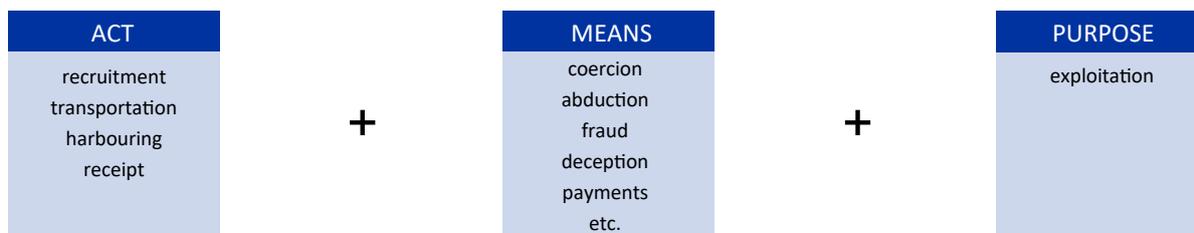


WHAT IS TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP)?

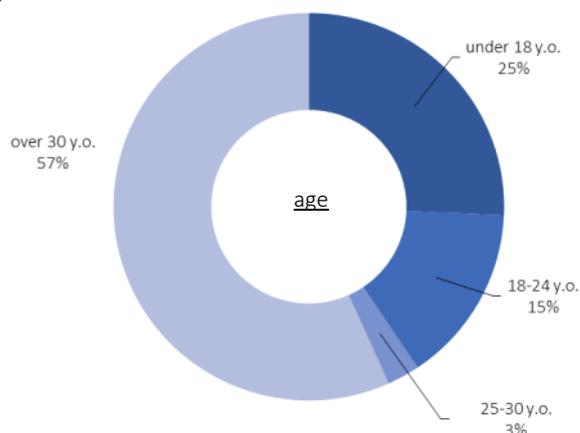
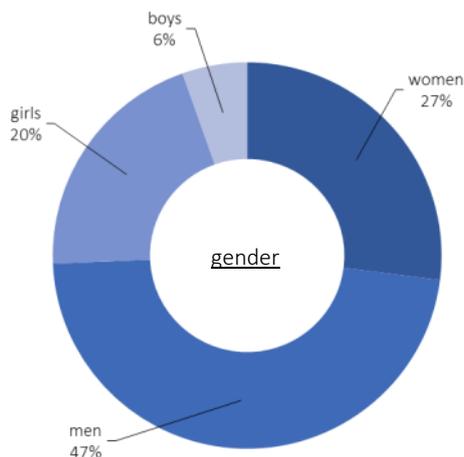
According to the [Palermo Protocol](#), trafficking in persons means recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits for the purpose of exploitation.

TIP includes three constituent elements:

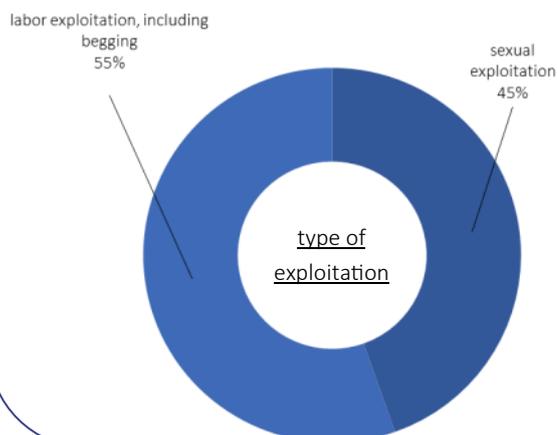


74 victims of trafficking (VoTs)

