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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human beings (Sixth Report) and setting out a renewed EU strategy

{SWD(2026) 311 final}

1. INTRODUCTION

This report is published at a pivotal moment when the current 'EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025[1]' ('the 2021-2025 Strategy') has reached the end of its implementation period, while new and evolving trends (particularly technology-facilitated trafficking) are increasingly reshaping the nature and scale of the threat and call for the EU to adapt its response.

The report provides an overview of the implementation of the actions set out in the 2021-2025 Strategy, identifies emerging challenges, and includes, as an annex the new 'EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings', announced in the ProtectEU: the European Internal Security Strategy[2]. In accordance with Article 20 of Directive 2011/36/EU[3] as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1712[4] (Anti-Trafficking Directive), it also presents a comprehensive assessment of the key trends, the main policy and operational developments from 2025 to 2026 at European and national levels and an analysis of statistics for the period 2023-2024, which is included in a Staff Working Document[5].

The report was drawn up with the support of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (EU ATC), and it is based on contributions from Member States through the EU Network of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs, independent bodies, EU Agencies[6], members of the EU Civil Society Platform against trafficking in human beings, and other documents from EU institutions, Member States and international organisations. The data used in the report was gathered by Eurostat from all the Member States via the national statistical authorities[7].

Trafficking in human beings is increasingly becoming a transnational and technology-enabled crime[8]. The misuse of online platforms has enabled traffickers to make their operations more professional, diversify their recruitment strategies, and reduce in-person interaction and their exposure to law enforcement. The boundaries between migrant smuggling and trafficking are increasingly blurred, particularly through deceptive

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[1] EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025.
[2] ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy
[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.
[4] Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.
[5] SWD(2026)311
[6] The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the EU Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA), the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the European Labour Authority (ELA).
[7] Since 2021, data is collected by Eurostat every year and is available in Eurostat's database under 'Crime and criminal justice' statistics.
[8] EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU SOCTA, 2025), The changing DNA of serious and organised crime, p. 2.

recruitment practices luring individuals into exploitative situations under the guise of employment, accommodation or transportation[9].

Recent developments indicate that criminal networks are rapidly adopting artificial intelligence (AI) and employing algorithmic targeting, encrypted communications and generative AI to recruit, coerce, manipulate, and control victims. The use of technologies enables traffickers to target a broader range of victims across linguistic and cultural boundaries, including the use of automated conversations in online recruitment and exploitation, which can have detrimental consequences[10].

The **Anti-Trafficking Directive** remains the cornerstone of the EU legal framework, setting out minimum standards for defining criminal offences, sanctions, victim protection and cross-border cooperation. The 2024 amendments, which had to be transposed into national law by 15 July 2026[11], have brought about major legal and organisational changes in Member States. As a result of those, some Member States have reshaped the coordination structure and reinforced assistance and support for victims of trafficking[12].

The EU's anti-trafficking policy has been equally shaped and reinforced by the strategic frameworks of the **ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy**[13] and **the European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy**[14], whose key initiatives actively contribute to the Member States' institutional, legal and operational capabilities to combat human trafficking, including a strong focus on assistance and support for vulnerable groups and victims.

2. TRENDS IN TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN THE EU

2.1. Victims (sex, age, citizenship)

During 2023-2024, the increasing trend in the number of registered victims of trafficking, which began in 2022, persisted with 20 022 victims registered in the EU. This represents a 16.1% increase compared to the 2021-2022 period, when 17 248 victims were registered[15]. However, **the actual number of victims is certainly higher** than reported data suggests, as statistics only account for victims that are identified by registering entities, namely law enforcement agencies, immigration authorities, social services and civil society organisations.

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[9] Europol, European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC, 2025), Annual Report, p. 6.
[10] OSCE (2024) NEW FRONTIERS: THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO FACILITATE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS.
[11] This report does not include an assessment of the Member States' transposition efforts.
[12] Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Italy and Sweden.
[13] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy (COM/2025/148 final).
[14] European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy - Migration and Home Affairs.
[15] Calculated based on Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_sex), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_sex__custom_22718139/default/table

As in previous years, trafficking in human beings mostly affected **women and girls, who accounted for 63% of all the registered the victims**, totalling 11 660 victims. Although this represents a slight percentage decrease compared to the previous reporting periods, 65% in 2021-22 and 66% in 2019-2020, the **absolute number of female victims increased by 8.8%** compared to 2021-2022, when 10 638 victims were registered[16].

The overwhelming majority (93%) of the victims trafficked for sexual exploitation were female, with 72% of them being adult women and 21% girls[17]. Conversely, men represent the majority (74%) of the victims trafficked for labour exploitation[18]. These numbers reflect long-standing gendered patterns in the types of exploitation prevalent across the EU.

A notable shift in the demography of registered victims emerged in 2023-2024 with non-EU nationals comprising 64% of all registered victims. 36% of registered victims were EU citizens, which represents an 8.4% decrease since the last reporting period and reverses the trend observed up to 2020 when EU nationals represented a larger share of registered victims. The top five EU citizenships of trafficking victims by number were French, Romanian, Polish, German and Hungarian, while the top five non-EU citizenships were Nigerian, Colombian, Moroccan, Brazilian and Ivorian. 28% of all victims were citizens of the Member State in which they were registered, which is a 6% decrease compared to the previous reporting period[19].

2.2. Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation

During the 2023-2024 reporting period, trafficking for the purpose of **sexual exploitation** continued to be the **most prevalent form of exploitation** in the EU. However, it continued to decline, **accounting for 48% of all victims compared** to 49% in 2021-2022 and 51% in 2019-2020. **The percentage of non-EU victims of sexual exploitation further increased to 53%**, compared to 51% in 2021-2022[20].

Sexual exploitation has shifted significantly to the online sphere, and victims are recruited and advertised through the internet on social media, adult websites, and in closed messaging groups[21]. The online environment expands a pool of potential victims but also broadens access to clients, while allowing criminals to minimise physical contact with both groups and avoid detection[22]. Criminals are manipulating the victims via diverse methods

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[16] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_vsage), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_vsage/default/table.
[17] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.
[18] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.
[19] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[20] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.
[21] Romania, Latvia, Czechia, Belgium, Malta.
[22] Europol Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2025; The 9th Annual Report of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre See also: https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-

(e.g. lover-boy, sex extortion, debt bondage and exploitation framed as a form of assistance)[23]. Online platforms and dating apps are increasingly utilised for 'live-streamed' exploitation, where victims are controlled remotely through digital means (e.g. webcam chats)[24]. Member States reported cases of extreme violence against the exploited victims either by the traffickers or the clients, when they were severely injured, attempted suicide or died[25].

Highly organised and violent criminal networks from Latin America increasingly recruit and traffic vulnerable women from Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and other Latin-American countries to Europe, including to Albania, Austria, France, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain and Croatia.

Operation Bogotá
During Operation Bogotá, Austrian law enforcement detected Latin American suspects who operated with a high level of mobility and entanglement with EU based criminal networks. Sexual services from the victims were advertised on adult websites, while negotiations on pricing and services were handled by call centres in Latin America, leaving victims with no control over their own lives. Traffickers oversaw every detail, from recruitment to money collection, often subjecting victims to psychological and physical violence, as well as to threats against family members in Colombia. These violent attacks were filmed by the criminals, who used the videos to intimidate other victims[26]. International cooperation between Albania, Croatia and Colombia, facilitated through Europol, was essential in linking the main organisers with local associates who acted on their behalf in transit countries and countries of exploitation.

Trafficking gangs also exploit EU citizens outside the EU. Following a three-year investigation, in early 2026 the Romanian and British authorities dismantled a network exploiting Romanian women in prostitution in the United Kingdom, both in short-term rental facilities or in street prostitution[27].

2.3. Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation

Trafficking for the purpose of **labour exploitation** remained the **second most prevalent** form of trafficking in human beings in the EU during 2023-2024 and **it increased slightly to 38%,** compared to 37% in 2021-2022[28]. It is the predominant form of exploitation in

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press/newsroom/news/over-30-potential-victims-identified-in-action-against-human-trafficking-enabled-online.

[23] Europol Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2025; IOM (2025). Europe and Central Asia Region on The Move: Migration Data Report 2023-2024.

[24] Romania, Latvia, Czechia, Belgium, Malta.

[25] Austria, Germany, Luxembourg.

[26] Dozens of sex trafficking victims in Austria – five arrests in Colombia - Criminal network forced its victims into sexual exploitation, relying on severe physical violence and threats against their families | Europol

[27] Romanian criminal network trafficking women to the United Kingdom rolled up | Eurojust | European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.

[28] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.

four Member States[29]. The number of victims has further increased by 15% and it affected 6 839 persons, compared to 5 940 victims in 2021-2022 and 3 940 in 2019-2020[30]. **The share of non-EU victims increased by 20 percentage points to 74%** in the EU in 2023-2024, which is a significant increase compared to the previous reporting period[31]. Non-EU victims have increasingly arrived from Asia, notably from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Vietnam, Thailand, China and Nepal, similarly to the previous reporting period[32].

The digital dimension also plays a continuing and increasing role in labour exploitation. Criminals lure victims into trafficking through false advertisements on legitimate online websites and in groups (e.g. targeting certain communities) on social media platforms[33].

The main sectors at risk of labour exploitation remain the same as in the previous reporting period, including agriculture, cleaning services, logistics, hospitality and manufacturing. These sectors are often marked by a high turnover of employees due to short-term and seasonal work. Moreover, domestic services and care remain at high risk for trafficking for labour exploitation[34] since labour inspections in private homes are legally restricted in many Member States and rare in practice. In some cases, victims of forced labour are also exploited by criminals to claim employment and social benefits, which are kept by the traffickers[35].

Victims are frequently recruited through false promises of work in their countries of origin, mainly outside the EU, where they face severe economic hardship and limited employment opportunities. In many cases, victims fall prey to highly sophisticated visa and document fraud schemes before even reaching the EU. Traffickers supply fraudulent documents, including forged residence permits and language certificates which facilitate their arrival or stay. Alternatively, victims often arrive legally with work or study visas issued by Member States. However, once their visa or residence permit expires, they are pushed into an irregular situation. This loss of legal status renders them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, as they fear deportation, lack access to labour rights and become dependent on traffickers. Trafficking for labour exploitation is becoming more and more professional, as traffickers establish legal entities such as job agencies and hospitality establishments[36]. In Sweden and Finland, major investigations took place involving the labour exploitation of berry pickers from partner countries (e.g. Thailand).

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[29] Belgium, Latvia, Luxembourg and Portugal.
[30] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.
[31] The citizenship of 5% of registered victims of trafficking for labour exploitation was reported as 'other'.
[32] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[33] Europol Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2025; Greece, Cyprus, Malta.
[34] Europol Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2025; Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Greece, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Malta, German civil society organisation (CSO), Portuguese CSO, Europol.
[35] Council of the Baltic Sea States (2024). Human Trafficking for Benefit Fraud and related Financial Fraud: Securing a Steady Revenue Stream.
[36] Czechia, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta, Europol.

How subcontracting chains can dilute responsibility while benefiting from exploitation – an example from France
France successfully investigated a human trafficking case in the champagne industry, where mainly African seasonal workers were exploited and housed in poor conditions during the 2023 harvest. The exploitation was organised through a service company which managed recruitment, transportation and housing via intermediaries. It was subcontracted by a local vineyard service company. The intermediaries and service company were convicted of human trafficking, while the principal company was convicted of undeclared work.

2.4 Trafficking in human beings for other forms of exploitation

During the reporting period, forms of trafficking in human beings, other than sexual and labour exploitation, **accounted for 15%**[37] of all victims[38], which is one percentage point more than in 2021-2022. Such forms of exploitation include forced criminal activities, forced begging and trafficking for organ removal. Moreover, the 2024 Eurostat data collection also included the three new forms of exploitation (exploitation of surrogacy, forced marriage and illegal adoption) under the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive.

Trafficking for **forced criminality** remains a persistent challenge[39] accounting for 2% of all victims (343) in 2023-2024, a slight decrease compared to 3% in 2021-2022. Despite this overall decrease, two Member States reported an increase in this form of trafficking[40]. Victims of forced criminality are often highly vulnerable individuals such as minors, migrants, and people experiencing severe poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation. Criminals also use call centres to coordinate victims across different locations to commit criminal offences[41].This form of exploitation can pose particular challenges for victim identification and protection, including the risk of being treated as offenders rather than being recognised as victim of trafficking.

The most common type of forced criminal activities are thefts, money laundering, property-related crimes and drug trafficking[42]. Belgium has identified an increase in the exploitation of minors from North Africa by organised crime groups in organised thefts and violence-as-a-service (VaaS)[43], in the context of drug trafficking[44]. **Social benefit fraud** affected 624 victims, mainly Polish nationals exploited in the United Kingdom.

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[37] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.
[38] In 2019-2020, other forms of exploitation represented 11% of cases of trafficking in human beings in the EU, while in 2021-2022 this figure was14%.
[39] Europol Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2025; The 9th Annual Report of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC); Spain, France, Netherlands, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, Eurojust, Belgian CSO.
[40] Belgium, Cyprus.
[41] Frontex, Warsaw police uncover criminal network involved in human trafficking and narcotics - English Section.
[42] Bulgaria, Greece, Belgium, Austria, Lithuania.
[43] VaaS refers to the outsourcing of violent acts to criminal service providers. This often involves the recruitment and use of young perpetrators to carry out threats, assaults or killings for a fee. See: Operational Taskforce GRIMM - Tackling violence-as-a-service and the recruitment of young perpetrators into serious and organised crime. | Europol.
[44] Belgium, Belgian CSO.

Forced begging remains present in Member States, representing 1% of registered victims (253), which is one percentage point less than in the previous reporting period[45]. Often the victims are children[46] or persons with disabilities[47], who suffer severe abuse from their family members, who are usually the traffickers[48]. Greece reported a forced begging case involving 12 Romanian victims. Poland reported a slight but noticeable increase in potential victims, including non-EU nationals from the Russian Federation and Ukraine, in forced begging.

Exploitation of forced marriage and sham marriages were also documented[49], accounting for 1% of registered victims (91)[50]. The reporting of such offences is usually very low due to family bonds[51]. Victims often face violence and threats (e.g. spreading their sensitive personal information online or threatening their family members), and may be unable to leave the marriage, or may never have consented to it in the first place[52]. Other forms of exploitation (sexual, labour exploitation or forced begging) can also happen in the marriage.

Massive sham marriage operation
The Cypriot law enforcement authorities together with Portugal and Latvia dismantled a massive sham marriage operation by an organised criminal group orchestrating 133 sham marriages concluded for residence rights in the EU. Vulnerable women were recruited in Portugal and in Latvia and were forced with bogus promises into marriages with Indian and Pakistani nationals[53].

During the reporting period, the Member States did not report **any exploitation of surrogacy** to Eurostat[54]. Greece reported **forced reproduction practices** with victims from Bulgaria, Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Romania and Greece.

Trafficking for organ removal remains underreported[55], representing 0.04% of registered cases (10), similar to the previous reporting period (less than 1%)[56]. Driven by a global shortage of legally donated organs, organised criminal groups exploit trafficking victims for organ removal and the sale of their organs. Detection remains difficult due to low

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[45] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[46] Cyprus, France, Bulgaria, Spain, Slovakia, Estonia, Greece, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, Italian CSO, Finnish CSO, Eurojust, Frontex.
[47] OSCE (2024). Invisible Victims: The nexus between disabilities and trafficking in human beings; Romania, Greece, Poland, Frontex.
[48] Greece.
[49] Spain, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia, Finnish CSO.
[50] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[51] KOK study: Neue KOK-Studie untersucht Zwangsverheiratung im Kontext von Menschenhandel | KOK gegen Menschenhandel.
[52] La Strada International (2025): 3646-LSI_IMPACT_The Legal and Policy Landscape on (Trafficking for the Exploitation of) Forced Marriage Across Europe.pdf; High levels of violence when children and women are forced into marriage | Swedish Gender Equality Agency; Finnish CSO.
[53] https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/15-arrested-for-arranging-sham-marriages-in-cyprus.
[54] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[55] Europol.
[56] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).

reporting rates, patient–doctor confidentiality constraints and challenges in proving the abuse of a position of vulnerability[57].

2.5 Child trafficking

In 2023-2024, child victims constituted **15% of the overall registered trafficking victims in the EU** (where the victim's age group was known) (2 913), which is a 0.88% decrease in absolute figures since 2021-2022 (2 939). In 2024, 1 577 child victims were registered, the second highest number since 2015 (the highest was in 2021 with 1 644 victims)[58]. The slight decrease in the reporting period may be linked to the continuing increase in online exploitation and grooming, whereby many (child) victims remain unidentified[59]. Child trafficking encompasses all forms of trafficking, with the most prevalent being sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced criminality[60].

77% of child victims were EU citizens and 72.4% of them were trafficked within their own Member State[61]. The proportion of child victims subjected to sexual exploitation increased from 22% in 2023 to 26% in 2024[62]. The hidden nature of child trafficking was further proven during the 2025 EMPACT Hackathon when investigators from Member States uncovered a dark web site where hundreds of traffickers offered a range of services involving both male and female victims of all ages. The prices ranged from USD 800 to USD 2 000 per hour, depending on the victim's age and perceived 'skills', while the sale of a permanent 'home' boy or girl was listed for between USD 20 000 and USD 60 000[63].

