

UKRAINE

"FOR PREDATORS AND HUMAN TRAFFICKERS, THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS NOT A TRAGEDY. IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY - AND WOMEN & CHILDREN ARE THE TARGETS."

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation ('Russia'), ongoing since February 2022, instigated catastrophic new realities for millions of Ukrainians and continues to be a lifethreatening and life-altering incursion with no end in sight. Data collected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that over 7.8 million refugees from Ukraine have been recorded in Europe in 2022.1 Furthermore, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Ukraine was estimated to be over 8 million at its peak.2 According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), explosive weapons caused most of the 17,994 recorded civilian casualties in 2022.3 However, actual numbers are believed to be much greater.4 It is impossible to quantify the destruction caused by the incursion, which extends well beyond the 127 billion dollars worth of damage to homes, businesses, schools, roads and other infrastructure.5

Refugees are inherently vulnerable to human trafficking as they may lack legal status, employment, support network, essential resources, access to health services and face language barriers.⁶ Although IDPs remain in their home nation, they face similar vulnerabilities to human trafficking due to their precarious situation.⁷ Human traffickers prey on vulnerability, and irregular forms of migration, including forced migration, typically increase an individual's risk of exploitation. Ukrainians forced to flee their homes for safety or in search of employment, work and accommodation, whether across the border or internally, were exposed to new threats and challenges.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN UKRAINE

Pre-February 2022 Invasion

A21 has been operational in Ukraine since 2009, where it countered human trafficking through prevention and awareness, intervention and survivor aftercare. Before the war, Ukrainian victims were trafficked internally within Ukraine and abroad for both labour and sexual exploitation. Sectors affected by labour trafficking, both domestically and abroad, are agriculture, construction and manufacturing, with reports of forced criminality and begging. Human traffickers operating within Ukraine exploited both citizens and foreign nationals. In recent years, Ukraine has also become a destination country, with trafficking survivors from other Eastern European nations, the Middle East, and Central and Southeast Asia receiving assistance from A21 Ukraine (A21).

From 2009 until 2021, most human trafficking survivors in A21's Aftercare Program were middle-aged Ukrainians exploited via labour trafficking. Labour trafficking accounted for 73% of A21's aftercare cases, with sexual exploitation comprising 13%. Traffickers had recruited most victims through fraudulent employment opportunities (79%) through social media, friends and relatives or recruitment agencies. Abductions were the second most reported method (10%).

The Impact of Prior Military Conflict in Eastern Ukraine on Human Trafficking

A21 had previously assisted survivors of human trafficking whose exploitation related to the military conflict that started in 2014 in East Ukraine. Some of these cases involved forced labour through abduction, or being taken by pro-Russian forces and controlled by physical abuse, with many accused of being Ukrainian spies. Through prisoner swaps, escape, and being left by the traffickers, these survivors exited trafficking from 2015 until as late as 2020. Other cases involved perpetrators exploiting the military conflict to traffick vulnerable individuals, including by forced labour and domestic servitude. Still, other cases involved Ukrainians desperate to escape the military conflict zone being deceived into trafficking by fraudulent employment opportunities. Exploitation took place as early as 2014 up until 2020, with exploitation spanning from a few weeks to a few years. Although trafficking due to the military conflict occurred as early as 2014, the first of these trafficking survivors only entered A21's Aftercare Program a year and a half after the commencement of the conflict.

A21 OPERATIONS RELOCATE TO POLAND

In early 2022, amidst an impending invasion by Russia, A21 contacted survivors in its Aftercare Program with information about the potential threat and provided information on preparing for evacuation. Upon the outbreak of the full-scale invasion in 2022, A21 staff immediately contacted current and past survivors to assess their safety and provide assistance.

In response to Russia's aggressive bombing of Kyiv and regions throughout Ukraine, A21 relocated its office from Kyiv to Warsaw, Poland, to ensure continued uninterrupted operations and staff safety. As Ukraine continued to respond to ongoing emergencies and dedicated itself to defending itself from Russia, with no perceivable end in sight, the temporary relocation of A21 to Poland soon became permanent for the remainder of the year.