received comprehensive assistance from IOM in 2021*

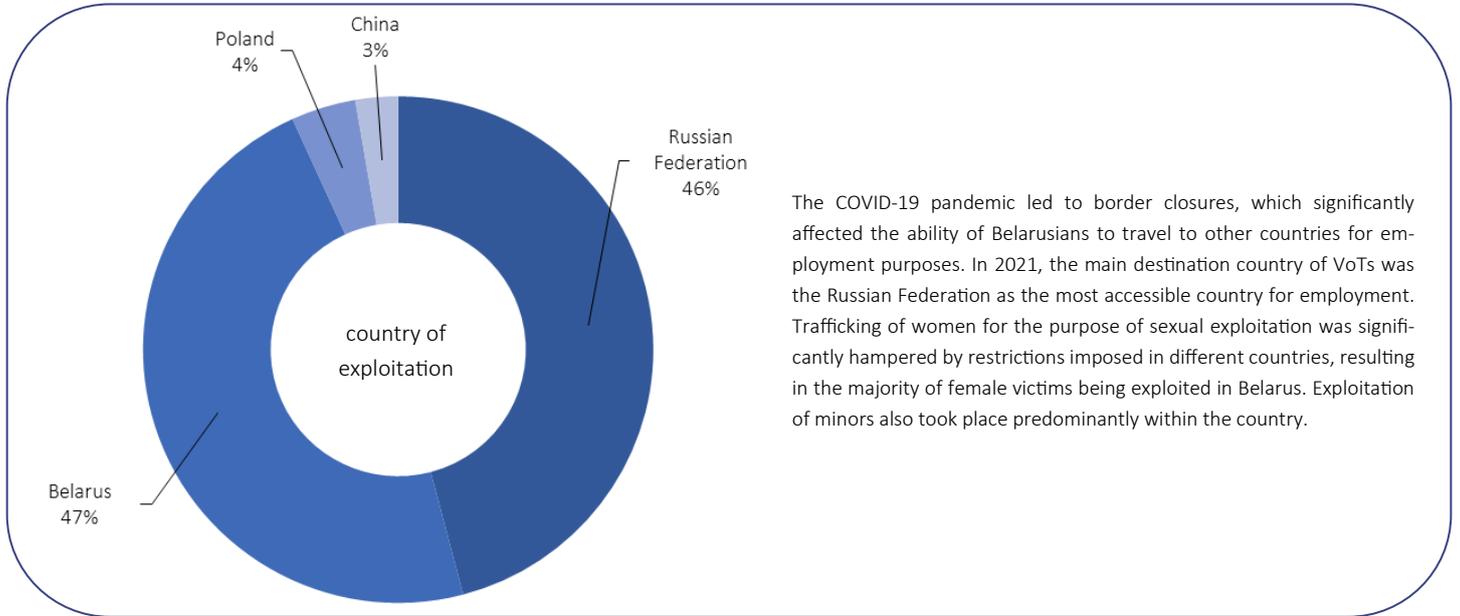


For a long time, victims of trafficking identified in Belarus were mostly women and girls who were sexually exploited. During the last decade, an increasing number of male victims of trafficking have been identified. Most often they are victims of labor exploitation.



Over the past few years, the number of children assisted by IOM Belarus has ranged from 17% to 26% of IOM annual VoT caseload. Most often, they were sexually exploited, including being used in the production of pornographic materials. According to [Europol](#), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the growth of cybercrime, which has increased the risks of online sexual exploitation of children. Children are being targeted in person, as well as online - through social media, gaming forums and other platforms. Criminals can use popular culture, such as music, videos, fashion, etc., to draw vulnerable young people into sexual exploitation. In 2021, 25 per cent of the victims assisted by IOM Belarus were children. At the same time, 57 per cent of the victims who received assistance were over 30 years old.

*The data presented in the analytical snapshot is based on IOM Belarus' statistics on the number of VoTs assisted by IOM and does not necessarily reflect the full scope of the situation of VoTs

