

# Contributing to change—OSCE live simulation-based training exercises on combating trafficking in human beings

## A Case Study for the OSCE50+

This report presents one of four case studies conducted as part of an OSCE Outcome Harvesting (OH) research initiative, led by the Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) to mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Funded through extrabudgetary support from Finland, this initiative engaged OSCE staff in a reflective analysis of the Organization’s impact, identifying significant changes in stability, peace, and democracy influenced by the OSCE’s work across its region.

The research serves a dual purpose: to strengthen internal learning by fostering evaluative thinking among OSCE staff and to demonstrate the OSCE’s impact to external stakeholders through concrete examples of change achieved over the past 10–20 years.

In line with the Outcome Harvesting approach, this case study focuses on observable changes in the behaviours, practices and relationships of key actors—referred to here as ‘changes’ or ‘outcomes’—to which the OSCE plausibly contributed.

Between September and December 2024, OIO gathered over 50 outcome stories from OSCE field operations, institutions and the Secretariat. This process went beyond documenting individual outcomes—OIO completed a structured analysis to identify patterns across the stories and produced a synthesis report to deepen understanding of how OSCE contributions have shaped developments in its region. From this broader body of work, four stories were selected for in-depth case studies, enabling a closer examination of changes, how they occurred and the OSCE’s contributions. This case study explores one of these initiatives in detail—focusing on the observed changes, the actors involved and the interventions that influenced them.

## > Introduction

This report presents key findings from an OIO assessment of the human trafficking simulation-based training exercises conducted by the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (OSR/CTHB) since 2016. Through this assessment, OIO aimed to understand how these training initiatives have influenced participants' skills and institutional practices in participating States—ultimately shaping more effective strategies to combat human trafficking across the OSCE region.

The assessment was conducted by Maria Delgado, an independent evaluation consultant, under the supervision of Leslie Thomas, Senior Evaluator at OIO. Nynke de Witte, Head of Evaluation/Deputy Director OIO, provided oversight and guidance throughout the research process. The research followed a participatory approach, involving OSCE staff, government officials and training participants. Their insights, combined with an extensive review of relevant materials, helped build a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the reform's impact. This report is structured into five sections:

**Context:** The challenges that prompted the OSCE initiative.

**Key outcomes and their significance:** The medium- and long-term changes observed.

**Contributions:** How the OSCE influenced these changes.

**Concluding observations:** Lessons to inform future OSCE efforts.

**Data collection summary:** An overview of OIO's research methods.

## > Acknowledgements

The OIO research team would like to express sincere appreciation to Kari Johnstone, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and CTHB officers Katharina Thon and Livia Zampolini, for their valuable insights, collaboration and assistance in providing critical data.

We also extend our sincere thanks to OSCE staff and to all government representatives and training participants from Canada, Finland, Georgia, Iceland, Italy and Ireland for their invaluable support during the data collection for this case study.

## > Context: the challenges underpinning the OSCE's engagement

In 2015–2016, the European Union experienced a sharp increase in mixed migration flows, driven by prolonged conflicts, such as the wars in Syria and Iraq, along with instability in countries such as Afghanistan, Libya and Eritrea. These large-scale movements of people significantly heightened the risk of exploitation for vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, who were exposed to different forms of human trafficking, including sexual exploitation, forced labour and more.<sup>1</sup>

The 2015 refugee and migration crisis exposed significant preparedness gaps among the 57 OSCE participating States. Frontline responders were quickly overwhelmed by the scale of arrivals and often lacked the necessary training needed to identify human trafficking cases, contributing to a recurring pattern of under-detection, re-trafficking, and an inadequate response.

To address these challenges, the OSCE OSR/CTHB developed simulation-based training exercises designed to provide law enforcement officers, social service providers and other anti-trafficking professionals with the practical skills necessary to promptly identify and assist victims of human trafficking within mixed migratory flows. Recognizing the co-ordination gaps between agencies, the lack of practical multi-agency training initiatives across the OSCE region, and the challenges posed by differing legal frameworks, the OSR/CTHB introduced an experiential training methodology that brought together law enforcement, migration authorities, social workers, NGO staff, labour inspectors, financial investigators, lawyers and others. This initiative aimed to foster a more cohesive, cross-sectoral, human rights-based, victim-centered and trauma-informed approach to handling trafficking cases. Launched in 2016, the initiative continues to address critical capacity gaps across the OSCE region and beyond.



### The Reality of Human Trafficking



**24.9 million victims worldwide** (UN estimates 2022)



**38% of global victims in 2022 were children** [UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2024]



**Annual profits from forced labour: US\$ 236 billion** (International Labour Organisation 2024)



**65% of victims in the EU (2021–2022) were women and girls** (European Commission, 2025)



**54% of registered victims in 2021 were third-country nationals** (EC, 2025)



**One of the most profitable illicit businesses globally**



**Millions are trafficked for sex or forced to work in supply chains across industries**

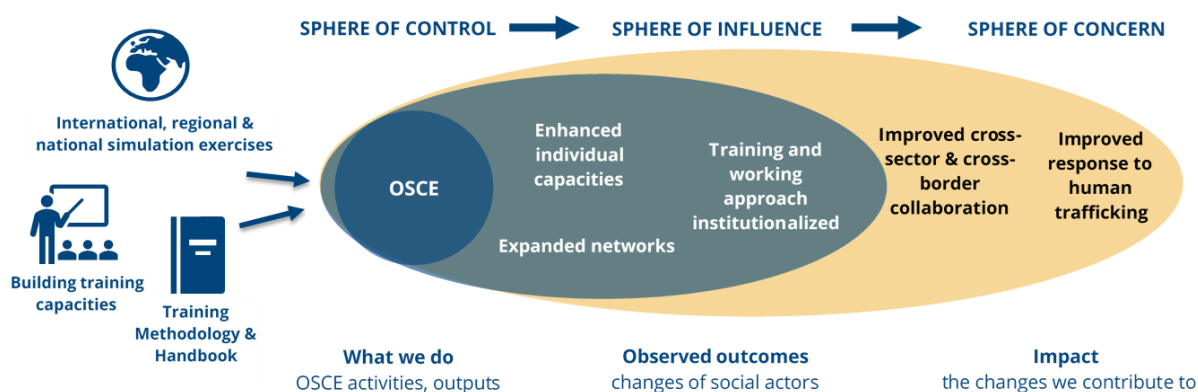
<sup>1</sup> ICMPD (2015), *Targeting Vulnerabilities: The Impact of the Syria War and Refugee Situation on Trafficking in Persons, A Study of Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq*, December 2015; Forin, Roberto & Healy, Claire (2018), *Trafficking along Migration Routes to Europe: Bridging the Gap between Migration, Asylum and Anti-Trafficking* – Briefing Paper. Vienna: ICMPD.

## > Key outcomes and their significance

This OIO research aimed to substantiate the different changes in behaviours, relationships, actions, policies or practices of actors and institutions participating in CTHB simulation-based training exercises on combating trafficking in human beings.

The following section presents the main results of simulation-based training exercises, as identified by a small group of participants interviewed for this assessment. Their testimonies were carefully triangulated with existing survey data and secondary sources. Guided by the Outcome Harvesting conceptual model (see Figure 2), the findings begin with observed changes in individual participants' behaviours, capacities and professional relationships in the fight against human trafficking. The section then traces how these individual-level changes may have influenced broader shifts in institutional actions, policies or practices, and to what extent the cumulative effect has strengthened participating States' efforts to combat trafficking in human beings.

**Figure 1. Visual illustration of the sphere of influence of the OSCE's contributions to the reform<sup>2</sup>**



### Participants enhanced their ability to engage in victim-centred, trauma-informed, collaborative anti-trafficking efforts

Conversations with participants revealed that the training had a significant impact on their confidence, skills and perspectives on their work. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants expressing gratitude for the opportunity to engage in the OSCE simulation-based training exercises on CTHB. Many returned multiple times to try out different roles, which underscores how valuable they found the experience.

Individual changes most frequently reported include:

#### 1. Improved understanding of multi-agency and multidisciplinary collaboration

One of the most significant takeaways for participants was a deeper appreciation of cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing human trafficking. Many acknowledged that before the training, they lacked a clear understanding of other agencies' roles in combating human trafficking. Working directly with professionals from

<sup>2</sup> Inspired by Clark and Apgar (2019), *Unpacking the Impact of International Development*: Resource Guide 1.

diverse fields gave them new insight into how co-operation can improve outcomes. Nearly all interviewees cited this shift in mindset as the most impactful change, which they carried back into their work. This shift in mindset also emerged as one of the most frequently mentioned benefits in post-training evaluations.

### Identifying missing pieces in our model

“Before I went [to the simulation], we were obviously trying to implement a multidisciplinary, multi-agency approach, but I didn’t notice that we were missing certain sectors. Like immigration... that was a big one. We weren’t even connected with them. I would think, oh well, we’re not a border country... But once I got back, I thought about how many people would have benefited from that kind of support. And we do have a community partner now. Actually, we have two community partners that we work with now, way closer. I think [the simulation] really put into perspective that we had to pull in more people into our model.”

—A trainee

## 2. New skills and enhanced professional confidence

The immersive, hands-on nature of OSCE simulation-based training exercises pushed participants to think critically and perform under pressure, significantly enhancing their problem-solving and communication skills. Many described a noticeable transformation, from initial hesitation to growing confidence by the end of the simulation-based training exercise. The safe, controlled environment encouraged experimentation and allowed participants to step outside their comfort zones without fear of compromising real-life victims or investigations.

Other frequently mentioned skills gained included:

- **Trauma-informed interviewing techniques:** Interview skills were also frequently highlighted as a key individual outcome in participant surveys. One participant noted that by taking on the role of a victim, he gained first-hand insight into how certain questioning techniques could re-traumatize or cause a victim to withdraw. The experience gave him a new perspective on conducting interviews in a more empathetic and effective manner.
- **Cross-cultural communication:** Others noted that engaging with professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds and sectors enhanced their communication, negotiation and collaboration skills.
- **Broader understanding of human trafficking:** Some participants shared that the training exposed them to forms of trafficking they had not previously encountered, broadening their professional understanding of the issue.

## 3. Refined skills in identifying and referring trafficking victims

While harder to measure, there are signs that simulation-based training exercises enhanced victim identification skills among practitioners. Some participants felt that it bolstered their ability to spot potential trafficking cases. In Georgia, for instance, labour

inspectors reported an increase in victim referrals to government offices after participating in national simulation-based training exercises, suggesting a direct connection between the training and improved detection capabilities.

#### **4. A first step into the field for some, an unintended outcome**

For some Italian participants, particularly human rights master's students who took part in the simulation-based training exercises as role players,<sup>3</sup> this was their first exposure to anti-trafficking case management. In some cases, the experience sparked a deeper interest in the field, influencing future career choices. A number of students went on to pursue careers in the anti-trafficking sector after participating in the training, one of our interviewees among them. Similarly, some early-career professionals said the training helped them gain confidence and find their footing more quickly in this complex area of work.

“As police, I just recently started working in the human trafficking field. It was almost the first thing that I did, coming to the organized crime department. The week I spent in Brühl was the only time that I've been to one of these trainings. As someone new to combating human trafficking [the simulation-based training exercise] was a game changer. A few months after we came back, we took on a big assignment and if I hadn't been trained, we would have done it so much differently. We used everything I had learned in Brühl”

—A trainee

#### **Participants built cross-sector and cross-border professional networks**

The simulation-based training exercises not only enhanced participants' understanding of cross-sector collaboration but also facilitated the establishment of formal and informal professional networks, making their anti-trafficking efforts more collaborative and effective. Feedback from participants and a 2019 evaluation<sup>4</sup> confirmed that meeting and interacting with colleagues from different sectors and nationalities were among the most valuable outcomes. Many reported continuing to use these contacts after the training for information exchange, collaboration requests and even joint funding proposals.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> In the early simulation-based training exercises, social workers acted as role players. However, due to the challenge of removing many practitioners from work for a whole week, organizers revised their approach by inviting only a few social workers and filling the remaining roles with master's students in human rights and multi-level governance from the University of Padova.

<sup>4</sup> Evaluation of Capacity Development and Learning in the OSCE, CASE STUDY III Combating Human Trafficking along Migration Routes Live Simulation-based Training Course of the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings: 17 July 2019 (IE 2018/03).

<sup>5</sup> Some stakeholders shared that the connections and relationships built during the simulation-based training exercise motivated them to collaborate on a joint project proposal for the European Commission. They also mentioned knowing of other similar cases.

## New connections often translated into improved cross-sector collaboration

“One of the biggest problems that we face is that it’s not always easy to co-operate with partners”

—A trainee

The impact of these new connections on real-life long-term collaboration varied. At the **national level**, testimonies highlighted that simulation-based training exercises helped build professional relationships that persisted beyond the training room. Participants frequently mentioned that meeting colleagues in person, many of whom they had only interacted with via phone or email, significantly strengthened working relationships and made their jobs easier. At the same time, some participants expressed concern that where participants hailed from different regions with fewer real-life collaboration opportunities, the long-term impact of these connections was more limited. On the other hand, Canadian participants noted that when training participants came from the same region or neighbouring countries, the relationships formed during the exercise continued to support their daily work after the training.

**International and regional simulation-based training exercises** were instrumental in exposing participants to different practices and challenges, providing insight into new and emerging forms of human trafficking that may not yet be apparent in their own contexts, and in familiarizing them with other countries’ resources and assistance systems, facilitating cross-border referrals.

Stakeholders shared multiple examples of how these new connections became valuable assets in their daily anti-trafficking work. For example, in **cross-border cases**, where trafficking networks operate beyond national boundaries, many reported that having trusted contacts in other countries made handling transnational cases significantly easier. Several participants also confirmed that they or their colleagues had used these connections to exchange information or expedite victim return co-ordination.

In one example reported a connection between a social worker and a journalist led to a collaborative effort that expanded media coverage of human trafficking issues, helping to raise awareness and drive public engagement. In another instance, CTHB staff reported that a Kazakh victim of sexual exploitation in Georgia was rescued thanks to connections forged between law enforcement officers from both countries during the 2018 simulation-based training exercise conducted in Kazakhstan. These examples underscore how the trust and networks built through such training exercises continue to foster international collaboration and yield real-world results long after the sessions conclude.

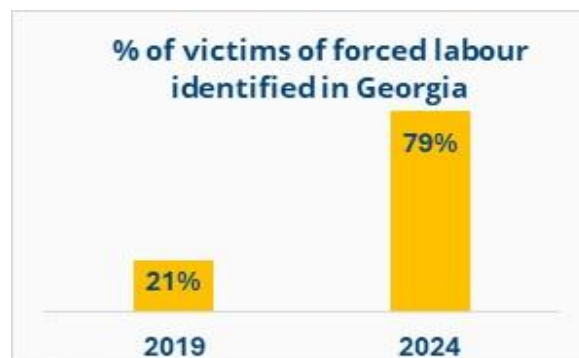
## While some participating States have begun to incorporate elements of simulation-based training exercises, full institutionalization remains limited

While the early projects were not explicitly designed to drive national policy change, the most recent one aims to institutionalize the simulation-based training methodology by incorporating simulation-based training exercises on combating trafficking in human beings into national training curricula and encouraging national authorities to replicate

the approach independently, with the hope that the exercises would become integrated into formal national training curricula. However, to date, most countries still rely on OSCE support for implementation. Of the 11 countries where simulation-based training exercises have been conducted, only France has independently replicated the exercise.

While full institutionalization remains a challenge, participation in such training often creates a ripple effect. Many practitioners cited cost and logistical complexity as barriers to national uptake but reported integrating simulation-based techniques into other training activities. In Italy, small-scale simulations and role-playing exercises were introduced for territorial commissions, asylum authorities and law enforcement academies. In Finland, one participant used their experience to design a police and border guard training programme featuring role-playing and mock interviews. The approach proved so effective that demand exceeded expectations, benefiting over a thousand officers.

**Figure 2: Increase in the identification of victims of labour exploitation**



Elaborated by consultant

However, broader institutionalization of the methodology remains difficult. Among the five countries consulted for this assessment, only Georgia had formally committed to incorporating simulation-based training exercises on CTHB into its National Action Plan (NAP), something likely to happen in 2025. A few stakeholders confirmed that some of the approaches learnt in the training had partly been incorporated into NAPs, referral mechanisms and internal guidelines on human trafficking, or had subtly or informally shaped procedures and practices. Others noted plans to use insights from the simulation-based training exercises to advocate for legislative changes, such as the revision of the criminal code or the inclusion of trauma-informed approaches in internal guidelines.

### **The longer-term outcomes of simulation-based training exercises: enhanced capacity to identify human trafficking**

The primary goal of the OSR/CTHB's flagship multi-project initiative on simulation-based training exercises is to strengthen the capacity of OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation to effectively investigate and prosecute trafficking in human beings, while ensuring the prompt identification and assistance of victims through a multi-agency, victim-centred and human rights-based approach.

In Georgia, one of the few countries to have conducted multiple national simulation-based training exercises, stakeholders reported that the knowledge and skills gained significantly improved the country's ability to identify cases of labour exploitation. As a result, the proportion of forced labour victims (both statutory and non-statutory)<sup>6</sup> among

<sup>6</sup> Georgian law distinguishes between a "victim of trafficking" and a "statutory victim of trafficking". The former status is granted within 48 hours by a government agency, while the latter is determined by law enforcement under the Criminal Procedure Code. Despite the different procedures, both statuses provide equal access to legal, psychological, medical and rehabilitation services, as well as the same rights during investigations and prosecutions.

all trafficking victims increased from 21 per cent in 2019 to 79 per cent in 2024. Stakeholders noted that strengthened collaboration between the Labour Inspectorate and the Ministry of Internal Affairs played a key role in achieving these noticeable results.

Some of this progress was also reflected in the 2023 and 2024 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Reports, which highlighted structural and procedural changes, such as updates to an Memorandum of Understanding between the Central Criminal Police Department mobile units and labour inspectors for joint inspections, the creation of a specialized labour inspection group, and new guidelines for identifying labour trafficking victims. While these outcomes cannot be entirely attributed to OSCE simulation-based training exercises, testimonies suggest it has been a significant contributing factor to these advancements.

Another stand-out case involved a representative from Iceland's organized crime unit, whose participation in a regional simulation-based training exercise proved pivotal in the success of a major national anti-trafficking operation. She described the simulation as a "game changer", marking her first exposure to anti-trafficking work. The insights she gained directly informed a major operation involving over 100 officers, which garnered significant media attention.<sup>7</sup> The operation led to the identification of dozens of Vietnamese labour trafficking victims and the detention of several suspected perpetrators. This success was also highlighted in the 2024 US Department of State report.<sup>8</sup> She also emphasized that connections made during the simulation-based training exercise significantly strengthened cross-sector relationships, with key contacts now being "just a phone call away".

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ruv.is/english/2024-03-06-dozens-are-suspected-victims-of-human-trafficking-406691>;  
<https://www.icelandreview.com/es/news/society/over-100-officers-involved-in-major-crime-operations-yesterday>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/iceland/#:~:text=The%20government%20identified%2036%20trafficking,foreign%20nationals%3B%20one%20was%20Icelandic.>

## > How the OSCE contributed to the changes

The initiative to hold simulation-based training, launched in 2016 by the OSR/CTHB, evolved through three distinct phases, each with its own scope and focus. The first project, **Combating Human Trafficking along Migration Routes** (2016–2018), prioritized international simulation-based training exercises that brought together participants from across the OSCE region and beyond. Building on that foundation, the second phase, **Combating Human Trafficking along Mediterranean Migration Routes** (2019–2021), maintained the international dimension. The current and third phase of the initiative, titled **Combating Trafficking in Human Beings: Sustaining Multi-Agency Collaboration through National Simulation-Based Trainings**, marks a shift in focus. It emphasizes national and regional training formats aimed at strengthening collaboration among domestic agencies and fostering regional networks.

Originally designed in response to the refugee and migration crisis of 2015, the training has since evolved to address a broader range of human trafficking patterns and trends, beyond the migration context.

### Training methodology

The training methodology involves anti-trafficking practitioners engaging in live action, simulated scenarios to identify and investigate cases and detect victims. A **fictional world** with country laws and profiles of perpetrators and victims is created by a team of experts so that participants can “**learn by doing**” and receive feedback from instructors.

A core feature of OSCE simulation-based training exercises is their strong emphasis on **multi-agency collaboration** and a **multidisciplinary approach to case management**. These training courses bring together a broad spectrum of anti-trafficking stakeholders, including law enforcement officers, prosecutors, social workers, representatives from NGOs and financial investigators to jointly tackle **simulated scenarios of human trafficking** inspired by **real-life cases**. In national simulation-based training exercises, the scenarios reflect the most pressing trafficking trends within the country, while regional exercises highlight dynamics shared across neighbouring states.

Unlike conventional training that relies on lectures or table-top discussions, and often focuses narrowly on legal aspects, this approach is grounded in hands-on, **experiential learning**, prioritizing the development of **practical skills**, such as trauma-informed interviewing and collaborative decision-making. Trainees are challenged with emerging trends and forms of exploitation, as well as with **non-stereotypical victim and perpetrator profiles**, including child victims, victims belonging to minority groups, or victims with a disability. The training also equips professionals with **technical tools and**

#### Professional background of trainees

- Financial Investigators
- Criminal Investigation Units
- Labour Inspectors
- Prosecutors
- NGOs
- Public Social Services and Child Protection Authorities
- Lawyers
- Migration Authorities

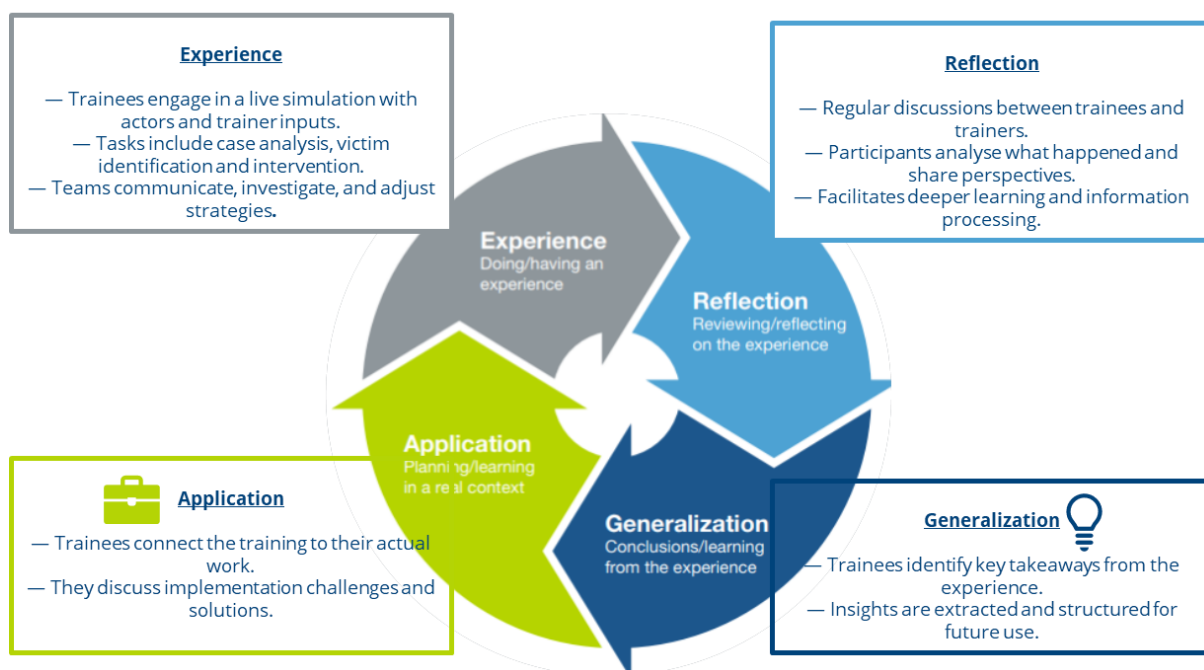
**methodologies** essential for addressing the evolving nature of human trafficking. Participants learn to identify victims that are being exploited online, recognize indicators of trafficking activity on websites and digital platforms, and trace illicit financial flows linked to trafficking networks. These **technical skills** are taught alongside practical competencies and soft skills, such as case co-ordination and trauma-informed interviewing.

The training aims to:

- foster a multi-agency, multidisciplinary and human rights-based approach to case management;
- integrate victim-centred, trauma-informed practices across detection, investigation, protection and assistance efforts; and
- strengthen practical, cross-sector collaboration through professional networks within and across borders.

**Figure 3: An overview of the training cycle**

**Simulation-based training: a step-by-step learning process**  
**“How immersive scenarios enhance learning and real-world application”**



**Organization of simulation-based training exercises**

Since 2016, the OSR/CTHB has delivered 24 simulation-based training exercises to over 1,000 practitioners from 68 countries, including 55 participating States and seven Partners for Co-operation.

Donors (participating States) along with partner organizations typically covered the bulk of training costs. The OSR/CTHB covered core components such as accommodation, catering and the development of training scenarios and materials, while encouraging high-income countries to finance the travel costs of their own trainees. To promote

inclusivity, the OSR/CTHB fully covered the participation costs of NGOs when financial constraints could have limited their involvement.

Partners such as UNODC, the International Centre for Migration and Policy Development, INTERPOL, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Labor Authority contributed either funding or expert support. National partners, including the Italian Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units, the Academy of Law Enforcement Agencies under the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan and relevant ministries, provided in-kind contributions.

### **International simulation-based training exercises**

Since 2016, the OSR/CTHB has conducted **six international simulation-based training exercises** in English and Russian, engaging around 400 professionals. Early sessions were open to any interested participants. However, the 2019 evaluation highlighted the importance of involving a critical mass of professionals from each participating country to help ensure that lessons learned during the training translated into real-world change. In response, the OSR/CTHB adopted a team-based approach, encouraging applications from multi-agency national teams composed of law enforcement officers, prosecutors, lawyers, social workers, NGO representatives, labour inspectors and others. This strategic shift, while reducing the number of countries represented in each training, significantly enhanced the quality and depth of national participation. It fostered stronger inter-agency collaboration within countries and increased the likelihood of lasting, systemic impact after the training concluded.

### **Regional simulation-based training exercises**

Since 2016, the OSR/CTHB has conducted **three regional exercises** targeting trafficking patterns in Central Asia, the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea. The Office responded to regional demand, often partnering with local organizations. In June 2023, the Office conducted the first regional simulation-based training exercise for Central Asia, involving practitioners from across the region. In November 2023, it conducted a simulation-based training exercise jointly with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, benefiting over 50 anti-trafficking professionals from Finland, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania and Sweden. In October 2024, approximately 60 anti-trafficking practitioners from Italy, Malta, Spain, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia joined the first Mediterranean regional simulation-based training exercise, which included participants from both OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation. At the time of writing, the OSR/CTHB is preparing to conduct a simulation-based training exercise in collaboration with the International Justice Mission, bringing together professionals from the Netherlands, Germany, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland.

### **National simulation-based training exercises**

Since 2016, the OSR/CTHB in partnership with relevant field operations has supported over **15 national simulations** in Italy, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Albania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine ran multiple simulations, showing sustained engagement.

France remains the only country to fully replicate a simulation independently.<sup>9</sup> Others have relied on OSCE field operations or OSR/CTHB support. Georgia is planning on holding a third national simulation-based training exercise in 2026. Georgia's increasing national ownership of simulation-based training exercises has significantly reduced its reliance on OSCE support, now limited to only covering expenses, such as catering and equipment. This reflects Georgia's commitment to sustaining such multi-agency training initiatives independently.

### **Building the capacity of participating States to independently conduct simulation-based training exercises**

The OSR/CTHB has actively worked to build the capacity of participating States to design and replicate simulation-based training exercises on combating trafficking in human beings. The OSR/CTHB regularly invited representatives from national anti-trafficking bodies to observe simulation-based training exercises, providing them with first-hand understanding of the logistical, operational and technical aspects involved. To further strengthen their expertise, the OSR/CTHB encouraged participants to take part in multiple training editions, each time assuming different roles to build versatile, well-rounded experience. This approach is designed to create a critical mass of professionals with the skills and confidence to independently conceptualize and implement simulation-based training exercises on combating trafficking in human beings within their own national context.

In 2019, the OSR/CTHB published *A Practical Handbook on How to Conduct Simulation-Based Training Exercises to Combat Human Trafficking* in English and Russian, offering a structured step-by-step guide to support replication. The handbook was designed to promote the sustainability of the methodology. In the past year, the handbook has recorded 165 interactions, according to OSCE communications data.

---

<sup>9</sup> According to an evaluation conducted in 2019, the idea of replicating the national training was a result of inviting French practitioners to participate as trainees or observers in previous international simulations. The OSR/CTHB supported French organizers with expertise and guidance.

## > Concluding observations

### A high-quality, unmatched training experience

Simulation-based training has set a new benchmark in anti-trafficking capacity-building, frequently cited in manuals and publications of other organizations. Interviewees described it as a “game changer”, emphasizing that “nothing else compares”. The exercises’ realism, paired with emotional and psychological depth, creates an immersive experience that demands full engagement. Participants consistently highlighted this as a defining feature. This distinctive approach has not only sharpened individual skills but also increased demand from participating countries, reinforcing its reputation as a leading model in the field.

### Institutionalizing the training methodology and ensuring sustainability

While simulation-based training exercises have proven highly effective in strengthening individual capacities, its institutionalization and long-term sustainability is a challenge. Due to their complexity and cost, these exercises have so far been only feasible for the OSR/CTHB, which, thanks to donor support, has the financial resources and personnel to organize them. Despite the OSR/CTHB’s efforts to build training capabilities within participating States and Partners for Co-operation, a cascading effect has yet to materialize, suggesting the need for a more strategic approach. Introducing a Training-of-Trainers component could be a step forward, though it is unlikely to be sufficient on its own.

Overall, embedding these simulations in national frameworks or action plans has proven difficult. A key barrier is that participants are often frontline officials without sufficient decision-making authority, limiting the training’s influence on policy and practices. Although decision-makers—including donors, representatives from participating States interested in replicating the exercise at the national level, and partners from other international organizations—have been invited as observers to encourage institutional adoption, this strategy has had limited impact so far, and evidence of direct policy changes remains anecdotal. Many stakeholders suggest that for decision-makers to drive adoption, their engagement must be more substantial, ensuring they fully grasp the value of the experience. Rethinking their role and participation could be key to overcoming this barrier.

### The importance of strategic participant selection and regional focus in simulation-based training exercises

All sources agreed that the selection of participants is crucial for the success of simulation-based training exercises, as proximity and real opportunities for collaboration play significant roles in fostering long-term co-operation. While international events offer valuable exchange, they often fall short in promoting sustained collaboration. Many participants found that regional simulations, where countries shared similar contexts and were geographically closer, were more effective in encouraging post-training co-operation on real cases. This reinforces the importance of selecting participants who have the chance to collaborate in their professional roles after the training. It also validates the Office’s move toward regional training sessions and international events that focus on

fewer countries but bring more participants from each, ensuring more meaningful and sustained collaboration after the training.

## > Data collection summary