As Poland swiftly became the neighbouring country receiving the most Ukrainian refugees, 11 A21's operations proved critical to counter-trafficking efforts there. Understanding the vulnerability of refugees and migrants to human trafficking, A21 quickly adapted its operations to prioritise its prevention efforts by forming strategic partnerships to raise awareness about human trafficking among the millions of displaced and vulnerable populations in Poland. In addition to its prevention and awareness efforts, A21 also trained entities supporting Ukrainian refugees to detect and adequately

respond to suspected reports of human trafficking. Finally, throughout 2022, A21 prioritised the safety and well-being of survivors in its Aftercare Program by assisting



survivors in relocating to safer areas, offering emotional and psychological support, and providing practical resources such as gas stoves, medical supplies and food.

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The Potential Scale of Trafficking

According to IOM's estimations, '46,000 Ukrainians suffered from human trafficking during 2019 and 2021', domestically and outside Ukraine (17,000 and 29,000, respectively).12 Based on the historical correlation between the increase in Ukrainian asylum applications following the 2014 conflict in East Ukraine and the later number of Ukrainian trafficking victims in Western and Central Europe, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates over 100,000 potential Ukrainian trafficking victims in Europe following the increased migration to Europe as a result of the 2022 invasion. 13 While this projection will likely be affected by variables such as the temporary protection offered by the EU, as noted by the UNODC, it does indicate the potential scale of trafficking.

The threat of exploitation for children unlawfully transferred to Russia, which the US State Department report 'are highly vulnerable to trafficking', 14 also exists. Furthermore, reports remain of children used in conflict by Russian-led forces. ¹⁵ According to Yuriy Parkhomenko, Head of the Department of Migration Police of the National Police of Ukraine, those forcibly deported to Russia and Belarus are also at risk of exploitation as they find themselves without work, money, or housing. ¹⁶

During frontline professional training sessions and counter-trafficking meetings throughout 2022, A21 received reports of Ukrainian refugees working unofficial jobs without pay, often living where they worked, and being mistreated. However, these potential victims were reportedly reluctant to report, fearful that this would worsen their situation and cause distrust among future employers. Based on the information provided to A21 by Ukrainian refugees and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working with the refugee population, A21 also suspects self-identification by victims may be low due to a lack of trust in the authorities, feelings of insecurity in a foreign country, language barriers and a lack of understanding of and access to their rights.

The National Police of Ukraine's 2022 Figures on Human Trafficking

The National Police of Ukraine (NPU) reported 134 criminal trafficking offences for 2022, comprised of the following: labour exploitation (44), sexual exploitation (42), involvement in criminal activity (23), child trafficking (12), surrogate motherhood (12) and forced begging (1). The NPU reported the identification of 131 victims of human trafficking, with women comprising 54.9%. The majority of incidents were recorded from the capital city Kyiv (43), followed by Odesa (19), Dnipropetrovsk (15), the Kyiv region (13), and the Lviv (10) region. The NPU also reported stopping certain illegal activity by five organised groups related to human trafficking in 2022.17

Official reports of human trafficking do not necessarily indicate the full extent of this crime during the war; instead, it may take years before instances of exploitation in 2022 are revealed, as seen in A21 cases from the earlier 2014 aggression by Russia in East Ukraine.



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PARTNERSHIPS FOR PREVENTION

AND AWARENESS

As part of its prevention and awareness efforts, A21 focuses on human trafficking education and reducing vulnerability in at-risk populations. In 2022, A21 pivoted its prevention and awareness work to respond to the conflict and quickly create additional resources aimed at newly emerging trends and demographics.