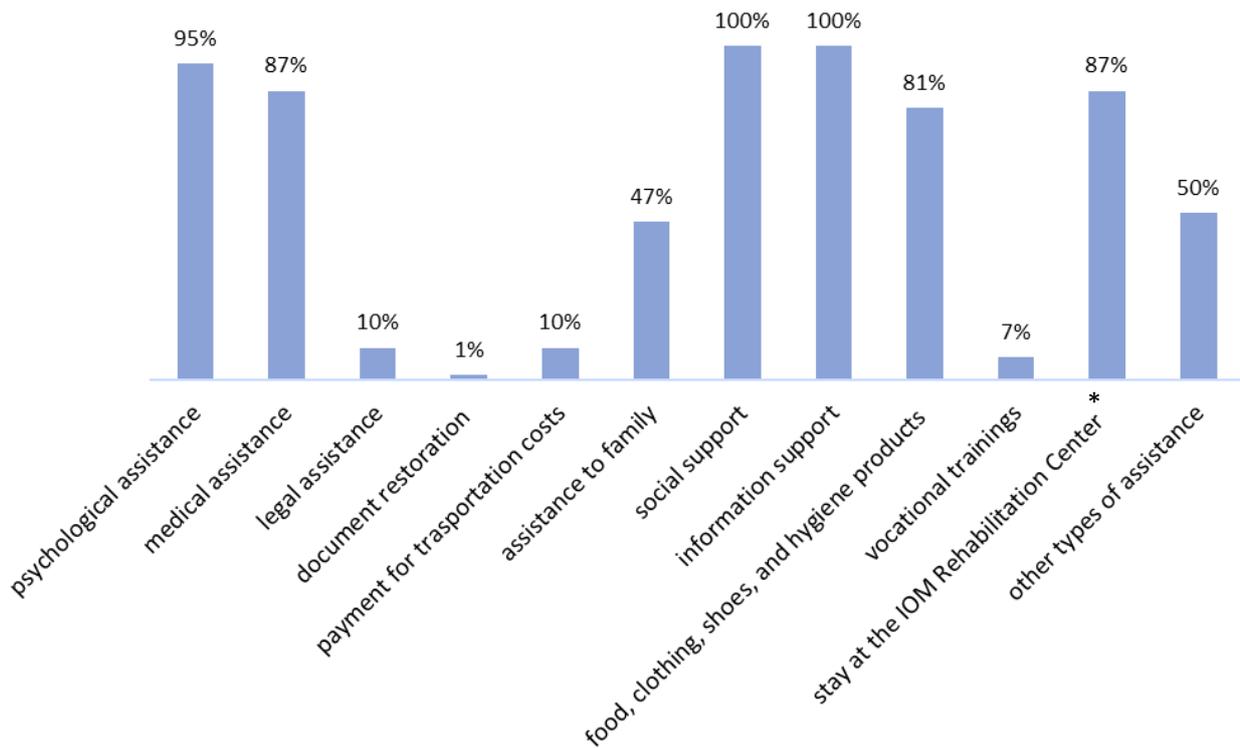


The COVID-19 pandemic led to border closures, which significantly affected the ability of Belarusians to travel to other countries for employment purposes. In 2021, the main destination country of VoTs was the Russian Federation as the most accessible country for employment. Trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation was significantly hampered by restrictions imposed in different countries, resulting in the majority of female victims being exploited in Belarus. Exploitation of minors also took place predominantly within the country.

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY IOM BELARUS

IOM Belarus has been providing various types of assistance to victims of trafficking since 2002. The main goal of providing assistance is to ensure a safe, dignified and sustainable return of VoTs to normal life. In 2021, IOM staff developed case-by-case reintegration plans for 74 victims based on their needs.

The below chart represents the different types of assistance provided to the 74 VoTs in 2021.



*IOM's Rehabilitation Center has been functioning since 2006. Over 1,140 people have already received assistance there.

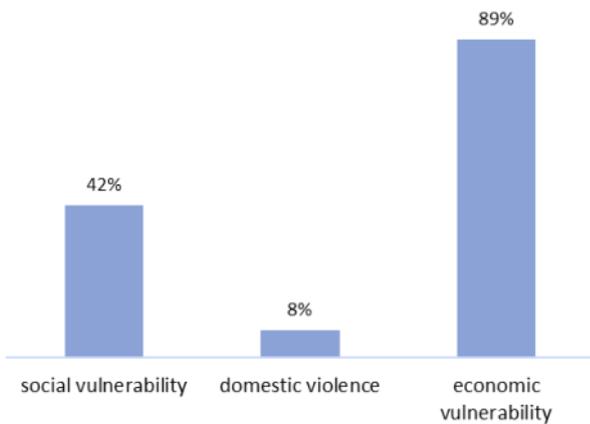


The following data is based on the analysis of cases of 26 adult VoTs (13 men and 13 women) who received assistance from IOM between 2020 and 2021

ROOT CAUSES OF TIP

Anyone can become a victim of trafficking, however, some people are more vulnerable. Many victims have experienced adverse situations in childhood: encountered psychological trauma, such as parental neglect, abuse, domestic violence, etc. Such people are more vulnerable to deception and manipulation by traffickers who promise them a better life, stability, love.

