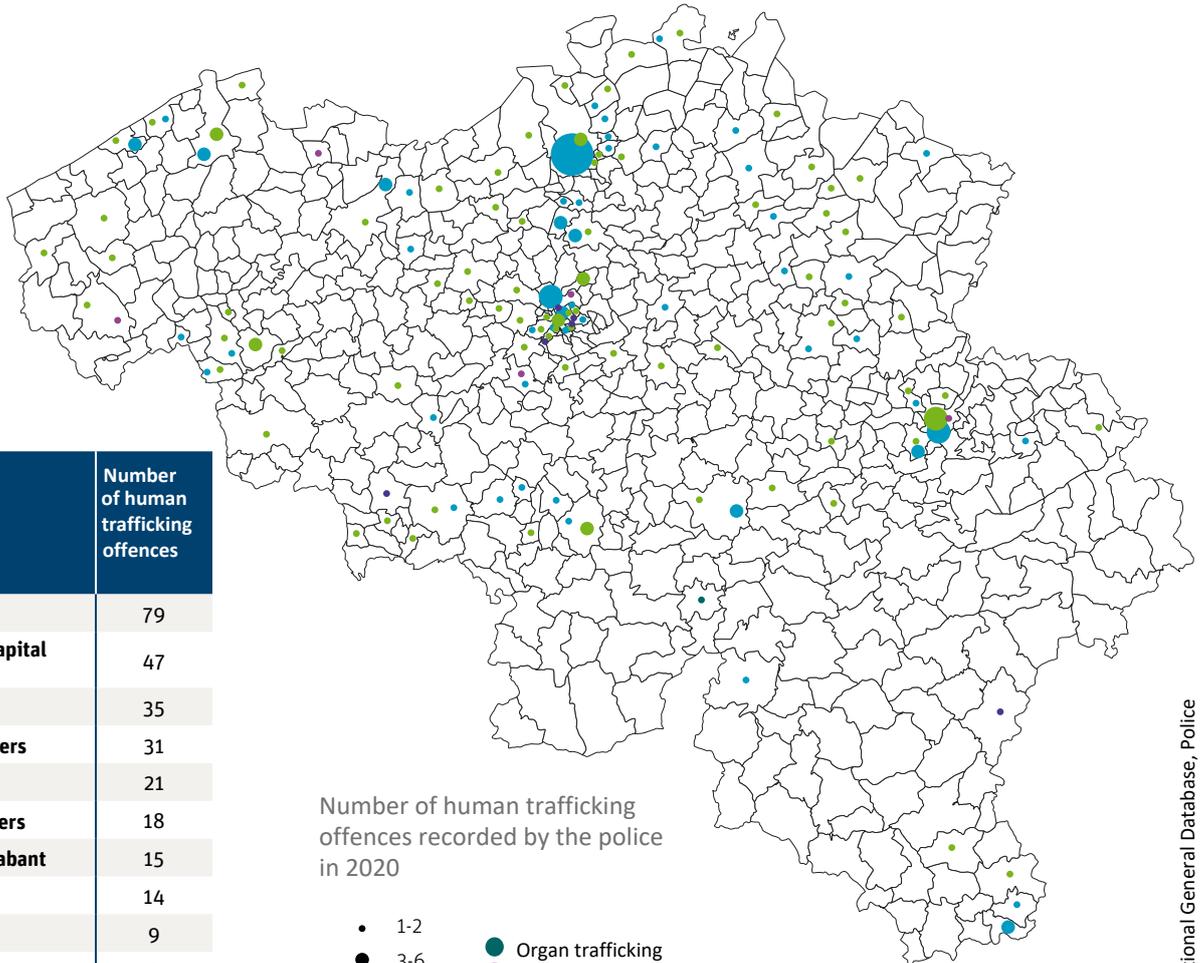
Human trafficking offences (police data)



Since 2016, the number of offences has remained below 400 and fluctuates from one year to the next. In 2020, there was a fall of 16% compared with 2019.

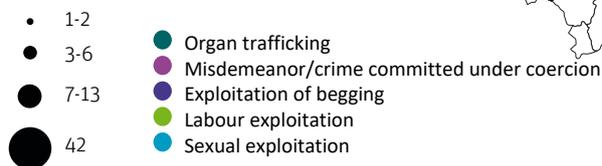
In 2020:

- The police recorded a total of **278 human trafficking offences**, mainly concerning sexual exploitation (51%) and labour exploitation (44%). Nevertheless, there were 7 offences involving misdemeanors or crimes committed under coercion and 7 involving exploitation of begging. There was one organ trafficking offence.
- There were more offences concerning human trafficking in big cities, mainly in the capital (47 offences in total in the 19 municipalities), in the municipality of Antwerp (with 45 offences recorded, 42 of them linked to sexual exploitation) and in the municipality of Liège (with 21 offences recorded).
- The province of Antwerp and the Brussels-Capital Region accounted for 62% of the offences associated with sexual exploitation at national level. Concerning labour exploitation, the offences were mainly recorded in the provinces of Liège (21), West Flanders (20) and Antwerp (18).



Province	Number of human trafficking offences
Antwerp	79
Brussels-Capital Region	47
Liège	35
West Flanders	31
Hainaut	21
East Flanders	18
Flemish Brabant	15
Limburg	14
Namur	9
Luxembourg	8
Walloon Brabant	1
Total	278

Number of human trafficking offences recorded by the police in 2020



Reports from the NSSO inspection department (ECOSOC units)

Among the investigations closed in 2020:

- The NSSO inspection department drew up 100 reports on human trafficking (Art. 433*quinquies* of the Criminal Code), which is almost double compared with 2019 (58 reports).
- 156 presumed victims of human trafficking were referred to the judicial authorities and the specialised



For more information, see the external contribution by the NSSO inspection department at the end of this part.

reception centres by the NSSO Inspectorate through criminal reports or reports (compared with 65 and 82 respectively in 2018 and 2019). In 2020, there were 137 male victims compared with 19 female victims.

- The most represented sectors of activity were construction and hospitality.

Sector of activity and nationality of workers identified as presumed victims of human trafficking by the NSSO inspection department in 2020

Country	Food industry	Construction	Garages	Wholesale trade	Retail trade	Land transport	Hospitality	Cleaning	Beauty sector (beauty care, hairdressing, etc.)	Households as employers of domestic staff	Other	Total
Morocco	4	1	1		4		11		3	1	1	26
Ukraine		22				1					1	24
Romania		6					1	1	1		1	10
Slovakia											10	10
Vietnam									9			9
India			1		1		4			1		7
Pakistan			1		2		4					7
Bulgaria		5									1	6
China							4		2			6
Egypt							6					6
Belgium			1		2		1			1		5
Uzbekistan		5										5
Brazil		1						1			2	4
Afghanistan			1		2							3
Burkina Faso		3										3
Spain		1					1		1			3
Ghana											3	3
Portugal		1							2			3
Algeria		2										2
Mexico							2					2
Tunisia					1		1					2
Turkey				1		1						2
Belarus						1						1
France							1					1
Mali											1	1
Niger											1	1
Philippines						1						1
Rwanda							1					1
Senegal					1							1
Serbia							1					1
Total	4	47	5	1	13	4	38	2	16	5	21	156

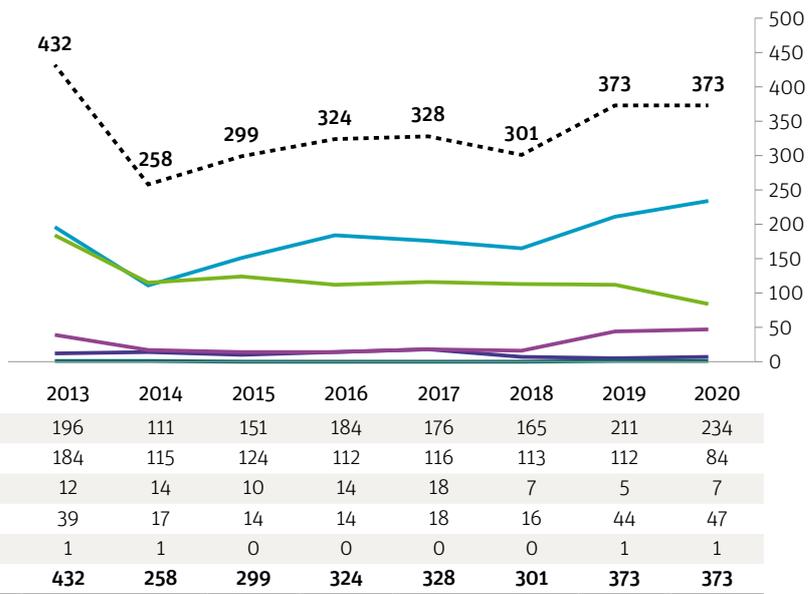
Human trafficking cases dealt with by the public prosecutor's office

In 2020:

- **373** human trafficking cases were dealt with by the public prosecutor's office.
- 63% of these cases concerned sexual exploitation, 23% labour exploitation, 13% misdemeanors or crimes committed under coercion and 2% exploitation of begging.

