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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

**Second report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings
(2018) as required under Article 20 of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and
combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims**

{SWD(2018) 473 final}

I. CONTEXT

Trafficking in human beings is a constantly evolving serious form of mostly organised crime. It brings high profits to the perpetrators, who abuse people's vulnerabilities and exploit the demand for the services provided by the victims. It results in irreversible harm to its victims, our societies and economies.

The link between trafficking in human beings and other serious crimes is increasingly understood. The complex interplay of supply and demand amongst perpetrators, abusers, profit-takers, exploiters and users creates a long chain of actors, whether they are knowingly or unknowingly involved. This chain must be broken in order to stop and effectively prevent this atrocious crime.

It is in this context that the Commission implemented the 2012-2016 EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings¹ ('the EU Strategy'). Further, in December 2017, in its Communication on reporting on the follow-up to the EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings and identifying further concrete actions ('the 2017 Communication')² the Commission also identified further concrete actions to improve prevention. The Commission continues to monitor how Member States implement Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims³ ('the Anti-Trafficking Directive').

This is the second Commission report on progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings. It is based on a wide range of sources, including:

- information gathered by the national rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms and transmitted to the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator⁴ by the Member States pursuant to Article 19 and 20 of the Anti-Trafficking Directive⁵;
- actions taken by the Commission and other stakeholders under the EU Strategy and the 2017 Communication;
- contributions submitted by civil society organisations participating in the EU Civil Society Platform and the e-Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings⁶ and,
- information from relevant EU agencies, and international and regional organisations.

This report, together with its accompanying staff working document, presents emerging patterns based on data and trends, actions taken under the EU Strategy and the progress in implementing the 2017 Communication, in line with the commitment undertaken therein. The report also analyses statistical data provided by Member States and presents an update on the

¹ COM(2012) 286.

² COM(2017) 728.

³ Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, OJ L 101, 15.4.2011.

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-anti-trafficking-coordinator_en

⁵ Under Art. 19 of Directive 2011/36/EU, the tasks of the national rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms should at least include 'carrying out assessments of trends in trafficking in human beings, measuring of results of anti-trafficking actions, including gathering of statistics in close cooperation with relevant civil society organisations active in this field, and reporting'. Art. 20 of Directive 2011/36/EU further stipulates that 'Member States shall transmit to the ATC the information referred to in Article 19, on the basis of which the ATC shall contribute to reporting carried out by the Commission every 2 years on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings'.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/media-outreach-els/eu-civil-society-e-platform_en

implementation of Directive 2004/81/EC⁷ on residence permits for victims of trafficking. The narrative information submitted by Member States mainly covers the period 2014-2016, while the report and staff working document draw on information from sources such as Member States, civil society, international organisations and Commission publications.

II. EMERGING PATTERNS AND TRENDS

The fourth exercise in the collection of statistics on trafficking in human beings (predominantly focusing on the period 2015-2016) presented in this second progress report⁸, provides more data than the previous ones. All Member States have provided statistical data, though at varying levels of detail. Eurostat has published two working papers on EU-level statistics in 2013 and 2014, updated in 2015, followed by a limited data collection exercise by the Commission for 2013-2014, reported in the first progress report⁹.

The data for 2015-2016 show similar patterns among registered victims and traffickers in contact with the police and criminal justice system to those found in previous reporting periods. These data concern those in contact with authorities and other organisations. There are reasons to believe that many victims and traffickers remain undetected and are therefore not included in these figures reported here. There are substantial differences in the way that Member States collect and record data, so there is a need for caution in any comparisons between them and over time.

For 2015-2016:

- There were 20532 registered victims of trafficking in the EU.
- 5979 prosecutions and 2927 convictions for trafficking in human beings were reported.
- 7503 people had formal contact with the police or the criminal justice system, that is were suspected, arrested or cautioned for a criminal offence concerning trafficking in human beings.
- Over half (56%) of trafficking in human beings was for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and this remains the most widespread form. Around one quarter (26%) was trafficking for labour exploitation, while other forms (such as forced begging, organ removal) (18%) made up the remainder. The majority (61%) of the registered victims of trafficking for labour exploitation are found in the UK, so data from the UK significantly changes the proportion of trafficking for labour exploitation at the EU level. If the UK data are not included, then the proportions within the EU change to: sexual 65%, labour 15% and other 20%.
- Females (women and girls) were over two-thirds (68%) of the registered victims (if UK data were not included they rise to 77%).
- Children were almost one quarter (23%) of the registered victims.
- EU citizens were (44%) of registered victims.
- The top five EU countries of citizenship of registered victims were Romania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Bulgaria. These are the same countries as in 2010-2012 and in the first Commission progress report.