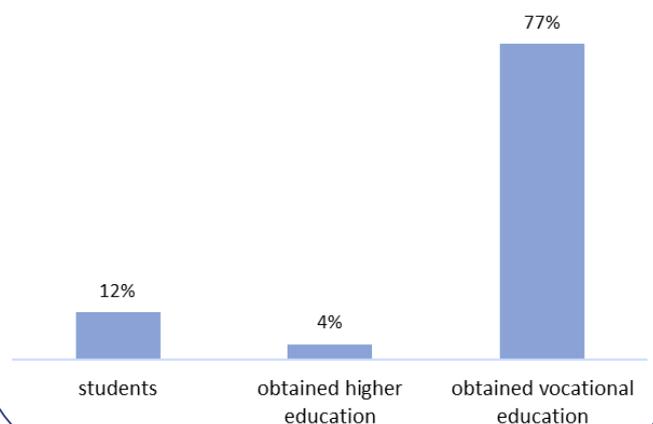
Economic crises and recessions can lead to increased unemployment and economic instability, creating and exacerbating those conditions that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Poverty is one of the common causes that contribute to human trafficking. Stories of victims show that many of them experienced serious financial difficulties: they were unemployed, could not find a job in their city that would allow them to support themselves and their families, had debts, etc.



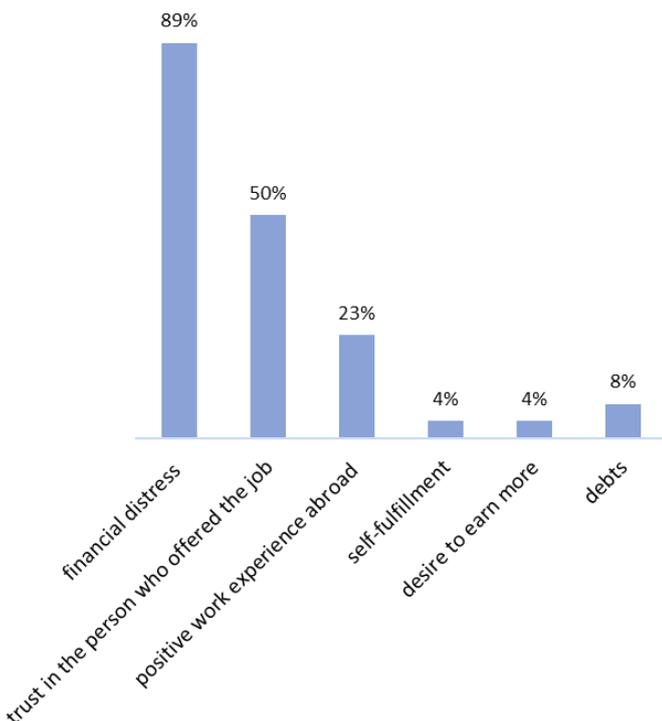
EDUCATION

Lack of education can lead to fewer opportunities to get a job that would allow people to earn enough to cover basic family expenses, as well as less knowledge about their rights, which makes people vulnerable when searching for work, especially abroad.

46 per cent of VoTs indicated that they had been previously forced to change careers because they had very low wages working in spheres of their education. For example, many men indicated that they had to work in construction, as it gave them more income, which allowed them to better support their families.



FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE DECISION TO TAKE UP THE JOB WHERE VICTIMS ENCOUNTERED EXPLOITATION

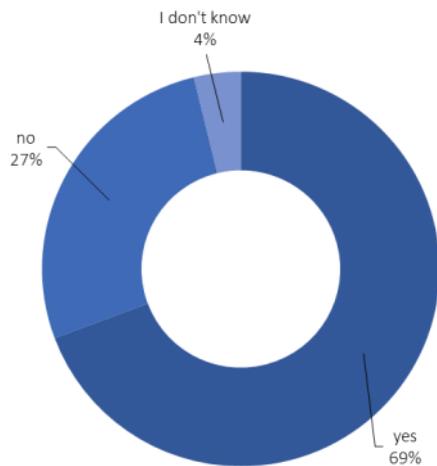


“You know, when you have a wife, kids, then you don't think. You think about how to clothe them, how to feed them, not that something might happen somewhere. That's the way I see it. I live for my family.”

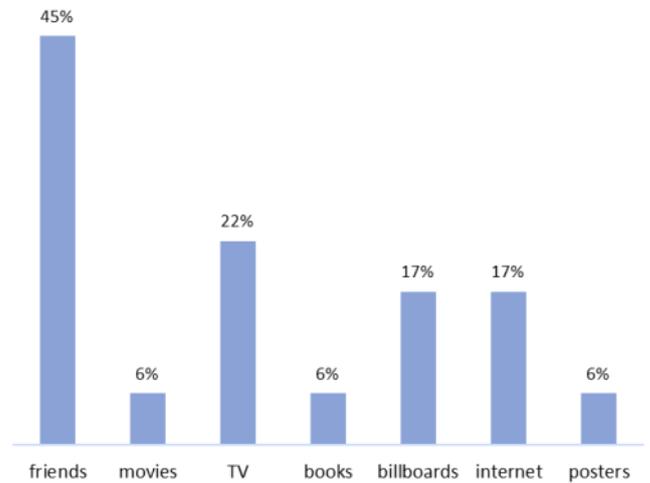
“It's hard for me to find a job here. I am disabled. No one wants to employ me. I have been registered at the employment center. Even when I was offered jobs, they were all seasonal, and the salary was low.”

