



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland

Annual Report 2023



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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Justice is pleased to present the fifteenth Annual Report on Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland (2023), covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023. The report fulfils Ireland's reporting obligations under Article 19 of Directive 2011/36/EU¹ on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings.

The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 outlines the definition and key characteristics of human trafficking.
- Chapter 2 presents statistics on victims of human trafficking identified in Ireland.
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of trafficking trends across Europe.
- Chapter 4 describes Ireland's State and NGO-led response, including supports for victims.
- Chapter 5 summarises international assessments of Ireland's efforts and international cooperation mechanisms.
- Chapter 6 highlights key developments and progress during 2023.
- Chapter 7 provides an overview of information and outreach.
- Chapter 8 is the conclusion.

In 2023, 53 victims of human trafficking were identified by An Garda Síochána (AGS), including 5 minors. As in previous years, the majority of incidents of human trafficking reported in Ireland related to sexual exploitation, accounting for 28 victims. A further 16 victims were identified as experiencing labour exploitation, while 9 cases related to forced criminality.

This represents an increase of 11 identified victims compared to 2022, when 42 victims were reported. It is recognised that official figures under-represent the true scale of trafficking, as many victims remain unidentified. At EU level, [Eurostat](#) recorded 10,093 registered victims of trafficking in 2022, based on official national reporting.

The Department of Justice continues to ensure that funding is available to NGOs playing a crucial role in assisting victims of human trafficking to access supports to aid their recovery from their ordeal. For 2023, the Department of Justice allocated funding of €5.8 million to more than 60 organisations supporting victims of crime, including victims of trafficking. The €5.8 million is an increase of over 25% on the previous total fund of €4.6 million made available in 2022.²

On 6 November 2023 the [Third National Action Plan \(NAP\) to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027](#) was published. The Action Plan builds on previous work and reflects an increased understanding of the complexity of trafficking, with a focus on prevention, identification, protection, and partnership.

¹ Article 19: 'Member States shall take the necessary measures to establish national rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms. The tasks of such mechanisms shall include the carrying out of assessments of trends in trafficking in human beings, the measuring of results of anti-trafficking actions, including the gathering of statistics in close cooperation with relevant civil society organisations active in this field, and report.'

² [Minister Harris announces €5.25 million in funding for organisations supporting victims of crime](#). The €5.8 million is an increase of over 25% on the previous total fund of €4.6 million made available in 2022.

Key measures include the development of a national training framework, enhanced awareness-raising, and actions to strengthen supports for victims.

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation continues to be recognised in Ireland as a form of gender-based violence. Measures to support victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are therefore reflected, where appropriate, within [Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2022–2026](#), which sets out a five-year programme of reform aimed at achieving a society that does not tolerate domestic, sexual, or gender-based violence.

A priority action under the Zero Tolerance strategy in 2023 was the establishment of Rosa’s Place, a dedicated, female-only accommodation centre for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Operated by the International Protection Accommodation Service, the centre opened in November 2023 and provides accommodation for up to eight victims, alongside tailored supports. Learning from the pilot will inform the future development of specialised accommodation provision.

Another development arising from the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence in 2023 was work undertaken to establish a standalone Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence agency, Cuan. The agency is scheduled to be established in January 2024 and will have responsibility for the coordination, monitoring, and implementation of the Zero Tolerance strategy. While human trafficking and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are distinct policy areas, there is overlap in cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

EU DIRECTIVE 2024/1712

In 2011, the EU adopted a Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting the victims of this crime. This is a key instrument in the fight against human trafficking as it sets minimum rules concerning the definition at national level of criminal offences and sanctions. It also includes EU-wide rules to strengthen prevention and protection of victims. Although the objectives of Directive 2011/36/EU remain relevant, several challenges have since arisen or gained importance, which are addressed through the targeted revision of this Directive.

In April 2023 Ireland opted into the European’s Commission’s Proposal for a Directive amending Directive 2011/ 36/EU on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.

The recast Directive, [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1712](#), will add forced marriage, illegal adoption, and the exploitation of surrogacy as recognised types of exploitation covered by the EU’s anti-trafficking law. This will take into account the prevalence and the relevance of these forms of exploitation.

This update also requires EU countries to make sure that people who knowingly use services provided by victims of trafficking can face sanctions. Ireland’s Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 created a specific offence of paying for sexual activity with a trafficked person.

As is the case in the current Directive, the new types of exploitation (forced marriage, illegal adoption, and surrogacy) will be punishable by a maximum penalty of at least five years of imprisonment, or of at least ten years of imprisonment in case of aggravated offences.

1. HUMAN TRAFFICKING EXPLAINED

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Human Trafficking is a crime and a human rights violation. For a situation to be one of trafficking, three distinct elements (act, means, and purpose) must be fulfilled:

- The ACT of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons must be done by...
- The MEANS, such as the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments, and it must be for...
- The PURPOSE OF EXPLOITATION i.e. sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced criminality or organ removal.

Child trafficking - an important note:

A child cannot consent to being trafficked; therefore, the MEANS element does not apply to children. In the case of a child, the mere ACT of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving a child for the PURPOSE of exploitation constitutes trafficking.