Since 2018, there has been an increase in the number of cases linked to sexual exploitation. However, the number of cases linked to labour exploitation fell by a quarter between 2019 and 2020, to reach the lowest level since this data was first recorded in 2008.

A **new case** is opened on the basis of the initial report (subsequent reports won't lead to the opening of a new case). A case can also be opened on the basis of a complaint or a civil action.



Methodological remarks

- This data corresponds to the status on 8 May 2021 and comes from the College of Prosecutors General database.
- It represents the number of cases submitted to the crown prosecution service (including the federal prosecutor's office) in 2020.
- It is limited to offences committed by adults and doesn't include cases dealt with by the labour prosecutor.
- The cases submitted to the public prosecutor's

office of Eupen have only been included since 19 February 2019. They weren't included in the data in previous years owing to a harmonisation problem regarding the computer system.

- For cases sent to another district, or when they are sent to another division in the same judicial district, there is a risk they will be counted twice.
- Each criminal case can involve one or more defendants.

Increase in the number of cases dropped

	Cases dropped	Total
Sexual exploitation	100	234
Labour exploitation	19	84
Exploitation of begging	4	7
Forced misdemeanor/crime	27	47
Organ trafficking	0	1
Total	150 (40%)	373

- **40%** of human trafficking cases submitted to the public prosecutors' offices in 2020 were dropped on 8 May 2021. This percentage has continued to increase over the last few years, from 24% in 2017, to 28% in 2018 and 37% in 2019.
- In 2020, of the 150 cases dropped, two-thirds concerned sexual exploitation.
- Among the 150 cases dropped, 39 were dropped on discretionary grounds and 111 for technical reasons (60 cases owing to insufficient charges, 31 owing to "unknown perpetrators" and 20 for other reasons).



Jurisdiction: extent of a jurisdiction's territorial competence. Belgium is divided into five major jurisdictions, which each have a court of appeal. Every court of appeal is responsible for several judicial districts.

- Antwerp → Antwerp and Limburg
- Brussels → Brussels (Brussels and Halle-Vilvoorde), Leuven and Walloon Brabant
- Ghent → East Flanders and West Flanders
- Liège → Liège, Eupen, Namur and Luxembourg
- Mons → Hainaut

Jurisdiction of Antwerp

- **Antwerp is the jurisdiction in which the most human trafficking cases were submitted in 2020.**
- Decrease of 9% in the number of cases submitted in the jurisdiction of Antwerp compared with the previous year.
- Majority of cases opened for sexual exploitation (83%).

Jurisdiction of Brussels

- Increase of 22% in the number of cases of sexual exploitation compared with 2019.
- Majority of cases concerning sexual exploitation (80%).

Jurisdiction of Ghent

- The number of cases has been continuing to fall since 2016.
- This is the only jurisdiction where there was a decrease in the number of sexual exploitation cases.

Jurisdiction of Liège

- Increase of 28% in the total number of cases compared with 2019.
- There were more cases of labour exploitation (32) than sexual exploitation (25) in 2020.

Jurisdiction of Mons

- Increase of 30% in the total number of cases compared with 2019.
- Majority of cases opened for misdemeanors or crimes committed under coercion (30 out of 48).

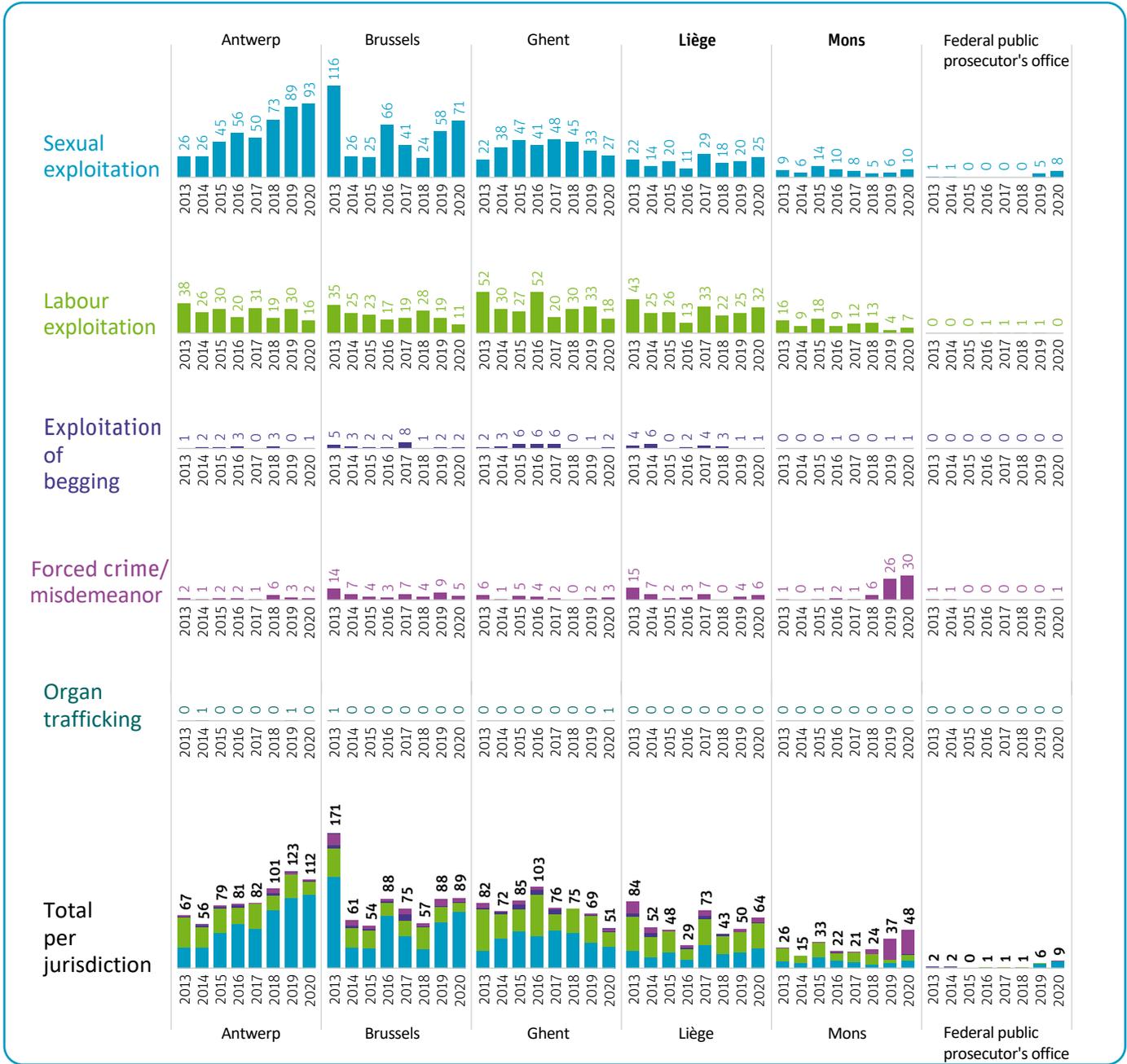
Federal public prosecutor's office

- In 2020, there were 8 cases of sexual exploitation and one of misdemeanors or crimes committed under coercion.



Classification of charges

Sexual exploitation	37L	art. 433quinquies § 1	1°C.C.
Labour exploitation	55D	art. 433quinquies § 1	3°C.C.
Exploitation of begging	29E	art. 433quinquies § 1	2°C.C.
Forced misdemeanor/crime	55F	art. 433quinquies § 1	5°C.C.
Organ trafficking	55E	art. 433quinquies § 1	4°C.C.



Cases submitted to the labour prosecutor's office for labour exploitation

- In 2020:
- **196** cases were submitted to the labour prosecutor's office for labour exploitation, i.e. an increase of 20% compared with 2019, when 164 case were submitted.
 - The offences were mainly recorded by the Brussels, Liège and Ghent labour prosecutors' offices, accounting for 23%, 22% and 21% of the total respectively.
 - An increase in the number of cases submitted was mainly observed in the Brussels and Halle-Vilvoorde labour prosecutors' offices.

No. of cases submitted per labour prosecutor's office and evolution 2019-2020

Labour prosecutor's office	2019	2020	Evol. 2019-2020
Brussels	14	45	↗ x 3,2
Liège	46	44	→ x 1,0
Ghent	47	42	↘ x 0,9
Antwerp	34	36	↗ x 1,1
Halle-Vilvoorde	3	13	↗ x 4,3
Hainaut	6	9	↗ x 1,5
Leuven	5	5	→ x 1,0
Walloon Brabant	9	2	↘ x 0,2
Eupen	0	0	→ x 1,0
Total	164	196	↗ x 1,2

New support for human trafficking victims initiated by the specialised reception centres

88 victims of human trafficking began receiving support in a specialised reception centre in 2020



Significant decrease of 39% compared with 2019. In 2020:

- Of the 88 victims, there were **49 victims of labour exploitation** (compared with 87 in 2019) and **36 victims of sexual exploitation** (compared with 52 in 2019).
- Among the new cases of support, there were also 3 victims who were the subject of offences committed under coercion. No new support was organised for victims of organ trafficking or for victims of exploitation of begging.
- There were 41 male victims and 47 female ones.
- There were 19 Nigerian victims, 12 Moroccans and 8 Romanians. These are the top 3 nationalities for victims of human trafficking who began receiving support in one of the 3 specialised centres in 2020.