Proactive Measures

A21 regularly attended six different UNHCR-led working groups in Poland throughout 2022, connecting to new partners and receiving invitations to provide professional training and distribute prevention and awareness resources. Despite outworking its operations

in Poland, A21 also maintained a strong relationship with law enforcement and governmental ministries in Ukraine, such as the Ukrainian Migration Police and the Ministry of Social Policy. In collaboration with various partners in Poland and Ukraine, A21 distributed 30,147 hotline leaflets, safe employment cards and flyers, 9,000 map brochures and 4,220 refugee comic books. Through radio, podcasts, social media and awareness billboards, A21 also had the opportunity to reach potentially millions of people. A21 created prevention and awareness resources to address potential human trafficking and exploita-

retaining control of personal identification and screening offers for transportation or shelter. Towards the end of 2022, A21 also launched a Safe Employment Campaign to offer guidance on avoiding fraudulent employment opportunities.

tion issues arising from the mass migration caused

by the conflict, outlining indicators of trafficking and

safety tips for those travelling internationally, such as

Strategic Partnerships

In partnership with the Lviv Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the State Border Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, A21 produced 12,000 safety and human trafficking prevention flyers for distribution in Ukraine at the border and in refugee centres. These flyers contained essential information about Ukrainian refugees and general information about human trafficking. Specifically, these flyers listed emergency phone numbers; a QR code to access hotline and emergency numbers from across Europe; a QR code to access a chatbot managed by Lviv State University of Internal Affairs and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; and critical contacts specifically for Ukrainian refugees in different countries available on the Telegram App (used by most Ukrainians).

Throughout 2022, the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy and the Ukrainian Migration Police distributed 9,000 A21 map pamphlets providing 18 hotline and police phone numbers for different European countries, websites with helpful information for refugees and a map highlighting available services in Europe. On World Day Against Human Trafficking in July 2022, the Ministry and Police distributed 3,700 A21 resources in Kyiv, including these map pamphlets, to raise awareness about human trafficking.

Global advertising agency, Clear Channel, displayed prevention billboards created by A21 highlighting the National Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking phone number in Poland, the EU emergency number, and a QR code to access more information about human trafficking, with a potential reach of over 4.6 million people. These 88 digital billboards were placed in high-traffic areas in the seven largest cities in Poland to share the human trafficking helpline number with refugees in their new neighbourhoods.

In cooperation with Meta via Facebook and Instagram, A21 conducted two online campaigns reaching potentially millions, targeting citizens of Ukraine in the eight countries with the most significant number of Ukrainian refugees. The first campaign launched in April 2022 and spanned six weeks, primarily focusing on informing refugees about their vulnerability and the dangers of human trafficking. The second campaign, launched in October and November 2022, continued to raise awareness and focused on safe employment for refugees abroad and reducing the risk of labour exploitation.

Refugee Comic Book

A21 designed and produced a refugee comic book in Ukrainian, Polish and English depicting scenes a child might witness crossing the border or when internally displaced within Ukraine. A21 strategically created this refugee comic book using visuals to ensure that children and low-literacy adults could easily access this critical message. A21 and partner organisations distributed 4,220 comics across Ukraine and Poland in partnership with the migration police, the UNHCR, an elementary school, NGOs, a Polish labour office and other government-run service facilities.



This child-friendly prevention material depicts two siblings meeting a 'safe person' in a yellow vest showing them emergency phone numbers and the signs of human trafficking. Later in the story, when the siblings meet an 'unsafe person' who is only wearing a vest to appear as though they are trustworthy, the children know to reject his offer and the number to call for help.

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Radio and Podcasts

In 2022, A21's Ukraine Country Manager, in an interview on a Ukrainian radio station, shared advice about preventing human trafficking with potentially millions of listeners. The interview allowed her to share not only her expertise in countering human trafficking but also her personal experience in exiting Ukraine during the conflict, providing a unique perspective on the situation. She offered recommendations on crossing the border safely, encouraged migrants to keep in touch with their families, travel with a group and always check volunteers' documents before accepting help. She continued to speak about human trafficking on the American radio station National Public Radio, again reaching potentially millions of listeners. In addition, one of A21's staff appeared as a guest speaker on two podcasts for Polish professionals, with one addressing potentially hundreds of thousands of listeners about human trafficking within the context of the war.