Similarly, exploitation of a child in and of itself, without the 'Act' element, while constituting another criminal offence, will rarely amount to human trafficking.



Victims of trafficking are often invisible to the public eye.

The presence of the three distinct elements is observed in the definition of human trafficking as set out in both the **Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** and the **UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime**:

“Trafficking in persons shall mean the 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 to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”³

In Ireland, these definitions have been incorporated into the **Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008** and the **Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) (Amendment) Act 2013**.

WHY DOES IT HAPPEN AND WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?

Trafficking in human beings is a high-profit, low-risk crime driven by supply and demand. Criminal networks or individuals exploit a range of ‘push and pull’ factors, including poverty, inequality, lack of economic opportunity, and the demand for cheap labour and sexual services. These factors increase vulnerability to exploitation and can result in individuals becoming victims of trafficking.

Trafficking can occur across borders or within a single country, and victims may be exploited in one jurisdiction and identified in another. A person who has been subjected to trafficking is a victim of trafficking regardless of where the exploitation occurred. Ireland may be a destination country for persons who have been trafficked or exploited in other jurisdictions, and such persons may be identified as victims of trafficking in Ireland.

Victims of trafficking may be exploited across a range of sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, hospitality, domestic work, and the service and entertainment industries. Forms of exploitation include sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, and forced criminality, including involvement in illegal drug cultivation or distribution.

PEOPLE SMUGGLING VS. HUMAN TRAFFICKING

It is important to distinguish between trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling, which are legally and conceptually distinct phenomena.

Trafficking in human beings involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons for the purpose of exploitation. It is characterised by the use of force, coercion, deception, abuse of power, or the exploitation of a position of vulnerability. For adult victims, consent is irrelevant where any of these means have been used.

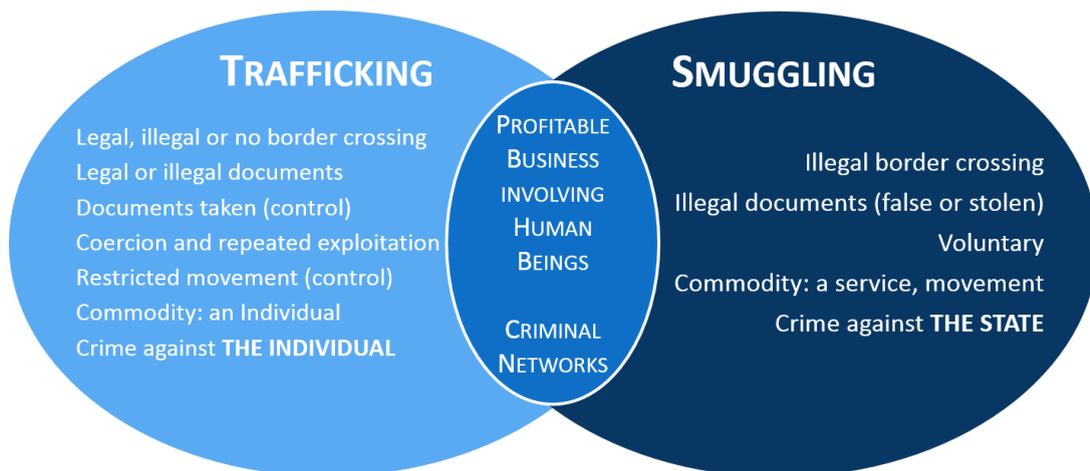
³ Article 3, [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#) | OHCHR

Migrant smuggling, by contrast, involves the facilitation of a person's irregular entry into a State for financial or material gain. While smuggling may involve dangerous or degrading conditions, it is generally characterised by the consent of the individual being smuggled to the act of facilitation.

What begins as a smuggling situation may evolve into trafficking where a person who has been smuggled is subsequently subjected to exploitation through force, coercion, deception, or abuse during or after the smuggling process.

The key distinctions include:

- Migrant smuggling involves the facilitation of irregular entry into a State, whereas trafficking involves exploitation and does not require illegal entry.
- Victims of trafficking may enter a State legally or illegally, while smuggling necessarily involves irregular border crossing.
- Migrant smuggling must involve the crossing of an international border; trafficking can occur both across borders and within a single country.
- Smuggling typically ends once the migrant reaches their destination, whereas trafficking involves ongoing exploitation.
- In cases of trafficking, any initial consent given by an adult victim is rendered irrelevant where coercive, deceptive, or abusive means are used



2. EXTENT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN IRELAND

A note on statistics:

Estimating the prevalence of trafficking in human beings is inherently challenging. Identified victim numbers are relatively low each year, and trafficking is a clandestine crime that often overlaps with other forms of criminal activity. In addition, where overall numbers are small, isolated incidents involving larger numbers of victims can have a disproportionate effect on annual figures. For these reasons, the statistical information presented in this section reflects the data available to the

relevant authorities and provides an analytical overview, rather than a definitive measure of the scale of trafficking in Ireland. It should also be noted that an identified victim of trafficking may not be linked to a trafficking offence that occurred within the State, as victims may be identified in Ireland where the exploitation took place wholly or partly in another jurisdiction.

The 2023 Annual Report applies the same classification approach as in previous years. In line with international best practice, victims of offences prosecuted under section 3(2) of the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998, as amended, are not included in trafficking statistics where the offence does not meet the legal definition of trafficking in human beings. This approach ensures consistency in reporting and alignment with internationally recognised standards.