It isn't possible to assess the extent of the specialised centres' work based on the data on new support

- The indicator for the duration of the support isn't discussed here. However, the Immigration Office's figures on the extension of documents, within the framework of the human trafficking procedure, do offer a potential indicator.

▶ See documents issued by the Immigration Office to victims of human trafficking and smuggling

- Reports of persons for whom no support was initiated aren't mentioned here either.

Among the 49 victims of **labour exploitation**:

- 11 were Moroccan, 5 Indian and 5 Romanian.
- Women were in the minority.
- There was 1 minor among these victims.

Among the 36 victims of **sexual exploitation**:

- More than half were Nigerian (19 victims).
- They were mostly women. (except for one Venezuelan man).
- There were no minors.

Support is organised once the initial phase (period of reflection) has begun, i.e. as soon as Annex 15 has been issued.

New support for victims according to nationality and the type of human trafficking

Nationality	Sexual exploitation				Labour exploitation				Misdemeanor/crime committed under coercion				Total
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		
	Min.	Maj.	Min.	Maj.	Min.	Maj.	Min.	Maj.	Min.	Maj.	Min.	Maj.	
Nigeria		19											19
Morocco		1				2		9					12
Romania		2			1	2		2	1				8
Brazil		2				2		2					6
India								5					5
Belgium		3						1					4
Bulgaria								4					4
Columbia		3											3
Pakistan						1		2					3
Egypt								2					2
Serbia									2				2
Tunisia								2					2
Venezuela		1		1									2
Vietnam		1						1					2
Algeria								1					1
Bangladesh								1					1
China								1					1
Dominican Republic		1											1
Spain		1											1
Ghana								1					1
Iraq		1											1
Ivory Coast								1					1
Cameroon								1					1
Macedonia						1							1
Mali								1					1
Ukraine								1					1
Portugal								1					1
Turkey								1					1
Total	0	35	0	1	1	8	0	40	3	0	0	0	88

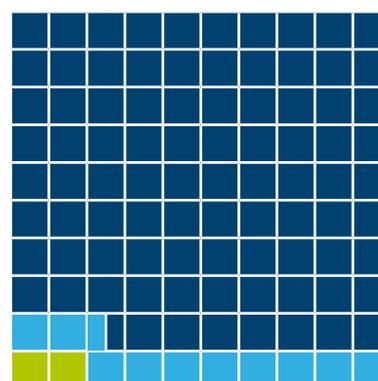
In the course of 2020, the specialised centres provided ongoing support for **561** victims. Among these victims were:

- 11 Belgian nationals (2%);
- 59 EU citizens (10.5%);
- 491 third-country nationals (87.5%).

Ongoing support in 2020 according to the victim's origin*

- Belgian
- EU citizens
- Third-country nationals

* 1 square corresponds to 1 percent of ongoing support



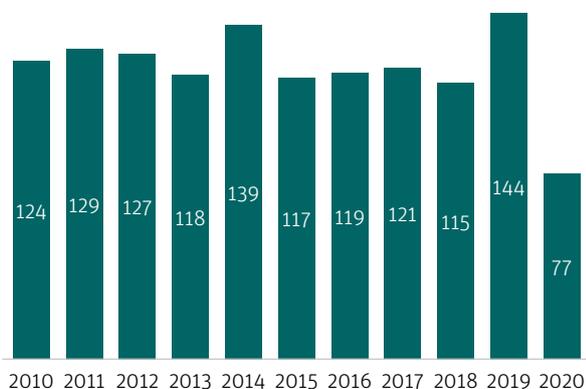
Victims of human trafficking or an aggravated form of human smuggling who entered the procedure (Immigration Office data)



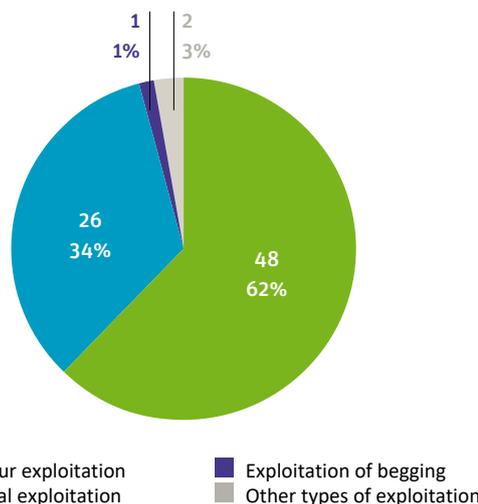
In Belgium, trafficking victims who agree to collaborate with the judicial authorities can benefit from a specific residence status. Just like human trafficking victims, victims of an aggravated form of human smuggling may also apply for victim status.

The aggravated forms of human smuggling are mentioned in Article 77^{quater} 1° to 5° of the Act of 15/12/1980. Among other things, they include the fact that the victim is a minor, endangering the life of the victim, etc.

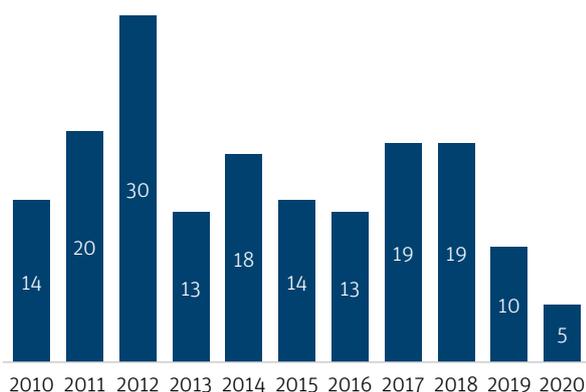
Number of human trafficking victims who entered the procedure



Human trafficking victims who entered the procedure per type of exploitation



Number of victims of human smuggling with aggravating circumstances who entered the procedure



The category "**Other types of exploitation**" corresponds to cases for which the type of exploitation hadn't been clearly identified during the first application.

In 2020:

- **77 victims** of human trafficking entered the procedure (significant decrease of 47% compared with 2019).
- More than **60%** of trafficking victims were the subject of **labour exploitation**. More than a third of the victims were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and one victim was exploited in the begging sector.
- No victims of organ trafficking or misdemeanors committed under coercion entered the procedure in 2020 according to IO data. However, this data refers to 2 victims of "another type of exploitation".
- **5 victims** of human smuggling with aggravating circumstances entered the procedure. This figure has never been so low in 11 years.

N.B.: this year, the Immigration Office has decided not to reveal some information to prevent the identification of certain persons.

Ranking of the main nationalities of victims of trafficking or an aggravated form of smuggling in Belgium

Nationality	2020
Nigeria	15
Morocco	10
Romania	7
Brazil	6
Bulgaria	5
Vietnam	5
India	4
Colombia	4
Others	26
Total	82

- In 2020, Nigerians and Moroccans were the two main nationalities of victims who entered the procedure (all types of exploitation and forms of aggravated smuggling).
- Specifically regarding labour exploitation, there were 9 Moroccans, 5 Bulgarians and 5 Brazilians.
- Among all the victims of sexual exploitation, the majority were Nigerian (15 people).

Human trafficking:

- There were 37 female victims and 40 male ones.
- The majority were victims of labour exploitation (48 out of 77) and were mostly men. Two thirds of these victims were over 30 years old (32 people).
- The victims of sexual exploitation were nearly all women (23 out of 26). Among them, 12 were between 26 and 30 years old.

4 child victims of human trafficking entered the procedure in 2020 including:

- 2 victims of labour exploitation and 2 victims of other types of exploitation;
- 3 female minors and one male minor;
- They were all UAM (unaccompanied minors). A UAM who is a presumed victim must also be reported to the Guardianship Service. Following identification by this Service, they will be assigned a guardian.

Human smuggling with aggravating circumstances:

- There were 3 female victims and 2 male.
- These victims were all adults.