Safe Employment Campaign

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According to pre-war A21 data, human traffickers have historically used fraudulent employment opportunities as the primary recruitment tactic in Ukraine. Notably, data collected from all survivors entering A21's Aftercare Program globally in 2022 identified

fraudulent job opportunities as the primary recruitment method for human trafficking that year. As the war continued well into 2022, and Ukrainian refugees realised the likelihood of remaining in Poland indefinitely, many started actively seeking employment in the latter half of the year. A21, recognising the need to raise awareness about forced labour and fraudulent job recruitment, created and launched its Safe Employment Campaign targeted at Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Latvia and Germany. As part of this campaign, refugee centres played a 35-minute 'Safe Employment Campaign' video created by A21 with guidance on safely seeking employment. A21 also created safe employment cards and posters. These campaign posters provided a general caution about seeking work and a QR code linking to the Safe Employment Campaign video. The accompanying cards offered more information about Polish labour laws, minimum wage, safety precautions to prevent exploitation, and the law enforcement-operated human trafficking hotline number. A21 distributed 2,281 of these cards through partners, such as refugee centres, long-term housing for refugees, labour offices, advice centres and NGOs working on the frontlines. The cards were and continue to be well received, with organisations showing interest in continuing to disperse the safeguarding materials.

FRONTLINE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Frontline professional training became a priority for A21 in 2022, and newly formed partnerships led to much-needed training opportunities. A21 conducted 13 professional trainings for 213 frontline professionals and volunteers working in refugee centres, local government, such as the social services centre in Kyiv, Canadian and US Army representatives, an NGO and a hotline in Spain, healthcare facilities, the UNHCR, an NGO specialised in assisting irregular migrants and the United Kingdom (UK) Border Force. While A21 conducted in-person training whenever possible, online options also allowed staff to continue training entities in Ukraine, and NGOs and government entities in other countries working with Ukrainian refugees.¹⁹

A21 provided training focused on the area of expertise of the specified frontline profession using examples from A21's experience. Trainees primarily requested guidance on recognising and responding to suspected human trafficking and modifying their organisational procedures to include trafficking prevention materials.

"WE ARE SO THANKFUL FOR THE TRAINING... THE TOPIC
IS DEFINITELY FOR "HERE AND NOW", BUT ALSO SO DEMANDING IN TERMS OF INCREASING CIVIC AWARENESS THAT
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IS NOT AN "EXOTIC" TOPIC IN
EUROPE AND POLAND...'

Dorota Piechowicz-Witoń, Head of the Centre for Civic Dialogue,
 Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, Opole City Hall, Poland²⁰

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Through its professional training program, A21's human trafficking specialists educate on general human trafficking indicators and equip trainees to develop contextualised counter-trafficking efforts within their sphere of influence. In 2022, several organisations trained by A21 in Poland modified their policies or procedures to include considerations specific to human trafficking. Management at some refugee centres advised of their plans to introduce several A21 recommended changes, including a new registration process for those entering and exiting the centre, criminal record checks for staff, and an improved screening process for partner organisations providing relocation, accommodation, and employment services for refugees at the centre. These developments extend beyond identifying potential victims, including preventative strategies. Such considerations focus on proactively safeguarding vulnerable refugees from potential perpetrators using volunteer or service provider opportunities as a pretext to ultimately traffick Ukrainian refugees.





SAFEGUARDING UKRAINIANS IN-TRANSIT

The Ukrainian refugee crisis reached across Europe as millions of refugees fled Ukraine in search of safety. Even while operating in Poland, A21 received requests for assistance from organisations located in other European countries. In 2022, A21 partnered with Open Arms, a humanitarian aid organisation based in Spain. While Open Arms historically focused on assisting irregular migrants abandoned at sea, it also helped in Spain's reception of Ukrainian refugees. Understanding the vulnerability of refugees generally to human trafficking, Open Arms requested training from A21. A21 Ukraine and A21 Spain worked jointly to remotely train frontline professionals and volunteers from Open Arms and their partner organisation, Integralia DKV, on human trafficking.