2023 OVERVIEW

There were 53 victims of human trafficking identified by An Garda Síochána in 2023. 28 of these were victims of sexual exploitation and 16 were victims of labour exploitation. There were 9 victims identified trafficked for the purposes of forced criminality. 5 of the 53 victims identified were minors.

Table 1 Total number of victims identified in Ireland in 2023

	No.	% Total
Total Victims Identified	53	100%
Adult	48	91%
Minor	5	9%

Table 2 Trafficking by exploitation type

	No.	% Total
Trafficking for sexual exploitation	28	53%
Trafficking for labour exploitation	16	30%
Trafficking for forced criminality	9	17%
Trafficking for Organ Removal	0	0%
Total	53	100%

Table 3 Source countries		
	No.	% Total
Nigeria	17	32%
Romania	6	11%
South Africa	5	9%
Latvia	4	7.5%
Vietnam	2	3.8%
Democratic Republic of Congo	2	3.8%
China	2	3.8%
Ukraine	2	3.8%
India	2	3.8%
Kenya	1	1.9%
Nicaragua	1	1.9%
Albania	1	1.9%
Bangladesh	1	1.9%
Pakistan	1	1.9%
Brazil	1	1.9%
England	1	1.9%
Norway	1	1.9%
Czech Republic	1	1.9%
Zimbabwe	1	1.9%
Sudan	1	1.9%
Total	53	100%

2019-2023 DATA

The tables that follow outline the number of victims that have been identified in Ireland over the last 5 years, the nature of the exploitation they have been subject to and their region of origin.

VICTIMS BY YEAR, AGE AND GENDER

Table 4 shows the number of victims of human trafficking identified by An Garda Síochána by year of detection, age and gender. There have been 219 victims detected over the last 5 years with 53 victims identified in 2023.

Table 4 Identified victims by year, age, and gender				
Year	Age	Female	Male	Total
2019	Adult	31	2	33
	Minor	7	2	9
	Total	38	4	42
2020	Adult	33	5	38
	Minor	-	-	-
	Total	33	5	38
2021	Adult	28	16	44
	Minor	-	-	-
	Total	28	16	44
2022	Adult	23	14	37
	Minor	4	1	5
	Total	27	15	42
2023	Adult	38	10	48
	Minor	4	1	5
	Total	42	11	53
Total	Adult	153	47	200
	Minor	15	4	19
	Total	168	51	219

VICTIMS BY REGION AND EXPLOITATION TYPE

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the 219 victims of human trafficking by region of origin. In the last 5 years, 24% of identified victims came from the EEA region, with 59% from the Africa region and 8% from the Asia region.

Year	Region of Origin	Total
2019	Africa	31
	EEA	8
	South America	1
	Asia	2
2020	Africa	23
	EEA	9
	Non-EEA Europe	2
	South America	2
	North America	1
	Middle East	1
2021	Africa	29
	EEA	9
	Non-EEA Europe	1
	South America	1
	Asia	3
	Ireland	1
2022	Africa	21
	EEA	11
	Non-EEA Europe	1
	South America	0
	Asia	6
	Middle East	1
	Ireland	2
2023	Africa	27
	EEA	12
	Non-EEA Europe	4
	South America	2
	Asia	7
	Middle East	1
Total	Africa	131
	EEA	49
	Non-EEA Europe	8
	South America	6
	North America	1
	Asia	18
	Middle East	3
	Ireland	3
Total	219	

VICTIMS BY YEAR, EXPLOITATION AND GENDER

The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) (Amendment) Act 2013 came into effect in August 2013 and expanded the definition of human trafficking to include exploitation of a person for the purpose of forced begging and for forced participation in criminal activities for financial gain. These specific categories of alleged exploitation were previously recorded as ‘uncategorised exploitation’ or ‘labour exploitation’.

Table 6 below illustrates the trend in exploitation type of those victims identified in Ireland.

Year	Exploitation	Female	Male	Total
2019	Sexual	33	1	34
	Labour	2	1	3
	Other*	3	2	5
2020	Sexual	24	2	26
	Labour	8	2	10
	Forced Criminality	1	1	2
2021	Sexual	24	1	25
	Labour	4	15	19
2022	Sexual	23	1	24
	Labour	3	12	15
	Forced Criminality	-	2	2
	Other	1	-	1
2023	Sexual	28	-	28
	Labour	8	8	16
	Forced Criminality	4	3	7
	Other	2	-	2
Total	Sexual	132	5	137
	Labour	25	38	63
	Forced Criminality	5	6	11
	Other	6	2	8
	Total	168	51	219

*Other denotes a mixture of Forced Criminality and Labour and Sexual exploitation

3. EXTENT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN EUROPE

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, reported that in 2022 there were 10,093 registered victims of trafficking in human beings in the EU and 2097 convicted traffickers.⁴ However, the number of convicted persons remained much lower than the number of those suspected of trafficking in human beings.

Women accounted for nearly two-thirds (62.8%) of victims of trafficking but less than a quarter of suspected and convicted traffickers. In 2022, 37% of the registered victims of trafficking in the EU were citizens of Member States.