		0-17	18-25	26-30	31 and over	Total	Men	Women
Sexual exploitation	2018	3	20	7	3	33	0	33
	2019	3	28	12	9	52	3	49
	2020	0	7	12	7	26	3	23
Labour exploitation	2018	1	14	25	35	75	66	9
	2019	7	13	11	57	88	65	23
	2020	2	8	6	32	48	37	11
Exploitation of begging	2018	3	1	0	0	4	2	2
	2019	1	1	0	1	3	1	2
	2020	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Other types of exploitation	2018	0	0	0	3	3	3	0
	2019	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
	2020	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
Total human trafficking	2018	7	35	32	41	115	71	44
	2019	11	42	24	67	144	69	75
	2020	4	16	18	39	77	40	37
Human smuggling	2018	8	5	4	2	19	12	7
	2019	3	2	3	2	10	6	4
	2020	0	3	1	1	5	2	3

Documents issued by the Immigration Office to victims of human trafficking and smuggling

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
OLT 45 days (human trafficking)	36	28	32	17	10	3	0	0	0
Annex 15	0	0	0	0	0	20	44	43	16
Certificate of immatriculation (CI)	140	117	133	114	116	112	113	136	80
CI extension	12	15	11	22	26	31	19	16	7
Human trafficking	Temporary CIAR (Card A)	104	98	84	90	84	97	108	78
	Extension Card A	437	458	443	425	413	383	370	384
	Unlimited CIAR (Card B)	35	44	33	36	49	50	42	29
Humanitarian	Temporary CIAR (Card A)	4	2	2	6	2	0	3	5
	Extension Card A	44	31	30	29	20	29	26	34
	Unlimited CIAR (Card B)	11	24	21	36	22	23	26	13
Annex 13 (OLT)	7	11	14	2	2	4	0	0	0
Total	830	828	803	777	744	752	717	770	646

In 2020:

- The data presented here concerns both victims of **trafficking** and certain aggravated forms of human **smuggling**.
- The **646** decisions to issue or extend a residence permit concern both new victims from 2020 and those from the previous years, who are in the process of being granted victim status and for whom one or more decisions were taken in the past.

The total number of documents issued to victims of trafficking and smuggling in human beings fell in 2020 (-16% compared with 2019). However, we observed an increase in the number of extended residence permits.

- A certificate of immatriculation in the aliens register (**CIAR**), which can be temporary and/or extended, is always issued for a period of six months. Normally, victims receive two a year until the end of the legal proceedings.
- Annex 15 has replaced the 45-day Order to leave the territory (**OLT**) since 21/05/2017. The legal basis and the requirements haven't changed, only the type of document. This document is issued during the period of reflection. If the victim lodges a complaint directly or makes statements against the perpetrators, this document won't be issued. The victim will directly receive a certificate of immatriculation (**CI**).

Convictions for human trafficking (Justice Department data)

Number of convictions



Every **conviction** concerns a convicted person (convictions are different from judgments, which can include several convictions).

1 conviction = 1 person

Sentences correspond to the decisions of the convictions. For one conviction, several sentences may be pronounced at the same time (prison, fine, etc.). As a result, one category doesn't exclude the other (with a few exceptions) and the total number of sentences is higher than the total number of perpetrators/convictions.

Methodological remarks

- These figures show the number of final convictions, i.e. convictions that couldn't be appealed.
- The database doesn't provide the type of exploitation for all the convictions.
- A certain number of cases were only entered in the database after several months. This is why the data is likely to be corrected in the future and that the data for 2020 isn't available yet.
- This data corresponds to the situation recorded on 16 March 2021.

As in previous years, it was mainly Belgians who were convicted in 2019. However, there was an increase in convicted persons of Romanian origin.

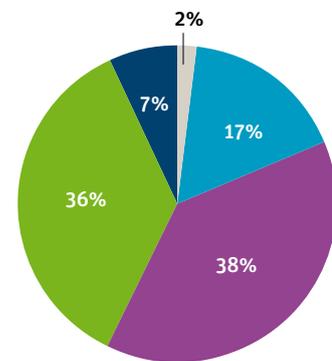
In 2019:

- **113** convictions were pronounced, about the same as in 2017.
- These convictions led to 368 decisions, 109 of which were suspended. The most common sentences were fines (28%), incarceration (27%) and the deprivation of rights (23%).
- Three-quarters of the prison sentences pronounced in 2019 ranged from 1 to 5 years.

Sentences	Decisions	Suspended (fully or partly)
Fine	104	52
Incarceration	101	57
Deprivation of rights	85	/
Confiscation	59	/
Professional ban	13	/
Community service	4	/
Other decisions	2	/
Total	368	109

Duration of prison sentences pronounced (suspended or not)

- 1-6 months
- 6 months - 1 yr
- 1-3 yrs
- 3-5 yrs
- 5-10 yrs



Main nationalities of persons convicted of human trafficking in 2019

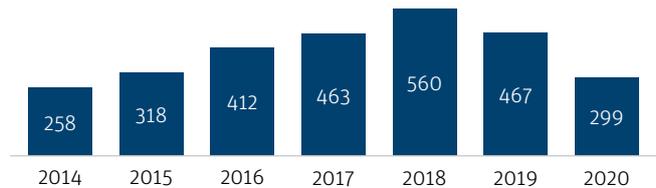
Nationality	2019
Belgium	32
Unknown	18
Romania	16
Nigeria	6
China	5
Albania	4
France	4
Others	28
Total	113

2. Human smuggling

Human smuggling offences (police data)

In 2020, 299 human smuggling offences were recorded by the police. 78% of these cases were in Flanders.

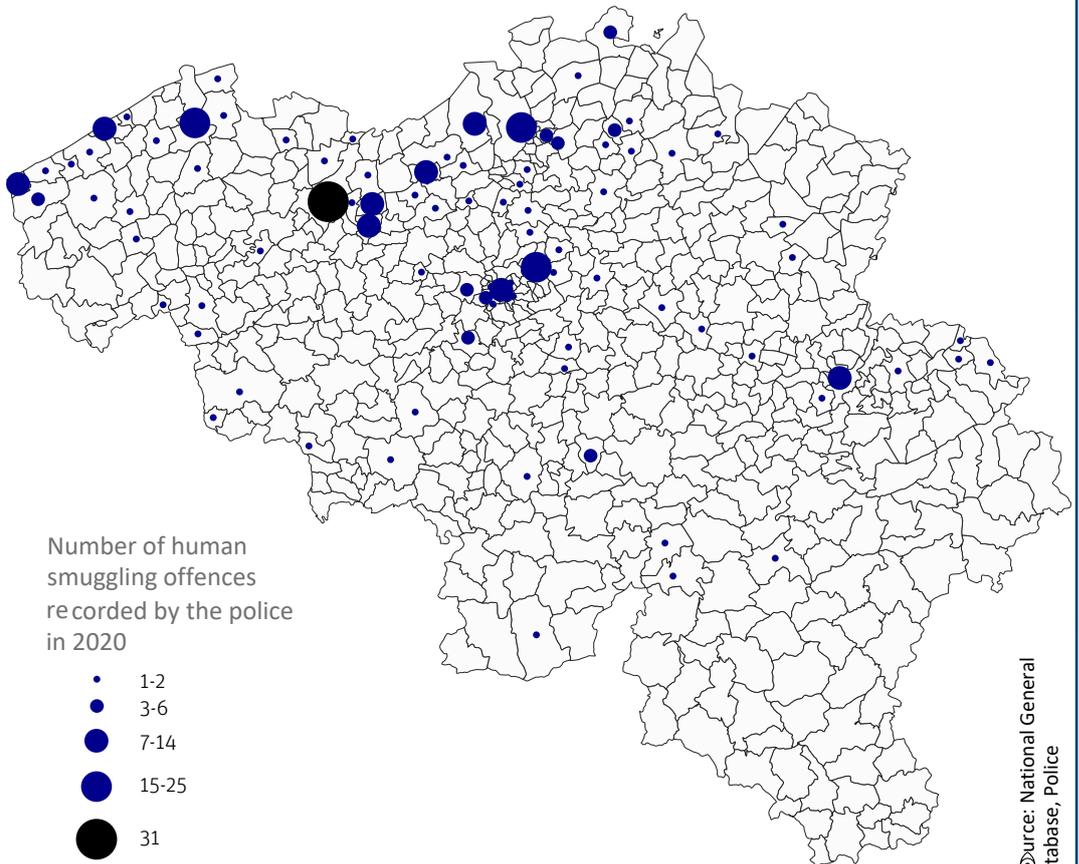
- In 2020, 78% of human smuggling offences were recorded in Flanders, 11% in Wallonia and 10% in the Brussels-Capital Region.
- The province of East Flanders recorded the highest number of offences, i.e. 27% of the total.
- At municipal level:
 - › In Flanders, Ghent (31) is in first place. Then, Zaventem (27), where the police recorded nearly all the offences at the airport (25), and Bruges (19), coming second and third respectively in the ranking.
 - › In Wallonia, Liège is the municipality with the most offences (14).
 - › In the Brussels-Capital Region, there was 14 offences in the City of Brussels, placing it at the head of the 19 municipalities.



Recent developments:

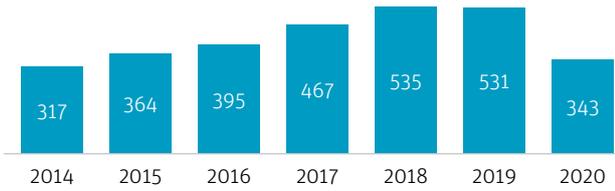
- Since 2014, the number of offences recorded has continued to rise, reaching 560 in 2018 (i.e. more than double than in 2014). This figure has fallen since 2019 thus matching the same level as in 2015.
- Between 2019 and 2020, the number of offences fell above all (-60%) in the province of Antwerp, with 139 offences in 2019 (and 56 in 2020).
- The big annual differences can chiefly be explained by police interventions within certain criminal cells, which make the statistics go up.