Moreover, A21's staff provided insight into cultural aspects to consider when communicating with Ukrainians, as well as their first-hand perspectives as refugees themselves. A21 also provided more indepth training to Open Arms in-person in Warsaw,

including utilising a victim-centred approach when interacting with potential victims of trafficking and general training in working directly with survivors of trafficking. Through this relationship, A21 supported the safe relocation of approximately 1,500 Ukrainian refugees travelling via six charter flights from Poland to Spain and Canada. In response to a request by Open Arms, A21 staff conducted cursory human trafficking screenings to determine whether any relocating Ukrainian refugees might be en route to a potentially exploitative situation. These screenings also provided opportunities to educate on refugees' susceptibility to exploitation and to give tips on protective measures.

Through an opportunity provided by the A21 UK office, the A21 Ukraine Country Manager provided a remote presentation on the refugee crisis to UK law enforcement. The UK Border Force invited A21 Ukraine's Country Manager to train their border force staff at a UK Airport on appropriately and effectively supporting Ukrainian refugees entering the UK. Subsequently, when UK law enforcement encountered three potential Ukrainian victims travelling to the UK, they were able to request that A21 conduct remote screenings.



SURVIVOR CARE

Aftercare Annual Summary

In 2022, A21 supported 27 survivors of human trafficking through A21's Aftercare Program, with all seven new survivors from 2022 entering its Aftercare Program in January before the war. All but one survivor was Ukrainian, consistent with previous years. After connecting with survivors previously in A21's program, A21 reopened six former cases to offer further assistance. In response to the most requested services, A21 provided psychological support, access to medical supplies, finances for rent and utilities,

necessities, including food, and assistance in relocating to safer areas of Ukraine or other countries. Recognising the increased need for ongoing holistic support, A21 offered Life Programs throughout 2022. These programs addressed significant healing and skill development needs that survivors were facing as a result of both their trafficking experience and the war. Programs focused on developing emotional resilience and life skills, including resume writing and seeking employment, safety, cooking without electricity, personal boundaries and budgeting.

Crisis Response

At the start of the war, many people in Ukraine had only 10-15 minutes to find shelter after the state of emergency announcements. Once alerted to these announcements, A21 staff immediately attempted to contact all survivors in its Aftercare Program to ensure their safety. Due to these calls, one survivor who had slept through the initial alert safely found shelter. A21 also supported the relocation of many survivors to areas known to be relatively safer.

When reliable sources indicated a Russian invasion was imminent, A21 prepared crisis 'go bags' for those needing to evacuate. These strategically packed bags contained emergency supplies for immediate evacuation, including a flashlight, batteries, a radio, wet wipes, medical supplies, food and water. A21 also provided survivors in need with gas burners to heat water or cook food, battery-powered light bulbs, power banks and portable lanterns in response to the nationwide energy crisis that caused prolonged power outages, sometimes lasting several days or leaving people without power for 8-10 hours a day.

'I can't express to you in words how nice it is to hear my phone ringing, not because it's an alarm clock, but because someone is interested in me and sincerely cares.'

— Survivor of Human Trafficking²¹

Psychological and Emotional Support

In 2022, A21 caseworkers prioritised establishing and maintaining regular remote communication with survivors of human trafficking in its Aftercare Program. Fleeing life-threatening conflict triggered and exacerbated many survivors' preexisting trauma from their trafficking. The experience of chronic stress and compounding trauma required caseworkers to respond by providing basic needs assistance and psychological and emotional support. Caseworkers contacted survivors who had previously exited the program, with cases from as far back as 2012, to ensure their well-being and meet potential needs.

After conducting assessments of survivors in its Aftercare Program, A21 sent 162 care packs containing food and toiletries to survivors across Ukraine. A21 also provided care packs for potential victims of human trafficking, either receiving support from a partner organisation in Ukraine or referred to A21 by other NGOs. All survivors in A21's Aftercare Program received special food packages before Christmas.

When physically located in Kyiv, A21 historically offered support to survivors in various locations throughout Ukraine, mainly

through remote support, with occasional in-person visits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, A21 continued its Aftercare Program remotely in compliance with strict restrictions. Consequently, both A21 and survivors in its Aftercare Program quickly adapted to continued remote services after relocating to Poland in 2022. Some female survivors in A21's Aftercare Program fled Ukraine for other Western European countries. A21 continued to provide remote support to these survivors as they settled into their new host nations. The male survivors in A21's Aftercare Program remained in Ukraine due to restrictions on men leaving the country. When possible, caseworkers conducted in-person meetings with survivors in Ukraine. However, A21 staff faced challenges reaching survivors in regions close to armed conflict or cities affected by transportation disruptions. Moreover, despite being skilled in providing remote care, the energy crisis and lack of cell service and internet caused by damaged infrastructure and the gas supply shut-off sometimes made communication impossible.

A21's staff were also working in the uniquely challenging context of being refugees, with several female staff members caring for their

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children while separated from their husbands due to restrictions on leaving Ukraine. Despite these unprecedented emotional and psychological challenges, A21 staff strived to continue to offer the same quality of care and support previously provided to survivors. A21 staff members were acutely aware of the devastation of Russia's invasion on each Ukrainian citizen and even more aware of the additional difficulties the war brought to survivors in their Aftercare Program due to preexisting trauma from trafficking. This awareness and understanding led the A21 staff to work with even more determination to ensure survivors in its Aftercare Program received proper care and support during this period.

Meeting Essential Needs

Beyond funding psychological consultations and emotional support, A21 provided many survivors with basic needs. A21 assisted ten survivors in Ukraine with emergency accommodation or financial assistance to pay for housing. A21 also purchased and delivered medicine and medical supplies to survivors. For those abroad, in occupied territories, or with immediate medical needs, A21 transferred funds to pay for medication. In one instance, A21 financially supported a survivor recovering from surgery.

Finding Employment

The continued war with Russia depleted resources and further exacerbated unemployment. Even before the war, finding stable employment proved challenging in Ukraine. However, many Ukrainians lost their jobs as businesses shut down after Russia's invasion. Survivors in A21's Aftercare Program living in Ukraine also struggled with obtaining stable employment

during this period. Young adult survivors in A21's Aftercare Program reported steady employment as their greatest need. Those able to work in 2022 typically only had temporary jobs. Some faced repeated unemployment in Ukraine and abroad, forcing them to continually search for work and accept one-off or temporary part-time jobs. A21 offered emotional support to survivors facing the continual disappointment of losing a job and encouraged them to prepare for their following interview. A21 caseworkers reviewed the Life Skills program with survivors to address resume writing and employment



KATERYNA'S STORY

Ukrainians lived under the threat of an invasion for some time before the 24th of February. After hearing about the war, Kateryna* packed her bags with two weeks of supplies for herself and her children. However, she did not prepare to relocate permanently, thinking they would be able to return home shortly.

As she and her children drove to Poland. her mind raced with questions: Where will we stay? How will I keep my kids safe in a new place? When will I see my husband again?

After crossing the border, strangers offered them places to sleep and food. They seemed to show genuine compassion, but Kateryna questioned whether it was safe to trust them, especially mindful of her need to protect her children from further harm.

Hopeful that the war would soon end, Kateryna found temporary accommodation, but two weeks turned into a month, and the need for more permanent housing became apparent. With no end to the war in sight, Kateryna began thinking about finding schooling for her children in Poland, learning the language to find employment, and paying bills, all while still full of concern

for her family back in

started looking for work but faced jobs offering minimal pay or general employment advertisements providing little information. Although uneasy about these prospects, Kateryna, desperate, began to consider applying for one of the jobs. Then, she started seeing A21 leaflets and posters with information in Ukrainian about the signs of human trafficking. Kateryna had never considered this or even thought herself vulnerable to trafficking. She was thankful she now had an idea of the signs to look for, to recognise a dangerous situation and avoid a false job opportunity.

Today, Kateryna continues to live in Poland with her children. She is hopeful for peace in her country and that she will soon be able to return home and be reunited with her husband.



*Name is changed for their protection.

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁹ See Appendix B for more information on A21's Professional Training Program.
- ²⁰ 'My jesteśmy bardzo wdzięczni za to spotkanie... temat jak najbardziej na "tu i teraz" ale też bardzo wymagający pod kątem podnoszenia świadomości obywatelskiej, że handel ludźmi to nie jest w Europie i Polsce temat "egzotyczny"...', Original guote translated by A21.
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