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION ON THE RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Have you ever heard of the issue of TIP?



How did you learn about it?



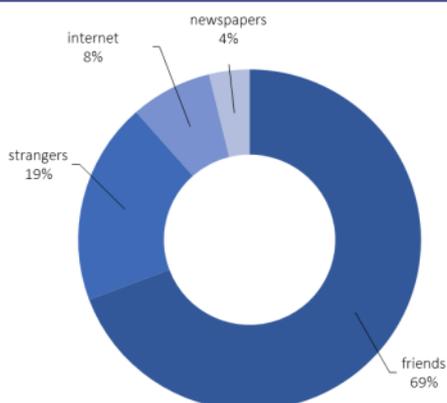
Awareness campaigns on the issue of TIP, recruitment methods used by traffickers, and dangers faced by the victims are a key element of TIP prevention. In Belarus, governmental, international and non-governmental organizations carry out information campaigns targeting both vulnerable groups and general population. Nearly 70% of the victims indicated that they had heard about the risks of trafficking. At the same time, even those who were aware of the problem noted that they did not consider themselves potential victims.



"I've heard about the issue. It can happen to anyone. But I have never thought it could be me. I've seen movies and billboards too. But it always seems you'll be able to deal with it."

"I've heard about it - on the Internet, on posters. I looked at it and that's it. It didn't seem like I should care. If there was more information on the Internet, it would be better. It is the 21st century, after all."

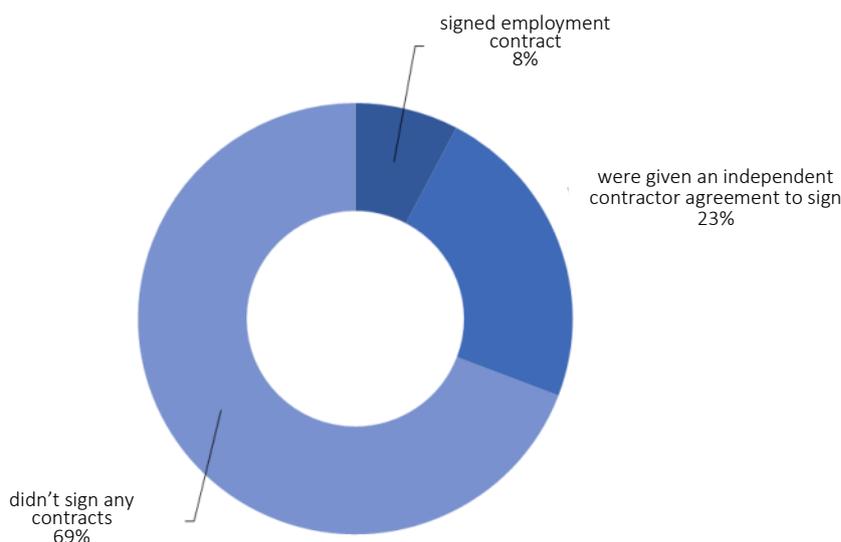
"I didn't realize at the time that I was being exploited, that it was human trafficking. I accepted the situation. When I saw this kind of information, I didn't identify myself as a victim."



RECRUITING METHODS

Trafficking in persons is a multi-step process, the first stage of which is the recruitment of the victim for the purpose of further transportation and exploitation. Recruiters resort to various methods but victims' stories show that in-person recruitment is still the predominant method in Belarus.

One of the key recommendations for conducting TIP prevention activities for at-risk groups is to inform them of a need to sign their legal contract and have it vetted by respective national authorities before going abroad. Although the presence of a contract will not in and of itself prevent trafficking and exploitation, the refusal of an employer to provide a contract and an opportunity for reviewing and vetting it is an indicator of human trafficking. Experience suggests that victims of sexual exploitation tend not to sign any documents at all. While survivors of labor exploitation fall into the trap of being promised a contract to be signed upon arrival, however this is a scam: they do not get a contract to be signed; they are offered an independent contractor agreement instead of an employment contract with limited social security; they do sign a contract, however, never get hold of it after signing, which prevents them from protecting their labour rights.