Province	Number of human smuggling offences
East Flanders	81
Antwerp	56
West Flanders	53
Flemish Brabant	41
Brussels-Capital Region	31
Liège	14
Hainaut	11
Namur	6
Limburg	2
Walloon Brabant	2
Luxembourg	1
Unknown	1
Total	299

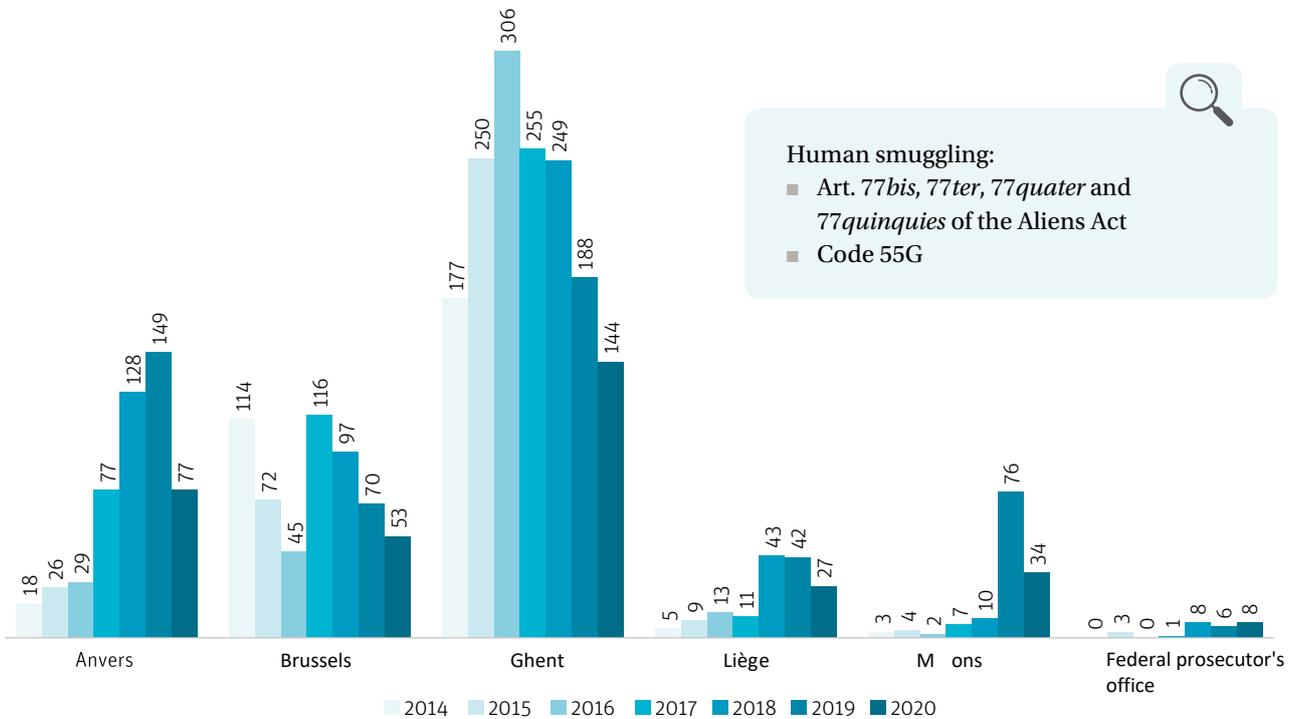


Human smuggling cases submitted to the public prosecutor's office

In 2020, **343** cases were submitted to the crown prosecution service for human smuggling, i.e. a decrease of 35% compared with 2019.

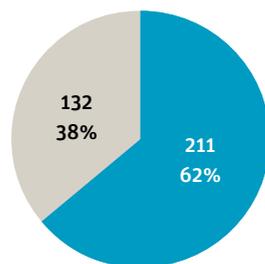


- After a continuous rise, the number of cases submitted to the public prosecutors' offices for human smuggling stabilised in 2018-2019. In 2020, this figure fell, reaching the same level as in 2015.
- In 2020, it was the jurisdiction of Ghent that had the highest number of human smuggling cases (with 144 cases, i.e. 42% of the total), followed by the jurisdiction of Antwerp (with 77 cases).
- As was the case between 2018 and 2019, the number of cases submitted continued to decrease in nearly all the jurisdictions except the federal prosecutor's office (where it increased from 6 to 8).



Difficulty in bringing successful prosecutions for human smuggling

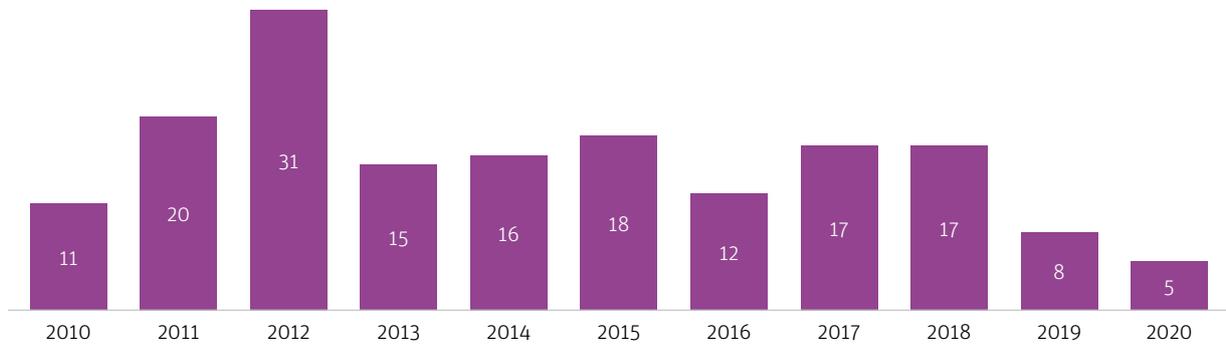
Cases submitted to the public prosecutors' offices in 2020 for human smuggling and dropped on 8 May 2021



■ Cases dropped
■ Others

- Of the 343 human smuggling cases submitted to the public prosecutors' offices in 2020, 211 were dropped on 8 May 2021, i.e. 62%. In 2017, this percentage was only 40%.
- Among the 211 cases dropped, 31 were on discretionary grounds and 180 for technical reasons (124 because the perpetrator(s) was(were) unknown and 46 owing to insufficient charges).
- More than half (59%) of the cases were dropped because the offences were committed by perpetrators who couldn't be identified.

New support for human smuggling victims initiated by the specialised reception centres



In 2020:

- 5 victims of aggravated smuggling began receiving support in one of the three specialised centres in Belgium. This is the lowest figure since 2010.
- There were 4 women and 1 man among the victims.
- Two of these victims were minors, both Vietnamese.

Nationality	Women		Men		Total
	<18	≥18	<18	≥18	
Ethiopia		1			1
Eritrea		2			2
Vietnam	1		1		2
Total	1	3	1	0	5

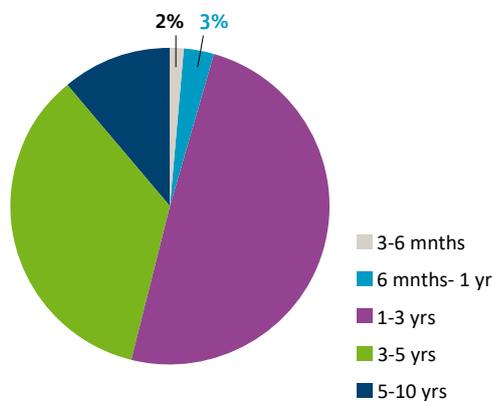
Convictions for human smuggling (Justice Department data)

In 2019, **139 final convictions** were pronounced for human smuggling, i.e. a decrease of 23% compared with 2018 (181 final convictions).

Several decisions can be taken per conviction. The total number of decisions therefore differs from the number of convictions. In 2019, these convictions led to 454 decisions, 88 of which were suspended (fully or partly). In 2019, the prison sentences pronounced (including suspended ones) were mainly for a duration of 1 to 3 years (49%), followed closely by those ranging from more than 3 years to 5 years (35%).

Main sentences	Decisions	Suspended (full or partly)
Incarceration	85	43
Fine	87	45
Community service	8	/
Confiscation	87	/
Deprivation of rights (Art.31 of C.C.)	89	/
Others	10	/
Total	366	88

Duration of prison sentences pronounced (suspended or not)



The nationality of many of those convicted in 2019 is unknown (19%). Iraqis (19%), Belgians (11%), Albanians (6%) and Congolese (4%) comprise the top 5.

Methodological remarks

- These figures show the number of final convictions, i.e. those that can't be appealed.
- A certain number of cases are only entered in the database after several months. This is why the data for 2020 isn't available yet.
- This data corresponds to the situation recorded on 16 March 2021.

Nationalities of those convicted of human smuggling in 2019

Nationality	2019
Iraq	27
Unknown	26
Belgium	15
Albania	9
DR Congo	6
Bulgaria	5
Iran	5
Sudan	5
Nigeria	4
Netherlands	4
Turkey	4
India	3
Italy	3
China	2
Morocco	2
Romania	2
United Kingdom	2
Somalia	2
Syria	2
Algeria	1
Bangladesh	1
Cameroon	1
Cyprus	1
Egypt	1
Spain	1
Greece	1
Lebanon	1
Macedonia	1
Poland	1
Yugoslavia	1
Total	139



External contribution Explanation of the statistical data relating to the investigations into human trafficking conducted by the NSSO Inspectorate's ECOSOC teams in 2020

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Introduction

This report concerns the NSSO inspection department (Thematic Directorate for Trafficking in Human Beings and ECOSOC teams).

Besides the purely statistical data, this contribution aims to provide qualitative information on the performance of the NSSO inspection department's ECOSOC teams in 2020.

The data included in this report stems from two sources:

1. The internal case management system, from which the data relating to the cases closed in 2020 was extracted. This data concerns 156 presumed victims.
2. The analysis of the checklists drawn up by the social inspectors in 2020 in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Joint Circular of the Minister of Justice, the Minister for Employment, the Minister for Security and the Interior, Secretary of State for the fight against social fraud and the College of Prosecutors General on the policy of investigation and prosecution regarding trafficking in human beings (COL 01/2015). NSSO inspectors draw up a checklist as soon as possible following observations and as long as there are sufficiently precise indications of a potential situation of human trafficking. In 2020, 134 checklists were drawn up, which means that 134 presumed victims were discovered.

The reason for the difference between the 156 presumed victims stemming from the Pegasis management programs and I2020 is because checklists are drawn up as soon as there are sufficient indicators of labour exploitation, regardless of the investigation's state of progress (when the investigation started, during the investigation or when it closed), whereas the figures from our investigation management systems concern investigations that were closed in 2020 but began well before 2020 (generally between 2018 and 2020). Hence, the data relating to the checklists are the most representative of 2020.

3. A specific analysis report based on these checklists is submitted annually by our Thematic Directorate to the Department of Criminal Policy, FPS Justice.

Another source of qualitative information is the information sharing relating to investigations into the trafficking of human beings set up with the ECOSOC team leaders.

1. Statistics relating to the police reports and the criminal reports (Pegasis & I2020)¹⁹²

As of March 2020, the NSSO inspection department's ECOSOC investigations were processed in a new investigation management tool: I2020. Statistics relating to **investigations closed in 2020** (investigations started in 2020 or before 2020) therefore come from the former investigation management program (Pegasis) and the new one (I2020). These management tools don't have the same functionalities, so the raw figures had to be "reworked" manually and it wasn't easy to extract the statistics as obtained in previous years:

- **In the course of 2020**, the NSSO compiled **100 PJ and/or criminal reports** (156 presumed victims concerned) concerning THB (Art. 433 *quinquies* of the Criminal Code). In addition, following investigations carried out with other inspection or police services, the pro justitia (PJ) or criminal reports on THB were sometimes compiled by another service (generally by the police): 13 reports or PJ were written by other services within the framework of a collaboration with the NSSO.

¹⁹² These statistics are based on closed investigations.

Provincial departments	PJ/CR compiled by NSSO	PJ/CR compiled by another service ¹⁹³
West Flanders	3	5
East Flanders	8	5
Antwerp	11	0
Limburg	0	0
Hainaut	6	0
Namur-Luxembourg	14	0
Liège	11	1
Flemish Brabant	6	2
Brussels	40	0
Walloon Brabant	1	0
TOTAL	100	13

Provincial departments	
West Flanders	6
East Flanders	65
Antwerp	9
Limburg	3
Hainaut	2
Namur-Luxembourg	13
Liège	8
Flemish Brabant	12
Brussels	12
Walloon Brabant	4
TOTAL	134

- **156** presumed victims of THB were referred to the judicial authorities by the NSSO inspection department through criminal reports or pro justitia.
- The prevalent nationalities were: Morocco (26), Ukraine (24), Romania (10), Slovakia (10) and Vietnam (9). Also note that among these 156 presumed victims, 38 concerned EU nationals, 5 of whom were Belgian. In terms of distribution according to gender, 17 presumed victims were women and 139 men.
- The most represented sectors of activity were construction, hospitality and the beauty care (nail bars and African hairdressers) .

2. Analysis of the checklists

2.1. Introduction

In accordance with the stipulations of COL 01/15, a checklist was completed **in 2020** as soon as there were **sufficiently precise indications** that a potential situation of human trafficking, whether the investigation was ongoing or closed.

In total, **134 checklists** were established (1 checklist per presumed victim: hence, several checklists may concern the same employer/exploiter). They are distributed as follows:

¹⁹³ Within the framework of an investigation conducted in collaboration with the NSSO.

2.2. Geographic distribution per sector of activity (2020)

	Namur-Lux	Brussels	Liège	Hainaut	Limbourg	Walloon Brabant	Flemish Brabant	Antwerp	East Flanders	West Flanders	Total
Butcher/Abattoir											0
Bakery		1								3	4
Car wash & truck wash			1				2				3
Hairdressing & beauty	1		2								3
Retail trade		2	1								3
Construction	2	2	2	1		3	2	1	54		67
Materials production									10		10
Wholesale trade	6										6
Hospitality		2	2				3	3		3	13
Horticulture/Fruit growing							1				1
Logistics		1									1
Riding school				1		1		2			4
Cleaning	1	1			3						5
Prostitution	1						4				5
Various services								1			1
Transport								2	1		3
Domestic work	2	2									4
Sorting/Recycling		1									1
TOTAL	13	12	8	2	3	4	12	9	65	6	134

Age	Men	Women
Minors (-18 yrs)	0	1
18 - 30 yrs	37	3
30 - 40 yrs	40	2
40 - 50 yrs	29	8
Over 50 yrs	13	1
TOTAL	119	15

2.3. Distribution according to age, gender and nationality of the presumed victims 2020

Nationality	Men	Women
Afghanistan	1	0
Algeria	2	0
Angola	1	0
Belarus	1	0
Belgium	0	0
Brazil	3	3
Bulgaria	7	1
Burkina Faso	4	0
Cameroon	1	0
China	1	1
Egypt	4	0
Spain	1	2
France	0	1
Guinea-Bissau	6	0
India	7	0
Mali	2	0
Morocco	9	1
Uzbekistan	5	0
Pakistan	3	1
Portugal	10	1
Dominican Republic	0	1
Romania	6	3
Senegal	3	0
Slovakia	10	0
Syria	1	0
Tunisia	1	0
Turkey	3	0
Ukraine	23	0
Venezuela	1	0
Vietnam	3	0
TOTAL	119	15

A quick analysis of the table above leads to the conclusion that 89% of the presumed victims of labour exploitation are men (119/134). As regards age, 30% of the presumed victims are between 18 and 30 years old, 31% between 30 and 40 years old, and 28% between 40 and 50 years old. The two oldest male presumed victims are 63 years old, and the oldest female presumed victim is 55 years old. The women are essentially active in prostitution (massage parlour), the cleaning sector and domestic work. The exploited minor (Romanian) was employed by a private individual to carry out domestic chores. She was 13 years old when the inspection took place.

As regards the nationality of the victims, 92 out of 134 are from third countries (non-EU). Among the 42 EU nationals, there are 11 Portuguese, 10 Slovaks, 9 Romanians, 8 Bulgarians, 3 Spanish and 1 French. In 2020, there were no Belgians.

2.4. Circumstances of the human trafficking observed and aggravating circumstances

Annex 5 of COL 01/2015 includes several human trafficking indicators under the point "Circumstances". The analysis of the checklists received in 2020 led to the following findings:

Identity documents

More than half the third country nationals (approximately 60%) were staying illegally in Belgium. Either they had no identity or travel documents, or they had their national passport or a temporary residence permit for another EU country. Among the Europeans, approximately 15% were established in Belgium and had a Belgian residence permit or had begun the procedure to stay in Belgium. The others were generally in possession of their national identity document.

In about 10% of the cases encountered, the presumed victims didn't have their own identity or travel documents, and sometimes they had copies.

Financial aspect – social security – social documents

In terms of income: in almost all the situations encountered, wages were low, very low, and even non-existent. In several cases, the promised wages hadn't been paid. Sometimes, the presumed victims had to hand over part of their wages, either for no reason, or to pay for the accommodation provided, or to pay back their travel costs.

One presumed victim said they had to pay back almost EUR 4,000, another EUR 17,000, and yet another EUR 18,000 for their travel to Europe.

Some victims who already earned very little saw their wages fall owing to the health crisis.

Here are several concrete examples encountered in 2020, in cases where victims were actually paid: EUR 1/hour; EUR 3.33/hours; EUR 4/hour; EUR 4.30/hour; EUR 5.50/hour; EUR 7/hour; EUR 20/15 hours; EUR 30/17 hours; EUR 300/month for 70 to 80 hours work/week; EUR 1,300 to 1,400 per month for 80 hours/week. A few victims were paid per task and received EUR 1 to stock up 1,5 steres of wood.

In terms of social security and social documents: very few workers were informed about Dimona (approximately 5%); almost half of the presumed victims were the subject of a Limosa declaration but within the context of a proven or presumed fraudulent posting. The others were employed illegally and no steps were taken in terms of social security or social documents. As regards foreign workers directly employed by a Belgian employer, among the third-country nationals only a few were authorised to work in Belgium (work permit/single permit).

Circumstances of the exploitation

The checklist includes the indicators listed below. Some are recurring, such as squalid housing conditions or excessive work hours. Details and examples are provided below for each one.

- **The victim has no appropriate equipment/work clothes**
- **The victim works in dangerous/squalid conditions**
Indicators relating to work protection (health and safety of workers: hygiene measures, clothes and workplaces, etc.) concern approximately 35% of the presumed victims encountered.
In particular, one victim was injured by a cutting machine that they had to operate without any protection. Another victim suffered CO poisoning, while another was seriously burned by a deep fryer.
- **The victim is allowed no contact with the outside world.**

- **The victim's freedom of movement is restricted**
Approximately 35% of the presumed victims encountered had no contact with the outside world and had limited freedom of movement.
- **The victim lives in squalid conditions**
In many potential situations of THB, the victims are housed in substandard or insanitary accommodation. This was the case for some 70 people, i.e. half of the presumed victims.
- **The victim is deprived of medical care**
A few presumed victims were deprived of medical care.
- **The victim works for long periods**
More than 75% of the presumed victims encountered were working for abnormally long periods. The duration of the work was excessive and easily exceeded the number of authorised weekly working hours in Belgium. There are many people who had to work 6 or 7 days a week and for 9 to 17 hours a day.

Aggravating circumstances

Annex 5 of COL 01/2015 includes several aggravating circumstances of human trafficking. Several were noted in the cases encountered in 2020:

- **Relating to the victim's situation**
Among the victims listed, a 13-year-old Romanian girl was exploited as a domestic worker for private individuals.
- **Relating to the perpetrator**
In the majority of cases, the perpetrator abuses the victim's vulnerable situation, has authority over them or abuses their position.
None of the checklists mention a perpetrator being a police officer exercising their duties.
- **Relating to the circumstances and consequences of trafficking**
Among the 134 victims concerned by the checklists in 2020, 27 explained they had suffered threats, acts of violence or coercion at the hands of the perpetrator.
The lives of several presumed victims were put at risk. Among them, one is permanently unable to work and the other is partly incapacitated as a result of their exploitation.
One victim was even raped by the perpetrator of the acts. Several presumed victims detected were infected by the coronavirus but still had to continue working. Neither the quarantine period nor social distancing were respected.
In the large majority of cases, the activity in question is a habitual activity.

2.5. Referral of victims to a specialised reception centre in 2020

Among the 134 checklists recorded, **38** concerned presumed victims who were taken care of by a specialised reception centre (Sürya, Payoke or Pag-Asa).

Some of them were already there: the investigation therefore focused on the hearing of these people and/or more in-depth searches into THB.

Among these 38 presumed victims, one minor was sheltered in by Esperanto.

Among the presumed victims of THB, nearly all the foreign workers employed within the framework of a proven or presumed bogus posting, didn't want to be put in contact with a reception centre and wouldn't even agree to be heard (to make statements about their work, living or housing conditions). The distribution per provincial department is as follow:

Provincial department	No. of presumed victims referred	Nationality and gender
Namur-Luxembourg	4	2 Portugal (1M/1W) 1 Brazil (W) 1 Venezuela (M)
Brussels	10	3 Morocco (M) 1 Tunisia (M) 1 Romania (W) 1 Egypt (M) 1 Mali (M) 2 India (M) 1 Algeria (M)
Liège	8	1 Morocco (M) 2 Vietnam (2M) 1 India (M) 1 Pakistan (M) 1 China (M) 2 Romania (1M/1W)
Hainaut	2	1 Ukraine (M) 1 Pakistan (W)
Walloon Brabant	2	1 Morocco (M) 1 Burkina-Faso (M)
Antwerp	3	2 Brazil (1M/1W) 1 Senegal (M)
Flemish Brabant	6	3 India (M) 1 Cameroon (M) 1 Mali (M) 1 Portugal (M)
East Flanders	2	1 Algeria (M) 1 Turkey (M)
West Flanders	1	1 Morocco (M)
Limburg	0	
TOTAL	38	

3. EMPACT Action Days labour exploitation

In September 2020, the Belgian social inspection services took part in the "**Empact Action Days Labour Exploitation**" for the fifth consecutive year. This is a European initiative supported by Europol, previously known as the *Joint Action Days (JAD) labour exploitation*. This EU initiative is part of the European EMPACT project (European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats), in which the fight against human trafficking is one of the priorities. The EMPACT project is part of the EU action plan against human trafficking.

Various actions were carried out in the week of 14 to 20 September 2020.

In several EU Member States, police and social inspectorates carried out checks in certain risk sectors to detect cases of labour exploitation.

In addition, special attention was given to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on workers who are already in a vulnerable situation.

In Belgium (as well as in the Netherlands, France, Germany and the United Kingdom), several actions focused on the nail bar sector. During these checks, the inspectors were able to count on the support of FPS Public Health. Illegal beauty products were seized in one establishment.

Joint checks were also carried out in the **agricultural and horticultural** sector. The checks were facilitated by the use of a drone. The images made it possible to locate the exact location of workers in large areas such as orchards. The use of this technology is an added value in this type of check.

A total of 78 workers and 45 self-employed people were checked in 39 workplaces all over Belgium. The workers were heard in detail about their working and living conditions with the help of sworn interpreters, as they were often foreign workers. Ten of the 78 workers checked were working illegally and four workers weren't authorised to work in Belgium.

During the same week, simultaneous checks were carried out on the same day in the **transport sector** in Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

The action was carried out at the "stopping points" of lorry drivers working for a large distribution chain in Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

The aim of this large-scale action was to look for evidence of possible labour exploitation among the lorry drivers (working, living and housing conditions contrary to human dignity).

Living conditions on the sites had to comply with both social legislation and public health regulations. Compliance with these standards is extremely important and was all the more so because of the Covid-19 health crisis.

The building, located next to the Belgian distribution centre that was checked, where workers had access to sanitary facilities, among other things, contained spaces that were too small for the large number of drivers passing through each day. Overall hygiene was also below standard.

A railer with a container and a tarpaulin-covered trailer were used as a kitchen, dining room and meeting space for the drivers.

The labour prosecutor's office was informed of the findings. The site's prevention adviser was asked to regularise the situation. The investigation also focused on the involvement of the distribution chain, which subsequently proved to be open and ready to collaborate in order to remedy the problems encountered.

The verification of the correct application of the "Mobility Package", a new EU regulation which came into force on 20 August 2020 in the transport sector, was also an important objective. With this new regulation, essential measures have been taken to combat social dumping by granting drivers a number of important rights, such as a ban on spending the weekly rest period in the cab; an obligation for the company manager to organise the return of the driver (hired internationally) to their country of residence or employer every four weeks; the payment of accommodation costs related to the rest period by the employer, etc.

The check carried out one month after these new rules came into force showed, on the one hand, that certain foreign employers were already being creative by presenting workers with documents according to which they waived some of their new rights. On the other hand, a large proportion of drivers were either unaware of the new rights or stated outright that they were financially obliged to drive for two to three months before returning home.

In total, during the transport action in Belgium, 33 lorries were checked. These tractors belonged to transport companies from Lithuania (4), Poland (7), Bulgaria (12), Romania (8), Czech Republic (1) and Turkey (1).

It should be noted that the check revealed that Polish and Lithuanian transport companies no longer use Polish or Lithuanian drivers, but choose to use non-European third-country nationals from Ukraine or Belarus. These drivers are in an even more precarious economic situation and are even more dependent on their employers than other drivers (especially to obtain visas, work permits and accommodation, or because of language problems).

The inspection took the data from the digital tachographs of the 33 drivers and examined it.

The federal traffic police also found a number of offences relating to transport licences, driving and rest times, and tachograph disks.

During the checks, evidence of labour exploitation was found in four workplaces (all sectors of activity).

The fight against **human trafficking**, a key task for the NSSO's ECOSOC teams, is also the priority focus of the Empact Action Days labour exploitation. Therefore, all the inspectors participating in the actions paid particular attention to this phenomenon.

In Belgium, the NSSO inspection department was responsible for organising the actions, in which other federal inspection departments, such as the Social Legislation Inspectorate or the Well-being at Work Inspectorate, and regional inspectorates participated.

The police were also very active, with several departments involved: the department for combating serious and organised crime, the provincial departments of the federal judicial police and local police zones. The labour prosecutors' offices were also involved in these actions.

Europol extended its traditional scope by involving social inspectorates in the coordination of actions against labour exploitation. Europol's usual coordination centre in The Hague wasn't operational owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the representatives of the different countries collaborated remotely during the week in order to coordinate actions and facilitate the exchange of information between the different countries, thanks to a secure application provided by Europol.

Thanks to this application, participating Member States were able to send "special requests" to another Member State to provide information or to request that a foreign inspection department investigate on its territory. For example, a Belgian investigation into labour exploitation was carried out with the support of the Portuguese police.

Information sharing wasn't limited to the duration of the EAD and continued beyond the action week.

4. Highlights in 2020

The most significant event of 2020 was undoubtedly the **health crisis** which is still ongoing at the time of writing. The slowdown in the economy, the shutdown of certain sectors of activity, border closures, the reduction or even in some cases the cancellation of transport services, the limitation of access to various public services and the reduction in social contacts have further complicated the daily lives of workers in the shadows. Their fragility has been accentuated, making them even more vulnerable prey. While all segments of the population (children, teenagers, etc.) have suffered and are suffering, sometimes significantly, from the impact of the pandemic despite the fact that their primary needs (physiological needs and safety) are being met, it is easy to imagine the distress presumed victims of human trafficking have been faced with, who often don't even have access to proper food or decent housing.

In 2020, when **the investigation management program was changed**, ECOSOC teams closed 284 investigations that were aimed at detecting situations of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation. Nevertheless, there were several duplicate investigations. Hence, following verification, the thematic directorate concluded that 236 investigations (THB) had been closed 2020.

The functionalities of the new investigation management tool, Inspection 2020, are different to those of the previous one. Reconciling the results from the different management systems wasn't easy and some data had to be manually restored. Inspection 2020 went live in March 2020 although initial data entry didn't go as smoothly as expected. This promising investigation management system is still in its infancy. It has already undergone and will continue to undergo numerous adaptations and improvements. Moreover, important modifications were made in 2021 in order to be able to distinguish between initial and subsequent investigations, and also to have more information on the victims found during checks who contacted the reception centres.

On 31 December 2020, 138 investigations were still open, i.e. they were in progress.

Approximately 30% of the THB investigations initiated by the specialised ECOSOC teams and closed in 2020, didn't lead to the conclusion of potential situations of labour exploitation, especially because the evidence in the investigation wasn't relevant or the labour exploitation indicators weren't sufficient and were more akin to illegal work than to labour exploitation.

It is also important to stress that several investigations are follow-up investigations on acts that were previously detected and reported to the judicial authorities.

Every year, the thematic directorate, assisted by the NSSO's data mining department and, where necessary, by other departments, chooses a **specific annual project (focus)**.

In 2020, two focuses were chosen: nail bars and and the posting of foreign workers in the hospitality sector. Despite the health crisis and successive closures in the hospitality sector and contact-based professions for much of the year, checks did take place and offences were noted.

Regarding **nail bars**, 68 companies and 137 workers (59 employees - 77 self-employed workers and 1 other) were checked. Several offences were reported in matters covered by the Social Criminal Code (Dimona: 13

for 28 workers; part-time: 5 PJ for 9 workers; foreign labour: 8 PJ issued for 20 illegally staying Vietnamese people in Belgium). In terms of THB, these checks led to the detection of two presumed victims.

For the checks focusing on the **posting of workers in the hospitality sector**, 21 companies and 65 workers (33 employees - 31 self-employed workers and 1 other) were checked. Several offences were detected in matters relating to the Social Criminal Code (Dimona: 4 PJ issued for 6 workers; part-time: 1 PJ issued for 3 workers; foreign labour: 1 PJ for 1 illegally staying Nepalese person; investigation into posting initiated for 2 companies). In terms of labour exploitation, several indicators were found and the judicial investigations are still ongoing.

Again in 2020, and as illustrated in the section on the Impact Action Days, the social inspectors of the ECOSOC teams used **specific investigation tools and techniques** such as:

- aerial reconnaissance;
- phone investigations;
- use of video-surveillance images;
- use of mobile phones;
- searches in "open-source intelligence" (internet, social media, etc.).

These investigation techniques are employed in collaboration with used by the federal police's specialised services, most often as requested by the labour prosecutor's office. Such techniques can help with the identification and hearings of the presumed victims, the identification of potential witnesses, corroboration of the victims' statements as well as ascertaining the employment of other workers/victims, the identification of the perpetrators and revealing links between individuals or companies.

The use of social media and the internet is increasingly essential to carry out thorough searches and investigations into human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation. However, in order for our social inspectors to make optimum use of these sources, it is necessary to examine the technical and legal possibilities.

In 2020, we also noted **emerging or growing phenomena** such as the exploitation of presumed victims in nail bars, shisha bars, domestic staff, the logistics and transport sector or in the context of often bogus postings.

It should be emphasised that in the international transport sector, there is an increasing number of workers from third countries who go to Belgian or foreign trade unions to report acts of exploitation. These investigations are difficult to conduct because the drivers are on the move and because of the specific rules that apply, particularly with regard to respecting rest periods.

Lastly, there are regularly cases of illegal workers wishing to work who take of someone else's identity. In practice, the identity thieves use the identity documents of compatriots to find official employment. In return, the identity holder demands a percentage of the earnings made thanks to their identity. Sometimes, they use threats and intimidation to obtain payment. Although it isn't easy to identify signs of labour exploitation, it is necessary to remain vigilant and to investigate further, as this abuse is directly linked to the precarious situation of the worker staying illegally in Belgium.

Conclusion

2020 saw the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on our society and our economy.

The work of our social inspectors has been affected both by the closure of certain sectors of activity/trade and by the security measures that have had to be set up so that they can carry out their checks in complete safety, and under the best possible conditions.

At the beginning of the crisis, monitoring was difficult for our ECOSOC teams and fewer presumed victims were detected. Successive lockdowns in certain sectors of activity helped to further conceal the shadowy phenomenon of labour exploitation.

After a few months, the effects of the crisis subsided. The ECOSOC teams almost returned to their original pace, even though this was disrupted by the imperatives dictated by the health crisis (safety of social inspectors, closure of many establishments preventing checks or investigations) and the new missions entrusted to them to monitor compliance with COVID measures in companies.

Nevertheless, from the figures in this report, we can conclude that despite the difficulties inherent

to 2020, there was no decrease in the number of presumed victims encountered by the NSSO, on the contrary. It should be stressed that around 30 presumed victims were detected because of the health crisis itself, for instance during a check initiated following the discovery of a source of infection, but also because of the unforeseen consequences of the lockdown (impossibility for some to return to the country of origin or serious conflicts caused by the lockdown).

As in other years, potential situations of labour exploitation have occurred in both urban and rural areas and have mostly involved men.

In the vast majority of cases, one, two or even three people were involved. Nevertheless, several investigations detected several presumed victims exploited by the same person or network. This was especially the case for:

- 4 women employed in a massage parlour in Flemish Brabant;
- 25 workers employed by a Portuguese company on several building sites in Flanders. The investigation was triggered by the detection of a source of infection of Covid-19;
- 6 workers employed to cut building materials in the province of Namur;
- 10 workers employed in a building materials factory in East Flanders by a Slovakian company;
- 20 workers employed by a Polish company on several building sites in East Flanders, who presented false documents for their posting;
- 5 workers employed on a building site in East Flanders in the context of a proven or presumed bogus posting.

It should be noted that some presumed victims found working in conditions contrary to human dignity weren't put in contact with a specialised reception centre, mainly because they were complacent about their situation and refused any support. Moreover, a significant number of workers employed by foreign companies, often in the context of a presumed or proven bogus posting, refused to talk or give information about their living and working conditions, since they were satisfied with their situation.

It is also worth noting that in some cases, our department contacted the presumed victims after they had applied to such a reception centre, either at the request of the centre itself or at the request of the labour prosecutor.

The table below shows an increase in the number of presumed victims encountered during our investigations in recent years, even in 2020, despite the impact of the pandemic on both the economy and the functioning of the services that fight human trafficking.

	2018	2019	2020
Number of presumed victims involved in the closed cases	65	82	156
Number of presumed victims according to the checklists	78	120	134
Number of victims who benefited from the intervention of the reception centres	39	73	38

As mentioned in the introduction, the most revealing figures on the situation of labour exploitation are those related to the checklists, which are drawn up as soon as a presumed victim is encountered.

Other data such as pro justitia, criminal reports or the number of victims included in closed investigations referred to in this contribution may relate to investigations that started in previous years but were closed in 2020.

Even though 2020 was a difficult year (successive lockdowns, limited possibilities for specialised services to carry out checks, etc.), there was an increase in the number of presumed victims identified by the checklists, i.e. encountered in 2020. Among them, some 40 were checked by social inspectors who don't work in the ECOSOC teams but who have been made aware of this issue and who have done everything possible to provide the presumed victims with the best possible support and to report the facts to the judicial authorities.

To conclude, and as the actors in the field have repeatedly stated, labour exploitation is a hidden phenomenon. It is difficult to identify and to estimate the extent of it. Checks carried out by social inspectors specialised in THB or with an awareness of this issue can help to bring to light situations of exploitation. The more human resources there are and the more frontline inspection services are aware of the problem, the more effective the fight against this phenomenon can be.