The highest rates in the EU per one million inhabitants were observed in Luxembourg (119), Estonia (65), Austria (50), the Netherlands (46), Finland (43), Malta (42), Italy (36), Greece (34), France (30), Romania (26), Portugal (24) and Hungary (23) - while the lowest rates were observed in the Czech Republic (2), Slovenia (2), Spain (5) and Lithuania (5). To note, higher rates could be linked to a greater capacity of the national system to identify victims, rather than a higher prevalence.



In 2022, there were 10,093 registered victims of trafficking in the EU.

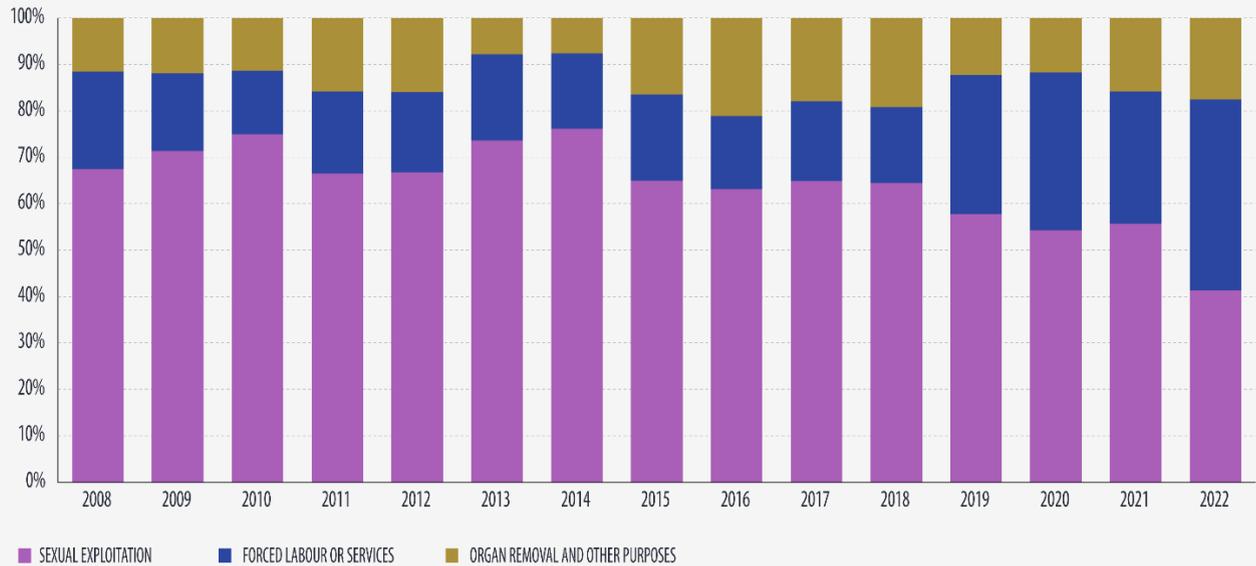


⁴ [10 093 registered victims of human trafficking in 2022 - News articles - Eurostat](#)

As shown in the graph below ,sexual exploitation was still the predominant form of exploitation in 2022, at 41.4%, although the prevalence is the lowest in the 2008-2022 period. Meanwhile, exploitation by forced labour and services reached the highest prevalence in 2022, at 41.1 %. Organ removal⁵ and other exploitative purposes, including benefit fraud, criminal activities and forced begging, stood at 18% in 2022.⁶ (See graph below.)⁷

Forms of exploitation for registered victims of trafficking in human beings, 2008-2022

(%)



⁵Organ removal is a form of trafficking in which individuals are exploited for organs. Although victims often appear to have consented to the removal of their organs, their consent is invalid when deception, fraud or abuse of a position of vulnerability is involved. In such cases, they are considered victims of human trafficking. The traffickers, who are usually part of sophisticated criminal networks, profit by selling these organs to recipients who are unable or unwilling to wait for legal transplants.' [Explainer: Understanding Human Trafficking for Organ Removal](#)

⁶ [10 093 registered victims of human trafficking in 2022 - News articles - Eurostat](#)

⁷ The graph above was calculated on responding countries and on known values. No adjustments were made.

More than one form of exploitation can be recorded for a victim. Organ removal and other purposes including use for benefit fraud, criminal activities and forced begging.' [Trafficking in human beings statistics Highlight 24-01-2024.png \(4000x2250\)](#)

4. IRELAND'S RESPONSE TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

INTERNATIONAL LAW

Ireland's national legislation has its foundation in the global and European commitment to fight human trafficking. The key international instruments are:

- The UN Palermo Protocol of the year 2000: A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- The Council of Europe Convention against Human Trafficking: A 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, ratified July 2010.
- EU Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN IRELAND

Ireland's legislation, combined with administrative measures for victim support, fully implements these international treaties.



The key legal instruments in Ireland are:

- [The Criminal Law \(Human Trafficking\) Act 2008](#). This is the main human trafficking Act which defines the crime and its penalties, with the exception of child sex trafficking. The Act criminalises: the trafficking of adults; child trafficking for purposes other than sexual exploitation (dealt with by the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998 – see below); prostituting a trafficked person; and the payment for sex with a trafficked person.
- [Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998](#). This Act covers child trafficking, child sex abuse and child pornography. In relation to human trafficking, the legislation criminalises child trafficking for sexual exploitation.
- [The Criminal Law \(Human Trafficking\) \(Amendment\) Act 2013](#). The 2013 amending Act modified the definition of Labour Exploitation to bring it into line with ILO definitions of forced labour and gave effect to the EU Directive 2011/36/EU.

STATE SUPPORTS FOR VICTIMS

IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS

A victim of trafficking may access assistance through a number of routes. Individuals may come forward directly to An Garda Síochána or to another State service. Victims may also be identified by An Garda Síochána during policing operations, or may seek support from non-governmental organisations, some of which receive State funding, such as Ruhama and Migrant Rights Centre Ireland.

Potential victims may also be encountered by a range of other bodies, including the Health Service Executive, Tusla – Child and Family Agency, the Workplace Relations Commission, embassies, and members of the public.

Public awareness plays an important role in the identification of potential victims of trafficking. Information on the indicators of human trafficking is available through the [Blue Blindfold](#) website.

NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES FOR SUPPORT

Ireland provides a victim-centred system of State supports for victims of human trafficking who have been identified by An Garda Síochána. These supports are delivered through existing administrative arrangements commonly referred to as the National Referral Mechanism. This framework supports the State, working in partnership with civil society, in meeting its obligations to protect and promote the human rights of victims of trafficking. Available supports include accommodation, medical services, legal aid, and advice, among others.

At any stage of the process, or where a victim does not wish or is not required to remain in the State, including for the purposes of a criminal investigation, voluntary return to their country of origin may be facilitated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM delivers assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes, which are available to victims of trafficking of any nationality who wish to return home voluntarily but lack the means or necessary documentation to do so. IOM maintains offices in many countries and works with local partners to support reintegration, including through access to accommodation, medical assistance, and other supports.

On 5 May 2021, Government approved the development of a revised National Referral Mechanism for the identification of victims of human trafficking and the provision of supports. Work to progress this reform has continued during the reporting period.

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

The close co-operation between stakeholders in the fight against trafficking is recognised internationally as a key element of a successful anti-trafficking strategy.

- The **Department of Justice** coordinates policy on human trafficking in Ireland and works in collaboration with other Irish government agencies, and non-government organisations.
- The **Human Trafficking Investigation and Coordination Unit (HTICU)** is part of the **Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB)** and officers of this Unit have particular expertise in regard to trafficking in human beings.
- The **Anti-Human Trafficking Team (AHTT)** of the **Health Service Executive (HSE)** delivers an individual care plan for each victim of human trafficking.
- The **Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth** provide full board accommodation and ancillary services through the **International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS)** to international protection applicants who are identified or suspected victims of human trafficking, following referral by An Garda Síochána under the National Referral Mechanism.
- Solicitors of the **Legal Aid Board** provide legal aid and advice to trafficking victims.
- **Ruhama** is a Dublin-based NGO which works on a national level with women affected by prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Ruhama provides a service to women who are currently involved in on-street and off-street prostitution, women who are exiting prostitution, women who are victims of sex trafficking and women who have a history of prostitution.
- **Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)** is a national organisation working to promote justice, empowerment and equality for migrant workers and their families. The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland provides information, advocacy and legal support to migrants and their families all over Ireland. The organisation works to identify and support victims of trafficking for labour exploitation and supports the growth and development of a number of action groups that enable vulnerable migrant workers to work together and improve working conditions in specific sectors.

Other organisations active in the provision of services to victims of trafficking include:

- **Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI)** works to secure improvements in the rights and protections of migrants and their families in Ireland through working on policy and awareness on issues of migration, integration, and human trafficking. The Immigrant Council of Ireland has an independent law centre and operates a helpline for immigration queries.
- **Sexual Violence Centre Cork (SVCC)** is a Cork-based organisation working towards the elimination of sexual violence in society by raising awareness about the prevalence, incidence, and dynamics of interpersonal violence within society. Its services include crisis support counselling, advocacy, a telephone helpline, and a Sexual Assault Treatment Service (SATS).
- **Doras** is an organisation that works to support and promote the rights of migrants living in Limerick and the wider Mid-West region. The organisation provides specialised direct support to victims of human trafficking and to women engaged in or exiting from prostitution.
- The **International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** is an international organisation whose primary responsibility lies in assisting persons in returning to their country of origin if they so wish. Assistance is provided to both EU and non-EU nationals alike.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

In November 2023, the Department of Justice published the Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027. The Action Plan builds on the work of the first and second National Action Plans and provides a framework for a whole-of-government response to preventing and combating human trafficking in the State.

The objectives of the Action Plan include reducing the demand that drives human trafficking, improving the identification of and supports for victims, strengthening the enforcement of victims’ rights and the prosecution of perpetrators, and enhancing coordination across Government Departments and agencies.

During the reporting period, work continued to strengthen coherence between the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking and Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2022–2026, particularly in relation to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. While trafficking and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are distinct policy areas, areas of overlap arise in relation to victim supports and responses to sexual exploitation.