Among those who signed the documents, only 37.5 per cent actually received them. Only 6.3 per cent of VoTs tried to check the employer with respective authorities before accepting the job offer.



"We signed the contracts. They wouldn't give them to us. We read them, but it was no use. We found them [the contracts] later, the boss used them as a cutting board. We thought they were going to employ us officially. Then they threw the documents at us. They didn't register anything."

NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM (NRM)

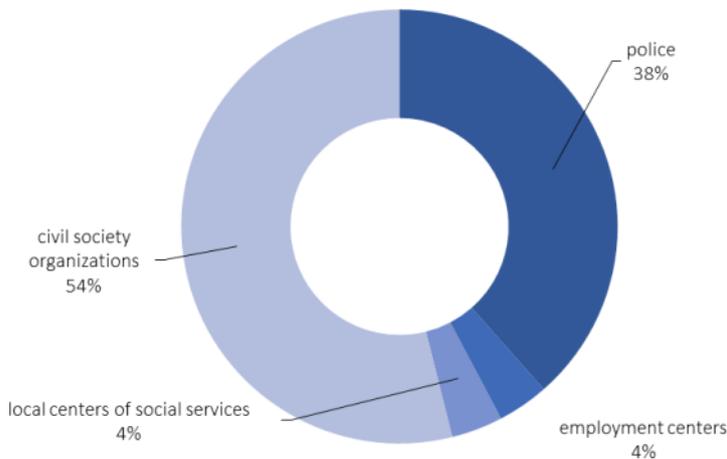
There is a national partnership structure through which national governments fulfill their obligations to protect and promote the rights of trafficked persons by coordinating their efforts with civil society organizations, the private sector, and other organizations working to combat TIP. It is called the **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**.

The main purpose of the referral mechanism is **to ensure the effective identification and protection of victims, which is based on respect for the dignity, integrity and independence of each victim.**

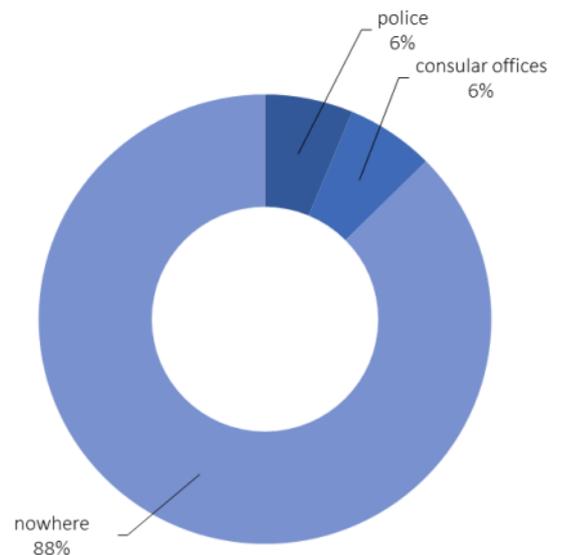
The National Referral Mechanism was adopted in the Republic of Belarus by the **Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 485 "On approval of the regulations on identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, completing the identification form for possible victims of trafficking in human beings and related offences, and the handling of information contained therein"**.

The identification of victims of trafficking is the first step in providing assistance to victims which guarantees their access to assistance from governmental, public and international organizations. Due to the fact that one organization cannot provide all types of assistance, a high level of interaction between organizations is also very important. Without such interaction, it is impossible to effectively refer victims for assistance.

WHO IDENTIFIED AND REFERRED VICTIMS



WHERE VOTS REQUEST ASSISTANCE ABROAD



Organizing the process of accompanying and supporting VoTs is one of the most important tasks of the **National Referral Mechanism**. Drawing up an individual work plan, searching for resources, coordinating the actions of specialists and services in order to address the situations of VoTs, and monitoring the situation - the case management approach - allows for effective assistance to VoTs.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new risks and challenges for victims of trafficking and has had a profound impact on the protection and safety of victims. VoTs have faced increased control, violence and isolation by traffickers on the one hand, and limited access to services on the other. Also, the economic downturn in many countries has worsened the financial situation of victims due to their lack of employment opportunities.

According to VoTs who received assistance from IOM Belarus and whose life stories were analyzed, the pandemic did not have a significant impact on their situations. Over 96 per cent of those interviewed indicated that they had had no difficulty receiving assistance in Belarus.

With regards to the pandemic, experts have observed the following trends in human trafficking in Belarus:

