

UKRAINE

Consistent with prior years, Ukraine remains primarily a source country for victims of human trafficking. Individuals are most commonly exploited through sex trafficking and forced labour domestically in Ukraine as well as in Russia, Poland, Germany, Turkey, and other countries of Asia, and the Middle East. Recently, the number of Ukrainian victims of forced labour has increased, with individuals exploited both domestically and abroad in a variety of sectors, including construction, agriculture, manufacturing, domestic work, and begging.

Ukraine hosts a set of factors that render its population particularly vulnerable. A generally low economic standard, large numbers of low skilled labourers, and more than 100,000 minors institutionalised in state-run care create groups vulnerable to exploitation and reflect the trafficking trends in recent years. Additionally, the ongoing armed conflict on Ukraine's eastern border has displaced more than three million people.¹ This displaced population, both in government reports and in the experience of A21 Ukraine, is especially vulnerable to trafficking and has constituted large victim groups since the inception of the conflict. Traffickers exploit this displacement and insecurity in the region, abducting women from the conflict zones for sex and labour trafficking, both locally and abroad predominantly in Russia, and trafficking men for forced labour and criminal acts, such as couriering of contraband and drug trafficking.²

COVID-19 Impact on Human Trafficking

Like much of the world, Ukraine initiated lockdown procedures in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most educational and governmental institutions moved online, with employees working remotely from home. Public establishments were closed, and public transportation restricted. From March to June 2020, the borders of Ukraine were completely closed for exit and entry for citizens of foreign states.

Due to the effect of the COVID-19 related lockdown, an unprecedented number of Ukrainian citizens experienced unemployment. Unofficial reports estimate almost three million people were unemployed by the first half of 2020, amounting to roughly 15% of the working population.³ With so many searching for income, this created a rather desperate situation and heightened vulnerability. Concurrently, borders with

the European Union (EU) were closed for Ukrainians. Taking advantage of this, illegitimate 'employment agencies' began to offer employment abroad, falsely claiming that they were able to circumnavigate COVID-19 travel restrictions and the illegal crossing of borders, and able to provide legal documentation and employment in the countries of the EU. A21 Ukraine was able to successfully intervene and assist a few of such cases. The consequences of these fraudulent employment abroad schemes will only fully manifest in the next few years.

COVID-19 related restrictions significantly limited anti-trafficking efforts in Ukraine. Prevention events, seminars, awareness campaigns, and professional training could not take place in person. Service providers encountered increased difficulty in reaching potential victims to conduct screenings and identifications. Trafficking survivors had difficulty accessing both government and health services for many months, hindering the necessary placements of survivors in government shelters or facilities due to lowered capacity and COVID-19 related requirements and restrictions.



A21's Response

A21 Ukraine's operational response in the country includes a full spectrum of strategic activities, including prevention and awareness, education, professional training, victim identification, international repatriations, as well as a holistic and comprehensive aftercare program.

Prevention & Awareness

Since its inception in 2010, A21 Ukraine has heavily focused on prevention and awareness activities, reaching many thousands across the country, largely through in-person presentations. Typically, A21 Ukraine outworks prevention and awareness efforts in a variety of ways, including school presentations, interactive games and summer camps for youth, awareness campaigns, amongst others. COVID-19 restrictions prevented in-person prevention and awareness presentations, requiring A21 Ukraine to adapt its anti-trafficking prevention and safeguarding materials to continue to reach vulnerable groups and provide resources to educators. A21 Ukraine adapted resources to be usable in an online format and shifted focus to training educators and interested parties online. A21 Ukraine also disseminated its newly reformatted resources to educational institutions, government, and nongovernmental organisation (NGO) partners to utilise to continue to spread awareness consistent with COVID-19 restrictions.

With the cooperation and approval of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, A21 Ukraine created an anti-trafficking Secondary Prevention Program entitled 'Live Free' to be used in schools. This program contains anti-trafficking information in an interactive and game format for children, teaching them safe behaviours and about human trafficking within their context. A21 also created an accompanying video training for teachers on the use and delivery of the program. In the second half of 2020, schools successfully implemented the A21 Live Free Secondary Prevention Program to reach students without needing the in-person participation of A21 Ukraine. To date, this training has been attended by 4,600 teachers online. Educators can access this training online through YouTube and the educational program directly from the Ministry of Education website.⁴



Despite COVID-19 realities, A21 Ukraine accomplished significant national impact in the execution of an artistic and informational public exhibition, called 'Expectations vs Reality'. The exhibition depicted different trafficking scenarios with the aim of preventing labour exploitation. The exhibition, conducted with the partnership and support of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the OSCE - Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, was held in central parks around the country for viewing by passersby

at the proper social distance mandated by COVID-19 restrictions. Each exhibit posted a QR code that could be scanned to access more in-depth anti-trafficking information. From July 30th to December 2nd, the exhibition travelled to eighteen different cities across the country and was televised. An estimated 55,000 people have viewed the content of the exhibit in-person, and several hundred thousand people via national and local media views.

COVID-19 limitations also prompted A21 Ukraine to adopt new methods to reach vulnerable populations via online platforms. Ukraine historically has had difficulty with unemployment, which COVID-19 further exacerbated. In light of this crisis, A21 Ukraine created a webinar targeting the unemployed to educate on false jobs exploitation risks, as well as safe employment standards. The Kyiv and Mariupol Municipal Employment services, who co-created this training, made the training accessible online as well as disseminated it to its subscribers and constituents. This resulted in direct engagement with 850 vulnerable and unemployed individuals, as well many more through the social pages of each institution. This focus on teaching safe employment standards was strategically important, as 70% of survivors in A21 Ukraine's Aftercare program were trafficked for labour exploitation, with 77% of those being recruited through false job offers.

A21 Ukraine also utilised its own online social media platform to continue its prevention and awareness efforts during the government-mandated lockdown, launching the program '21 Minutes with A21', broadcasted live on Instagram. During this broadcast, A21 Ukraine hosted seven different online sessions with different professional guests covering important topics related to human trafficking. For the European Day against Trafficking on October 18th, A21 Ukraine translated the A21 Global Freedom Summit Broadcast into Ukrainian and Russian, adapted the content to reflect the region's human trafficking context, as well as further contextualised locally with the participation of the Ministry of Social Policy. The Ministry then posted the broadcast on government channels and online platforms, as part of a national awareness campaign devoted to the European Day against Trafficking.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, A21 Ukraine successfully shifted its strategy in order to continue raising awareness and educating the general population about human trafficking. In 2020, A21 Ukraine reached 16,721⁵ individuals with prevention, awareness, and education material, including 6,421 individuals A21 engaged with in-person at schools or events either before or after lockdown periods. A21 Ukraine also reached an estimated 55,562 through its 'Expectation vs Reality' exhibition.⁶ The media reach of A21 Ukraine's two national awareness campaigns, A21's Global Freedom Summit and 'Expectations vs Reality' exhibition, via TV, radio and online channels is an estimated five million people.⁷ The adaptation from in-person to broadcast and online prevention and awareness efforts resulted in A21 Ukraine effectively engaging more people in anti-trafficking information in 2020, than in 2019.



Identification & Intervention Efforts

A21 Ukraine also conducts victim identification training for frontline professionals, in order to increase interventions and identifications of both trafficking and potential trafficking victims who these frontline professionals are likely to encounter as part of their normal course of duty. In lieu of in-person training, A21 Ukraine shifted to conduct professional training online through online meeting platforms and pre-recorded webinars for much of 2020. A21 Ukraine conducted 19 training sessions,⁸ training 247 professionals in detection, screening, and identification of potential victims of trafficking, among them Radisson Hotels network employees, educators and facilitators from different regions, NGO employees from bordering countries, social workers in Kyiv and many professionals from the local territorial communities of the Kyiv region.

In response to requests by law enforcement, A21 Ukraine either on its own, or in collaboration with other organisations such as IOM Ukraine, have conducted victim identification screenings of individuals exploited as a consequence of the armed conflict on Ukraine's eastern border. Identification screening interviews often reveal that male Ukrainian citizens are trafficked for non-combat positions with the pro-Russian military forces there, whereas female Ukrainians endure both labour and sexual exploitation around their military camps. A21 provides aftercare services for those identified as survivors of human trafficking as a result of the armed conflict.

Despite COVID-related challenges, A21 Ukraine was involved in more successful identifications of victims of trafficking in 2020 than the previous year, with 58 identified victims in 2020 as opposed to 31 in 2019. A21 Ukraine attributes this increase to the growing cooperation between government institutions and NGOs, necessitated by COVID-19 challenges requiring more resources. In particular, cooperation with law enforcement and the Police Department of Migration increased, resulting in more survivors referred to A21 Ukraine for assistance in 2020 than in any previous year. A21 Ukraine also assists with the identification and repatriation of survivors identified abroad, and despite border closures and general travel restrictions, successfully facilitated three international repatriations and five domestic relocations of survivors in 2020.

Aftercare Services

To support survivors, especially those vulnerable to COVID-19, A21 Ukraine shifted its aftercare focus to the most imminent needs caused by the pandemic, including providing accommodation for safe quarantine, access to medical care and food for survivors during the periods of lockdown. Due to COVID-19, the healthcare system in Ukraine faced enormous difficulties, revealing the weakest points of the system such as the critical shortage of qualified medical staff, the lack of emergency medical care facilities, and the limited number of available hospital beds. As a consequence, this adversely affected the ability of government agencies to provide guaranteed emergency medical care to survivors of trafficking. As trafficking survivors were unable to independently access medical and institutional services due to COVID-19 quarantines and lockdown, A21's focus shifted to assisting survivors in its Aftercare program with navigating all aspects of the new realities, including the additional bureaucracy and difficulties in accessing aftercare services caused by the pandemic.

A21 Ukraine faced difficulty in navigating the existing institutions and procedures to secure medical services, identity documents, and residential facilities for survivors in its Aftercare program as a result of issues caused by the pandemic. For instance, due to the COVID-19 instigated lockdown of various bureaucratic institutions, restoring identity documents for one survivor took more than five months. A21 Ukraine also faced difficulties in arranging placement of survivors into government centres and rehabilitation centres, as such facilities were either closed or not accepting new individuals due to COVID-19 related space limitations. As a result, A21 provided survivors with safe accommodation through placement in safe housing and the provision of financial assistance for rent.

In 2020, A21 Ukraine provided independent emergency accommodation for five survivors, and long-term accommodation for nine survivors. A21 Ukraine's aftercare services also focused on ensuring current and past survivors had all necessary supplies needed for safe isolation as well as personal protective equipment. In 2020, 17 new survivors entered A21 Ukraine's Aftercare program. A21 Ukraine provided access to COVID-19 tests for six survivors who either exhibited COVID-19 symptoms or required a negative test to begin employment. In total, in 2020, A21 Ukraine assisted 168 survivors with material support, including food, medicine, clothing, disinfectant, and masks. In the face of massive unemployment due to COVID-related lockdowns, A21 Ukraine focused on teaching life skills and providing job readiness training to improve employment opportunities for survivors. Specifically, A21 taught computer and technology skills to survivors, resulting in multiple survivors successfully finding new employment, despite high nationwide unemployment levels. Throughout 2020, A21 Ukraine's caseworkers consistently provided emotional support, guiding current and former survivors

through insecurities caused by COVID-19 realities and its impact on the Ukrainian economy. For survivors, many of whom were already struggling with existing trauma, the COVID-19 pandemic compounded their stress and anxiety, causing general insecurity, a lack of

confidence in the future, as well as fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus and being unable to provide for their families. Consequently, A21 Ukraine provided more psychological assistance for survivors through professional psychologists in 2020 than in any other year.

COVID-19 Challenges Prompt Reform & Greater Collaboration

Despite a difficult year full of unexpected challenges, a greater level of collaboration between government institutions and like-minded NGOs manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ukrainian government admirably coordinated efforts to fulfill the nationwide anti-trafficking mandate through wide-scale collaboration and actively sought to effectuate anti-trafficking activities and programs through collaboration with NGOs. A21 experienced this heightened collaboration consistently with different government bodies across various projects throughout the year. Different government authorities and institutions invited A21 Ukraine to participate in roundtables and numerous webinars. Through these avenues, A21 Ukraine had the opportunity to discuss the effect of human trafficking not only locally in Kyiv, but nationally throughout various parts of Ukraine. Along this vein, A21 Ukraine became the implementing partner of a Government initiated and IOM sponsored anti-trafficking project which provided training on best practices to combat human trafficking in the Kyiv region. This joint project with IOM spanned from November to December 2020, where A21 Ukraine met with key local government officials to provide a briefing on the urgent state of human trafficking in the area, including exacerbations created by the pandemic, and the need to create multidisciplinary groups to quickly identify victims, provide any urgent assistance, and generate referrals to specific law enforcement agencies and NGOs. During this

project, A21 Ukraine conducted best practices training in combatting human trafficking in the 12 territorial communities. A21 Ukraine developed two national awareness campaigns together with The Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, who also invited A21 to participate in the governmental press briefing to the campaign '16 Days Without Violence' on the 26th of November. The Ministry of Education both collaborated, supported, and disseminated A21's Secondary Prevention Program in schools. The OSCE, IOM, Ukrainian Government and A21 Ukraine partnered together in the nationwide awareness exhibit, 'Expectations vs Reality', that successfully reached individuals in 18 major cities of Ukraine during five months in 2020.

In March 2020, the government implemented several reforms, including simplifying the process of restoring identity documents to survivors, and facilitating the process to be completed online. Additionally, the reforms now allowed survivors to restore their documents either centrally in Kyiv or their place of residence, and not at the place of birth or official registration, as previously required. These reforms of the State Migration Service will hopefully be prolonged after the COVID-19 period. Lastly, as government institutions began working remotely in 2020, this provided the opportunity to facilitate online training, seminars, and meetings with officials and professionals that otherwise would not have occurred. Through this, A21 Ukraine forged new relationships with many local administrations across Ukraine to enable stronger anti-trafficking efforts throughout the country.

¹ United States Department of State, 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/ukraine/>

² US State Dep't, 2020 TIP Report (Ukraine).

³ Daryna Antoniuk, Ukraine's unemployed rises by 156,000 amid the pandemic, May 5, 2020 (updated May 5 2020), <https://www.kyivpost.com/business/ukraines-unemployed-grow-by-156600-amid-the-pandemic.html?cn-reloaded=1>.

⁴ Ministry of Education, Ukraine, Prevention of Human Trafficking, Materials for Teachers, A21 Ukraine. <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/osvita/pozashkilna-osvita/vihovna-robota-ta-zahist-prav-ditini/protidiya-torgivli-lyudmi>.

⁵ This number represents the cumulative total in 2020 of those who confirmed engagement with A21 Ukraine's prevention and awareness programs by either attending a training, participating in an online course, and heard a presentation or awareness piece.

⁶ This number was calculated based on reports from exhibition partners and tracked visits to the exhibit website to obtain anti-trafficking information, per QR code scans provided on-site at the exhibition.

⁷ Numbers for viewers of content are calculated by in-country media outlets based on industry methods for reach calculation and thereafter provided to A21.

⁸ These 19 trainings reflect both in-person and online facilitated training sessions. In-person training training conducted in the latter part of 2020 when permitted were conducted in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions and required precautions.