Actions under Zero Tolerance relevant to this overlap include engagement with individuals involved in the sex trade, safeguarding checks in relation to persons and premises associated with organised prostitution, and participation in nationally and internationally coordinated operational days of action targeting organised prostitution, brothel-keeping, and the purchase of sex. The strategy also includes research and scoping work to inform future communications in relation to prostitution, its societal impacts, and its links to trafficking.

5. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

CROSS BORDER CO-OPERATION

Irish authorities continue to work closely with law enforcement partners in Northern Ireland to support a coordinated, all-island approach to tackling organised criminal activity, including human trafficking. This cooperation includes joint operational activity, intelligence sharing, and cross-agency engagement.

During the reporting period, An Garda Síochána engaged with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in investigations targeting organised crime groups involved in organised prostitution and the trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation, where a cross-border dimension was identified. This cooperation supports the disruption of trafficking networks operating across jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

JOINT AGENCY TASK FORCE (JATF)

The Joint Agency Task Force (JATF) provides a formal mechanism for structured cross-jurisdictional cooperation between Irish and UK authorities in addressing organised and cross-border crime. The JATF is led by senior representatives of An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Revenue

Commissioners and HM Revenue and Customs, with participation from other agencies including the Criminal Assets Bureau and the UK National Crime Agency.

Trafficking in human beings, including child trafficking, is one of six priority threat areas identified by the JATF. The Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) is responsible for this priority area and participates in JATF-related operational activity where a cross-border element is identified. This includes structured engagement with PSNI counterparts and participation in joint operational discussions and activity during the reporting period.

INTERPOL TASK FORCE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING (ITHT)

Ireland continued to participate in the Interpol Task Force on Human Trafficking, an international forum for law enforcement cooperation focused on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings at a global level.

Through participation in the Task Force, Irish authorities engage in the exchange of intelligence, good practice, and learning on investigative approaches to trafficking. Ireland also continued to make use of Interpol's 24/7 information systems to support international cooperation and to assist other law enforcement authorities in trafficking-related investigations.

EMPACT (EUROPEAN MULTIDISCIPLINARY PLATFORM AGAINST CRIMINAL THREATS)

Ireland continued to engage with EMPACT, the European Union's operational framework for addressing serious and organised international crime. Human trafficking remains a priority crime area within the current EMPACT cycle.

The Garda National Protective Services Bureau participated in EMPACT activities related to trafficking in human beings, including attendance at relevant project meetings and engagement in operational action plans. These action plans support cooperation between Member States in addressing trafficking routes, organised criminal networks, and cross-border investigations. Ireland's participation contributes to coordinated EU-level responses to trafficking and related organised crime.

JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAM (JIT)

Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) are a key instrument for international cooperation in complex cross-border criminal investigations. They enable participating authorities to exchange information directly, coordinate investigative activity, and conduct joint operations within agreed legal frameworks.

An Garda Síochána has participated in JITs involving international partners, including in cases with a trafficking dimension. Participation in JITs allows for real-time cooperation, efficient use of resources, and enhanced coordination between law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities across jurisdictions.

EU NETWORK OF NATIONAL RAPORTEURS OR EQUIVALENT MECHANISMS ON TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Officials from the Department of Justice participated in meetings of the EU Network of National Rapporteurs and Equivalent Mechanisms (NREM). The network facilitates cooperation between Member States in monitoring trafficking trends, measuring the impact of anti-trafficking measures, and improving data collection and reporting.

Discussions during the reporting period focused on victim protection and support, law enforcement and judicial cooperation, and prevention measures, including reducing demand for trafficking. The network also provides a forum for sharing experience on the implementation of EU anti-trafficking legislation and policy.

NATIONAL ANTI-TRAFFICKING CO-ORDINATORS AND RAPORTEURS

The Department of Justice participated in the annual meeting of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs or Equivalent Mechanisms, co-organised by the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

These meetings support international cooperation through the exchange of experience, identification of common challenges, and discussion of effective responses to trafficking in human beings. Participation contributes to the development and strengthening of Ireland's national anti-trafficking framework in line with international standards.

SANTA MARTA GROUP

Ireland continued its engagement with the Santa Marta Group, an international alliance of law enforcement leaders and other stakeholders focused on addressing human trafficking and modern slavery.

EUROPEAN NETWORK ON VICTIMS' RIGHTS (ENVR)

Officials from the Department of Justice attended meetings and workshops of the European Network on Victims' Rights (ENVR). The ENVR provides a platform for cooperation between Member States on issues related to the protection and support of victims of crime, including victims of trafficking.

Participation in the network supports the exchange of expertise and contributes to the development of victim-centred policies and practices at EU level.

6. PROGRESS IN 2023

Throughout 2023, Ireland progressed a range of measures to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, with an increased focus on strengthening victim identification, enhancing victim-centred supports, raising awareness, and building professional capacity. Key developments during the year included the following:

- Publication of the Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027 on 6 November 2023. Key features of the Plan include the development of a national training framework for professionals who may encounter potential victims of trafficking, awareness-raising and information dissemination initiatives, and actions aimed at improving supports for victims.
- The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023 was published in July 2023 and progressed through the Oireachtas during the year.
- In April 2023, Ireland exercised its right to opt in to the European Commission proposal for a Directive amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.
- Continued training was delivered to border management and airport personnel, healthcare professionals, and social workers who may come into contact with potential victims of trafficking, supporting improved identification and referral practices.
- Funding totalling €5.8 million was allocated in 2023 to more than 60 organisations supporting victims of crime, including victims of trafficking. This represented an increase of approximately 25 per cent compared to 2022.
- There was a continued increase in the overall number of trafficking-related files received by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.
- Rosa’s Place, Ireland’s first specialised accommodation centre for female victims of trafficking, opened in November 2023. The centre was established as a pilot programme, with a view to applying learning from its operation to the future development of additional specialised accommodation.
- The Workplace Relations Commission increased the number of fishery inspections carried out in 2023 to 88, compared to 35 in 2022. The Labour Inspectorate identified nine suspected cases of trafficking for labour exploitation, all of which were referred to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau.

INVESTIGATIONS AND PROSECUTIONS

In 2023, 53 cases of trafficking in human beings were identified in Ireland. These cases relate to trafficking that may have taken place within the State or in another country, with victims identified while present in Ireland.

During the year, the State pursued prosecutions against 11 individuals for trafficking offences. These prosecutions related to 18 victims, comprising 11 cases of sexual exploitation and 7 cases of labour exploitation. Of the individuals prosecuted, 7 were charged with trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and 4 for trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation.

In terms of outcomes, three trafficking convictions were secured in 2023. These included one new conviction for trafficking for sexual exploitation and two prior trafficking convictions that were upheld on appeal. A further case resulted in convictions for related offences where trafficking charges were withdrawn due to evidential difficulties.

DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW ACTION PLAN

The Third National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027 was published in November 2023. Drafting of the plan involved consultations with representatives from Civil Society organisations and Department and Agencies representatives. This Action Plan aims to further strengthen the whole-of- government approach in supporting victims and decreasing incidents of trafficking in the State. The specific goals of the NAP are to work towards the abolishment of human trafficking and its demand, to identify and support victims of trafficking, to enforce the rights of victims and bring the perpetrator to justice.

REVIEW OF ATYPICAL WORKING SCHEME FOR FISHERS

The Atypical Working Scheme for Fishers was in operation from 2016 – 2022. Within that period, concerns were raised that the scheme was potentially leaving workers vulnerable to labour exploitation as they were linked to a particular employer and challenges could arise.

A review of the operation of the scheme was conducted in 2021 and 2022. Following publication of the review group’s report in October 2022, the Atypical Working Scheme for Fishers was closed to new applications on 31 December 2022 and since 1 January 2023 it is no longer possible for a crew member of an Irish-registered fishing boat to apply for the Atypical Working Scheme. A key recommendation of the review was for a transition of responsibility for work permission in this sector to the Employment Permits Scheme. This brings practices within that sector in line with recruitment of non-EEA nationals seeking to work in other sectors. An employee granted an employment permit has all the employment rights of an Irish citizen for the duration of that permit.

The full transition to employment permit access was completed and finalised by the end of 2023 and new recruitment of fishers, when required by the sector, will now take place through the Employment Permits Scheme. Fishers will now be able to avail of a Stamp 4 Permit. Some of the benefits of the Employment Permit Scheme over the Atypical Scheme for sea fishers in the Irish fishing fleets are higher salary thresholds for both the General Employment Permit and the Critical Skills Employment Permit and multi-year permissions - a general employment permit can be issued for an initial period of 2 years and can then be renewed for up to a further three years. After 5 years, the applicant may apply for long term residency, which, if their application is successful, will provide unrestricted access to the labour market.

PROVISION OF SPECIALISED ACCOMMODATION

As part of a transition to a new model of accommodation for International Protection applicants, the International Protection Accommodation Service has placed a focus on commissioning NGOs to provide targeted supports to meet the diverse needs of people in the International Protection system. This includes a programme to deliver a range of accommodation for vulnerable applicants, including victims of trafficking.

In November 2023, a specialised accommodation centre (Rosa’s Place), supported and funded by Department of Children Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), opened for referrals of female victims of trafficking. Rosa’s Place is an 8-bed accommodation unit providing specialist support for women who are identified as victims of trafficking, including those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In addition to the supports provided by the Health Service Executive, each service user will have an assigned case manager providing individualised assessment and support planning. The centre will operate as a pilot programme in 2024 with a view to applying learnings to the roll out of further specialised centres in the future.

NATIONAL RAPPORTEUR FOR ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Under Article 19 of the European Union (EU) Anti-Trafficking Directive all EU Member States are legally required to have National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms to assess trends, measure results of anti-trafficking actions, gather statistics and report. In October 2020, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) became Ireland’s Independent National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings.

The Commission’s task as Rapporteur is to provide effective, independent, and meaningful oversight of the State’s actions to combat human trafficking and to protect victims. A National Rapporteur is instrumental in collecting comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data, as well as the research and analysis of the trafficking situation in a State and systematically analysing the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies.⁸ IHREC as the National Rapporteur produces annual evaluation reports. These reports underpin effective monitoring and policy developments, and their main purpose is to provide a resource for national policy makers, practitioners, and researchers and to inform the public about the human trafficking situation in Ireland.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) published the [second evaluation of the implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) in September 2023. This report, focused on the period of January 2022 to December 2022, included a detailed evaluation of the State’s implementation efforts, alongside updated recommendations, and important priority areas for the State’s consideration.

⁸ Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, *The role of independent National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms in enhancing States’ anti-trafficking responses*, (OSCE, 2006) <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/9/503920.pdf>

7. VICTIMS' RIGHTS, AWARENESS RAISING AND PREVENTION

VICTIMS CHARTER AND VICTIMS' FORUM

The Victims Charter continued to provide a central, accessible source of information on victims' rights and available supports. In 2023, the Charter was further enhanced to improve accessibility and user experience, enabling victims to more easily locate information relevant to their engagement with the criminal justice system and to recovery supports more broadly. It is available in print, and online at www.victimscharter.ie

The Victims' Forum, established in 2022, remained operational during 2023. Co-chaired by a representative of the sector and a senior official from the Department of Justice, the Forum provides a structured platform for engagement between State bodies and civil society organisations funded under the Victims of Crime grant scheme. During the reporting period, the Forum convened facilitated workshops to agree its terms of reference, identify priority issues, and support collaborative approaches to improving service coordination and delivery for victims of crime. More information on the Forum can be found at [The Victims' Forum](#).

AWARENESS RAISING EVENTS

Awareness raising and information dissemination remained a core component of prevention efforts under the Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027. Initiatives during 2023 focused on ensuring that victims of crime, including victims of trafficking, had access to clear, accurate and multilingual information on their rights and available supports, particularly when engaging with the criminal justice system.

Key initiatives included:

- A national "Know Your Rights" awareness campaign highlighting core victims' rights, including access to interpretation and translation services, delivered in multiple languages.
- Continued development of the Victims Charter website, designed to provide clear and user-friendly information to victims at all stages of their journey.
- Distribution of multilingual print materials in public locations such as Garda stations, hospitals, courts, libraries and GP surgeries.
- Production of court-based information videos to inform victims about what to expect when attending court as witnesses.

CULTURAL MEDIATORS, PROTECT II

Throughout 2023, the Department of Justice continued to fund the International Organization for Migration's PROTECT II project, which supports migrants who are victims of, or at risk of, human trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence. The project focuses on:

- Training cultural mediators to act as bridges between service providers and migrant and ethnic minority communities;
- Building awareness of trafficking indicators and referral pathways among frontline professionals, including An Garda Síochána;
- Supporting culturally informed and trauma-aware service delivery for vulnerable groups.

As part of PROTECT II, the 'Anyone' awareness-raising campaign continued during 2023. The campaign aimed to challenge misconceptions about trafficking, highlight that exploitation can be hidden in plain sight, and raise awareness of the signs and indicators of trafficking across different forms of exploitation. Outreach activities were delivered through social media, transport hubs and public events, using multilingual materials.

In November 2023, IOM further promoted the campaign through participation in Dublin City Council's Inclusion and Integration Week, including screening of the short film [Anyone: Deceived](#).

TARGETED PUBLIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

In September 2023, a dedicated Crimecall segment on labour exploitation was broadcast nationally. The programme featured the account of a victim of trafficking for forced criminality and included expert commentary from the Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit. The episode reached an audience of over 260,000 viewers and contributed to public understanding of trafficking indicators and reporting mechanisms.

Targeted awareness raising also took place at the National Ploughing Championships 2023, where members of the Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit and the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit engaged directly with the public. The event provided an opportunity to raise awareness of trafficking risks in rural and agricultural contexts, with an estimated 2,500 members of the public engaged over the three-day event.

WEBSITES

The website, anyonetrafficked.com, was developed in conjunction with the 'Anyone' awareness raising campaign, to highlight the availability of supports and services for victims from the State as well as community and voluntary organisations active in this sector. IOM reported that there were 883 unique and organic visitors to the Anyone Trafficked website in 2023. All the telephone numbers which can be used to report information on human trafficking are listed on the trafficking websites – and [Blue Blindfold Campaign](#)

These websites are easily accessible, free, and provide a user-friendly overview of how the crime of Human Trafficking manifests in Ireland, how members of the public can spot and report the signs of trafficking, and how the State supports these victims once identified. The Blue Blindfold website provides a list of the important signs that may indicate a person has been trafficked for labour exploitation, domestic servitude, child trafficking, forced criminality and begging, forced marriage, and general exploitation.

WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMISSION

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) continued to contribute to prevention and demand reduction through outreach, information provision and enforcement activity. During 2023:

- 44 outreach presentations and information sessions on employment rights were delivered;
- Over 1.1 million users accessed employment rights information through the WRC website;
- Information was made available in up to 132 languages, including sector-specific materials for vulnerable worker groups.

The WRC also undertook targeted information measures for displaced persons from Ukraine, including the distribution of multilingual employment rights leaflets at points of entry and the publication of tailored online guidance in Ukrainian and Russian.

8. CONCLUSION

This report provides an overview of Ireland's response to trafficking in human beings during 2023, including victim identification trends, supports available, awareness raising activity, and relevant policy and operational developments. It reflects information provided by State bodies and funded civil society partners during the reporting period. Implementation of the Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027 will continue in 2024, with a continued focus on prevention, victim-centred supports, and effective law enforcement and international cooperation. The Department of Justice will continue to work with all stakeholders to strengthen the national response in line with Ireland's obligations and international standards.