⁷ Council Directive 2004/81/EC of 29 April 2004 on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings or who have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, who cooperate with the competent authorities, OJ L 261, 6.8.2004.

⁸ More details can be found in the accompanying staff working document and in the linked data analysis study containing updated statistics and methodological details.

⁹ COM (2016) 267.

- The top five non-EU countries of citizenship of registered victims were Nigeria, Albania, Vietnam, China and Eritrea.

The Commission has worked with Member States, Eurostat and statistical authorities to improve the data available. There is more detail, as well as new information, on the different ways in which state services engage, support victims and act to reduce the impunity of traffickers. This work included requests for information in relation to victims, such as the use of international protection status, and in relation to reducing impunity, such as the criminalisation of the use of services of victims of trafficking. However, gaps remain in the provision of data by Member States, which place limits on the reliability and comparability of the information.

Member States should improve the recording and registration, as well as reliability, availability and comparability of data, but also ensure they can break it down by gender, age, forms of exploitation, citizenship of victims and perpetrators, as well as by assistance and protection. Reliable data is a prerequisite for adequate monitoring and ensuring better policy-making.

1. Forms of exploitation

Trafficking is a complex crime that develops often according to demand and the inventiveness of traffickers, with exploitation lying at its centre and taking many forms.

- **Trafficking for sexual exploitation**

Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation continues to be the most reported form. In 2015-2016, there were 9 759 registered victims of sexual exploitation. i.e. over half (56%) of the registered victims who had a recorded form of exploitation, predominantly women and girls (95% of registered victims of sexual exploitation). A sharp increase has been noted in the number of women and girls trafficked through the Central Mediterranean route for sexual exploitation in the EU¹⁰. Victims are exploited in the sex and entertainment industry, facilitated by the rapid technological development and the use of internet for advertising services and the recruitment of victims. Emerging patterns reported include pornography, the use of live web cameras and live distant child sexual abuse.

Europol's finding¹¹ that 'there are Member States where prostitution is legal, making it much easier for traffickers who wish to use a legal environment in order to exploit their victims' is echoed by Member States' reports that traffickers tend to drive their victims to countries where prostitution is regulated and lawfully practised. In this respect, Europol¹² finds that in some EU Member States, where prostitution is legal, suspects were able to exploit children alongside adults victims in legal businesses such as brothels, red light districts, sex clubs, often with the support of the business managers, since prostitution of minors can be very profitable, as 'clients' are generally prone to pay more to have sex with a child.

While the majority of Member States' reports mention trafficking for sexual exploitation as the most frequent form, information on the actions taken in the Member States demonstrate a tendency to focus on other forms of exploitation.

¹⁰ https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis_for_2018.pdf

¹¹ Europol, Situation Report 'Trafficking in Human Beings in the EU', February 2016.

¹² [Europol, Situation Report on Criminal networks involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the European Union, 2018](#)

Member States should continue and further intensify their efforts to address trafficking for sexual exploitation, and make this a priority. They must put in place measures that boost their capacity to detect victims of all forms of exploitation, but this should not be done to the detriment of victims of sexual exploitation.

- **Trafficking for labour exploitation**

Trafficking for labour exploitation affected around one quarter (26%) of registered victims. Labour exploitation primarily affects males (80% of the registered victims) although in certain sectors of labour victims are predominantly women (such as domestic work). Several Member States have reported that trafficking for labour exploitation is on the rise.

According to Europol¹³, ‘organised criminal groups cater to the growing demand for cheap labour across many Member States, and take advantage of discrepancies in labour legislation to organise the exploitation of victims in the grey zone between legal employment and labour exploitation.’

Victims are exploited in the sectors of construction, agriculture and forestry, manufacturing, the catering industry, care services, cleaning services and domestic work, entertainment, fishing, hospitality, retail and transportation. Numerous reports by Member States and submissions by the civil society refer to the role of labour inspectors in detecting victims, and/or the need for increased cooperation between law enforcement bodies and labour inspectorates.

It is encouraging to witness progress in identifying victims of trafficking for labour exploitation, especially given the funding allocated by the Commission for this form. The Commission will continue monitoring the implementation of the Employers’ Sanction Directive and the Anti-Trafficking Directive.

The Commission notes however that not all exploitative situations in the EU labour market are a result of trafficking in human beings.

- **Other forms of exploitation**

In 2015-2016, other forms of exploitation accounted for around a quarter (18%) of the registered victims. This includes trafficking for forced marriage, forced begging, forced criminality, among other purposes. These ‘other forms’ are associated with petty crime, property crime and benefit fraud. Trafficking for forced criminality and forced begging are reported to be on the rise.

Member States report that instances of victims entering into sham or forced marriages are increasing. Such victims are also subjected to sexual exploitation, forced child bearing and/or labour exploitation, or forced into marrying non-EU citizens to regularise their stay. Europol¹⁴ links this development to the increase in recent years in the number of irregular migrants seeking to transition to legal residence status after failed asylum applications. Victims of this form of trafficking are often forced to take loans or apply for social benefits.

¹³ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment-2017>

¹⁴ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment-2017>

Member States should intensify actions, including information and awareness-raising campaigns, to address all forms of exploitation. They should also introduce targeted training for civil registrars and other officials likely to come into contact with victims of trafficking.

2. Emerging patterns of trafficking

Internal trafficking, within the territory of a Member State, is reported to be on the increase. Member States report that the age of identified victims is decreasing. Children from Eastern European countries and Roma communities continue to be particularly vulnerable, with traffickers exploiting kinship.

Other emerging patterns include cases of pregnant women being trafficked for the purpose of selling their new-borns, trafficking for organs or human tissue removal and child marriage. People with developmental and physical disabilities are also increasingly targeted by traffickers.

3. Trafficking in the context of migration

The migration crisis is reported to have heightened the risks of trafficking. In its risk analysis for 2018, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency noted that ‘although human trafficking from Nigeria has, for decades, supplied the European sex market, the spike in the number of Nigerian females arriving in mixed migration flows to Italy (and, to a lesser extent Spain), has brought the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings from Nigeria to light’¹⁵.

Member States report on victims of trafficking found in asylum application systems and on organised criminal groups abusing asylum procedures. Member States also report traffickers requiring victims to apply for international protection in an attempt to regularise the victims’ status.

Trafficking in human beings should be addressed in the context of migration, taking into account new patterns such as the disproportionate targeting of women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Efforts should continue to ensure that all victims are identified and provided with assistance and protection appropriate to their gender, age and the form of exploitation.

4. Profile and how the traffickers work

Member States report that traffickers are constantly changing the ways they work, using less physical force but more psychological and emotional violence. They also report that the number of own nationals treated as suspects by Member States, as well as of women victims who are turned into perpetrators, is increasing. Criminal networks are highly mobile and often transnational, with cells in the victims’ countries of origin, transit and destination. According to Member States, traffickers use the internet and social networking tools to recruit victims, for logistics, to enable the exploitation of victims, and as a marketing platform for prostitution. Member States also report that the use of encryption technologies raises difficulties for investigative authorities. They also highlight links with drug trafficking, document fraud, currency falsification, property crimes, migrant smuggling, arms and illegal tobacco trafficking.

¹⁵ https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis_for_2018.pdf

In view of the ever-adjusting methods used by traffickers, Member States should ensure specialised training for professionals likely to come in contact with victims, which is adapted to the role of new information technologies, and initiatives to prevent trafficking in human beings.

III. COUNTERING THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY AND PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Countering the culture of impunity and preventing trafficking in human beings are the Commission's key priorities according to its 2017 Communication. The Commission will also continue to focus on disrupting the business model of trafficking, following the money and untangling the trafficking chain. This section examines progress in investigating, prosecuting and convicting perpetrators, as well as measures taken to improve prevention and reduce demand.

1. Encouraging the criminalisation of the use of services provided by the victims

Further encouraging those EU Member States, to the extent they have not done so, to criminalise those who knowingly use the services of victims is at the core of the Commission's priorities for preventing trafficking in human beings as set out in the 2017 Communication. Article 18(4) of the Anti-Trafficking Directive encourages Member States to consider criminalising the use of services of victims of trafficking in the knowledge that they are trafficked. Furthermore, the analysis in the Commission's 'Users' Report'¹⁶, which assesses the impact of national legislation criminalising the use of services from victims of trafficking, reveals a diverse legal landscape within the EU.

Only three Member States were able to provide statistical data on police contacts, prosecutions and convictions related to the criminalisation of the users of such services. Accordingly, in 2015-2016, 2 suspects (persons brought into formal contact with the authorities), 135 prosecutions, and 18 convictions were reported in the EU concerning the use of services which are the objects of trafficking in human beings.

Member States informed mainly on measures related to the use of services provided by victims of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation. Member States also reported on action to address impunity for users of victims of trafficking for labour exploitation targeting, among others, subcontractors, intermediaries and supply chains.

While civil society organisations have expressed concerns over a lack of political will to implement relevant laws, Member States reported on new legislation related to criminalising those who knowingly use services provided by victims of trafficking.

As noted in previous Commission reports, further efforts are needed to counter impunity by ensuring that those who exploit and abuse victims are brought to justice. The Commission continues to encourage Member States which have not yet done so to proceed to the criminalisation of those who knowingly use services provided by victims of trafficking.

¹⁶ COM(2016) 719,
http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/report_on_impact_of_national_legislation_related_to_thb_en.pdf

2. Increasing and the effectiveness of prosecutions and convictions

In 2015-2016, Member States reported 5979 prosecutions and 2927 convictions for trafficking in human beings. Generally, cross-border cooperation through Europol and Eurojust channels has increased. In 2016-2017, there were 2 476 new cases, and 8 411 new operational messages referred to Europol. In 2014-2015, a large number of joint investigation teams were set up within Eurojust.

Despite some increase in recent years, the overall level of prosecutions and convictions remains very low. Due to the complex nature of such investigations, there is often insufficient evidence to sustain a prosecution and bring a case to court. Consequently, charges are brought against offenders for other crimes, such as money laundering or prostitution-related offences.

An increase in the awareness and use of financial investigations has been observed, and measures have been taken to make investigations more effective. Eurojust reports¹⁷ in its analysis of 28 cases that 75 % of them were tackled by joint investigation teams, and touched on issues such as money laundering investigations and following money flows. It also reported improved and increased use of freezing, seizing and confiscating the proceeds of crime, and proceeds being used to support victims.

Civil society submissions have stressed the need to prioritise investigations and prosecutions of trafficking for sexual exploitation, and to address the excessive burden placed on victims and their testimonies, as well as the length of criminal proceedings.

The Commission actively supports national authorities to focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions through measures allowing them to follow the money and the profits from trafficking, and criminalising those who use the services of victims.

3. Joint actions and cross-border cooperation

Often the chain of organised criminal groups spreads outside national borders, requiring transnational cooperation in investigations.

EU agencies and Member States report an increase on cross-border cooperation and joint investigations, with an increase also in the number of joint investigation teams set up with non-EU countries, especially countries in the Western Balkans. Member States stress the need to strengthen international cooperation and coordination between relevant intelligence, law enforcement, prosecutorial and judicial authorities in order to intensify the exchange of information and streamline investigations.

Member States should continue enhancing transnational law enforcement and judicial cooperation. Cooperation with non-EU countries must be further enhanced by capacity building for joint investigation teams.

4. Awareness raising, training and the trafficking chain

Numerous initiatives including awareness-raising actions, training courses, legislative actions and other types of guidance¹⁸ take place in Member States. Member States cooperate with

¹⁷ Eurojust, Implementation of the Eurojust action plan against trafficking in human beings 2012-2016, 2017.

¹⁸ Legal obligation of Member States under Art. 18(3) of the Anti-Trafficking Directive.

civil society organisations on trainings, but also use EU networks such the European Judicial Training Network or the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (‘CEPOL’).

Awareness-raising campaigns in Member States target demand for services exacted from victims of trafficking, but limited information was shared on their impact. At the same time, civil society organisations focus on the need for campaigns or educational programmes aimed at discouraging demand for sexual exploitation, and call for awareness-raising campaigns targeting clients.

Member States report on having taken legal and other measures to address the responsibility of legal persons in the broader trafficking chain, including cooperation with the private sector.

Awareness-raising and training measures should be targeted and aimed at achieving concrete results, especially to prevent the crime. Member States are encouraged to better measure their impact. Upholding accountability towards the victims also means ensuring that businesses are held accountable for their actions or inaction.

IV. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND ASSERTING THE RIGHTS OF VICTIMS

A comprehensive framework to assist, support and protect victims when asserting their rights has been put in place under EU law, however there continue to be obstacles in implementing it¹⁹.

Member States report that they are cooperating more closely with civil society organisations, whereas civil society stresses the need to formalise procedures to facilitate, promote and enhance information exchanges across all actors involved.

The Anti-Trafficking Directive reinforces the rules on protection and assistance to victims laid down in Directive 2004/81/EC on temporary residence permits. However, Member States have adopted only a limited number of relevant legislative initiatives since the Commission’s last implementation report in 2014²⁰, mostly aimed at strengthening legal certainty for victims and improving the functioning of the residence permits mechanism²¹.

1. Identifying the victims of trafficking in human beings

The first progress report notes that the possibilities for victims to assert their rights are hindered by them not being identified or correctly referred. According to Member States, the level of threshold applied for initial identification of victims and the length of procedures vary across the EU. Member States also highlight the role of local authorities in identifying victims. Particular challenges arise when identifying victims in mixed migration flows and international protection procedures, including in cases where the victims have been exploited outside of the jurisdiction of a Member State.

¹⁹ The Commission’s ‘Transposition Report’ concluded that national authorities have made substantial efforts, but that there is still significant room for improvement, particularly as regards protection and support measures. Report from the European Commission assessing the extent to which Member States have taken the necessary measures in order to comply with Directive 2011/36/EU in accordance with Article 23(1), COM(2016) 722 final.

²⁰ COM(2014) 635.

²¹ More information on the application of this Directive can be found in Annex I of the staff working document.

There is limited information on the impact of measures to identify, assist, support and protect the victims. Civil society organisations report difficulties in relation to asylum procedures and issuing residence permits to victims of trafficking, who are non-EU nationals.

Despite these challenges, Member States consider that progress has been made in identifying victims, not least due to increased cooperation among different national authorities and sectors involved, and cooperation at cross-border level.

The early identification of victims of trafficking through national referral systems, which should include asylum systems, is crucial in preventing the crime and protecting the victims.

2. National and transnational referral mechanisms

Many formalised or non-formalised national referral mechanisms have been set up in the Member States, and they are making efforts to ensure the mechanisms function more smoothly and effectively.

Member States report increasing transnational cooperation, including with non-EU countries, international organisations and civil society. Moreover, they acknowledge that cooperation and established networks have improved the length of procedures, highlighting the support of EU funding.

Civil society organisations point to persistent shortcomings in ensuring a multidisciplinary approach. They also note the failure to involve civil society, the lack of appropriate training and capacity building for all actors involved; and the lack of uniformity in decisions related to victims' referral.

In line with the 2017 Communication, the Commission has launched a study on reviewing the functioning of the Member States' national and transnational referral mechanisms.

3. Assistance to and protection of victims of trafficking

Despite Member States reporting improvements in the assistance, support and protection provided to victims, and in speeding up procedures, their unconditional and effective access to these rights is not always guaranteed. Improvements include using modern technology to avoid secondary victimisation in criminal proceedings, and establishing shelters and appropriate accommodation for victims.

Identifying child victims and helping them access their rights, irrespective of their country of origin, remains a challenge. Member States report having specific procedures in place, including through legislation, to address child trafficking, also in mixed migration flows. Civil society organisations stress the need to focus on ensuring appropriate expertise, training and capacity building for all relevant actors, including guardians, social and health workers.

The Commission has made recommendations to the Member States for strengthening the protection of migrant children.

4. Compensation of victims and the non-punishment principle

Compensation for victims is often hindered by the complexity and diversity of the national compensation schemes and the differences in compensation payments across Member States. Some Member States report that victims have received compensation. However, submissions

of the civil society point out to difficulties particularly for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, who are not able to meet requirements for producing evidence of verifiable expenses or employment losses.

On non-punishment there was limited information provided to the Commission by the Member States. In particular, victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and for forced criminal activities are at high risk of being punished for crimes they have been forced to commit, as reported by civil society submissions.

Member States are encouraged to give effect to national legislation by ensuring tools are in place for victims to access compensation, including appropriate training and capacity building of relevant professionals.

V. COORDINATED AND CONSOLIDATED RESPONSE WITHIN THE EU AND BEYOND

The EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator provides strategic orientation to ensure coherent policies both within the EU and with non-EU parties. The 2017 Communication made it a priority to develop a coordinated and consolidated response, both within and outside the EU²².

As a deliverable of the 2017 Communication, 10 EU agencies signed a Joint Statement of Commitment to work together against trafficking in human beings²³. National authorities invited the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator to conduct country visits, and numerous exchanges with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders have taken place. Moreover, three studies planned in the 2017 Communication have been launched²⁴.

There are numerous external policies, partnerships and dialogues with non-EU countries, which address trafficking in human beings, such as the Khartoum and Rabat processes, the follow up to the Joint Valletta Action Plan and the joint AU-EU-UN Task Force, as well as through its CSDP missions and operations. Moreover, the EU has funded numerous anti-trafficking actions in non-EU countries through its external financing instruments.

The allocation of EU funding in the area of anti-trafficking policy has been examined by the Commission's Comprehensive Policy Review²⁵. The Commission continues to publish calls for proposals to address trafficking in human beings under the Internal Security Fund and the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund. EU funding has become available in national programmes under shared management and direct grants. In their reports, many Member States refer to national and EU funding for anti-trafficking initiatives in 2014-2017. EU funding provisions to support anti-trafficking policy have been included in the Commission's

²² This is achieved through interactions with the EU Network of National Rapporteurs or Equivalent Mechanisms; the EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings; EU institutions (within the European Commission, with the European Parliament and the Council of the EU) and EU agencies, including justice and home affairs agencies, as well as strategic international partners in multilateral processes.

²³ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/heads-ten-eu-agencies-commit-working-together-against-trafficking-human-beings_en

²⁴ 1) Study on reviewing the Functioning of Member States' National and Transnational Referral Mechanisms, 2) Study on the economic, social and human costs of trafficking and 3) Study on the impact of the EU approach to combating trafficking for sexual exploitation. Tender available at: <https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/cft/cft-display.html?cftId=3932>

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/study_on_comprehensive_policy_review.pdf

proposals for regulations related to 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework²⁶. National funding is directed at actions on issues such as victims' assistance and support, but Member States report on the difficulty of estimating exact amounts. Civil society organisations decry the scarcity of financial support for victim support programmes at national level and the lack of sustainability.

The Commission encourages Member States to allocate sufficient resources for victim support services and to fight trafficking as a serious and organised crime. In this context, Member States are further encouraged to take maximum advantage of shared management funding and via the available direct grants provided in various Commission funding instruments.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The information on which this report is based demonstrates certain improvements, especially relating to cross-border cooperation, cooperation with civil society, use of financial investigations, setting up joint investigation teams, and developing national and transnational referral mechanisms.

Nevertheless, trafficking in human beings remains a crime characterised by impunity for the perpetrators and those who exploit the victims. The findings of this report do not indicate that trafficking has decreased. Further, the analysis of the data reveals a tendency to identify victims of prioritised forms of exploitation, with certain categories of victims placed at the forefront of action, while others receive less attention. Information from the Member States reveals persisting complexities and a lack of progress in key areas. The Member States must therefore make it a priority to take all the necessary measures.

Member States are further encouraged to take decisive measures and implement a comprehensive strategy that encompasses all aspects of the trafficking chain in order to counter impunity and foster demand reduction, not least by criminalising those who knowingly use the services of victims of trafficking. Victims continue to have limited access to their rights under EU law to protection and support, compensation and non-punishment.

The low numbers of convictions and prosecutions, together with the number of EU victims, suggest that the need to continue stepping up identification of victims, investigation, prosecution, collecting and improving data recording and registration, cross-border cooperation and raising awareness persists.

The Commission has taken a wide range of steps to address trafficking in human beings, implemented many of the concrete actions of the 2017 Communication and will continue to assist in every possibly way, including by financially supporting the development of policy and operational measures to eradicate trafficking in human beings.

²⁶ https://publications.europa.eu/en/web/general-publications/eu_budget_for_the_future and https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/factsheets-long-term-budget-proposals_en