Beyond sexual exploitation, **recruitment of young people into criminality by organised crime groups remains a major challenge**, particularly in the context of trafficking for forced criminality. Traffickers often target children to commit criminal offences as their age may limit their criminal responsibility and the penalties they face, together with a lack of prior offences and lower likelihood of arousing suspicion in public spaces. Children and young adults are groomed through social media and gaming platforms into committing criminal offences where criminals glamorise crime. Such criminal activity may constitute recruitment for forced criminality where children are coerced and pressured into committing a crime.

Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes remain the main entry point for minors from **Africa and the Middle East**, accounting for 80% of total entries. Child trafficking in the **Western Balkans** continues to rise despite enhanced legal and practical

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[57] Focus Group of specialised prosecutors against human trafficking: Outcome Report of the 4th meeting | Eurojust | European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.
[58] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_ vsage), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_ vsage /default/table.
[59] See also: https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/threats-to-minors.
[60] Spain, Ireland, Italy, Slovakia, Czech CSO, French CSO, Spanish CSO, Frontex.
[61] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[62] Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_expsxa), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_expsxa/default/table.
[63] EMPACT Hackathon: 16 suspected human traffickers and 60 potential victims identified - During this third edition of the EMPACT Hackathon, 76 experts from 27 countries targeted human traffickers online | Europol.

response measures. Unaccompanied children remain vulnerable to trafficking. The main nationalities of the minors identified include Syria, Afghanistan, Egypt, Tunisia, Türkiye, Guinea, Morocco and Mali.

Half of child victim cases in Greece relate to unaccompanied children
In 2024 Greece observed a concerning trend involving unaccompanied children from Egypt arriving in large numbers, often in groups of more than ten. It also observed unaccompanied girls from Somalia arriving in Greece in significant numbers, with potential exposure to trafficking risks.

In cases of forced begging, children are forced to beg on the street either by organised crime groups or, in some cases, by their own family members. In addition to begging, organised crime groups exploit children across Europe to commit thefts, pickpocketing, burglaries, drug trafficking and sometimes even money laundering[64]. They take advantage of areas with high levels of tourism and large metropolitan transport hubs, strategically deploying child victims during seasonal tourist peaks, major public events and periods of perceived lower law enforcement activity. Recruitments predominantly take place within internal and familial settings with methods including grooming from early childhood, normalisation of criminal activity, emotional manipulation, financial dependency or threats of violence[65].

2.6 Trafficking in human beings in the context of migration

In 2023-2024**, 36% of registered victims with known citizenship were EU nationals (7 023) and 64% were non-EU nationals (12 369)**, representing a ten percentage point increase in non-EU national victims compared to the previous reporting period, when they accounted for 54%[66]. The main origin of non-EU victims is Africa (5 450), in particular Nigeria, Morocco and Côte d'Ivoire; Latin America (2 697), namely Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela; and South(east) Asia (2 623), in particular Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Thailand and China[67]. Victims from Latin America are trafficked mainly for sexual exploitation[68], but increasingly also for labour exploitation.

Trafficking in the context of migration is often linked to labour exploitation and the promise of employment by traffickers or to sexual exploitation[69]. This occurs in situations of both irregular and legal migration when traffickers take advantage of migrants in vulnerable situations (e.g. lack of knowledge of local employment rules and lack of support). In this context, the exploitation of non-EU nationals residing in the EU on work visas has been identified, highlighting vulnerabilities linked to limited access to

[64] schleswig-holstein.de - Landgericht Kiel - Konto für Freunde freigeben? Vorsicht Geldwäsche-Falle!
[65] Germany, the Netherlands.
[66] Calculated based on Eurostat (online data code crim_thb_vctz), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_vctz/default/table?lang=en&category=crim.crim_thb.
[67] Extraction based on special request from THB annual data collected by Eurostat.
[68] Brazil (sexual exploitation 61%, labour exploitation 34%), Colombia (sexual exploitation 61%, labour exploitation 37%) and Venezuela (sexual exploitation 78%, labour exploitation 20%).
[69] Greece, Latvia, Poland and Bulgaria.

information, dependency on employers or intermediaries, and precarious working and living conditions[70]. Spain has reported that some recruitment agencies in Latin America take advantage of the visa-free regime for short stays in the EU to recruit Columbian, Brazilian and other nationals from Latin-American countries along established migration corridors and transport migrants to other Member States where they are subjected to forced labour or other forms of exploitation.

3. EU AND MEMBER STATES' ACTIONS TO ADDRESS TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

3.1 Support to Member States to implement the Anti-Trafficking Directive and the 2021-2025 Strategy

During the reporting period, **the transposition and full implementation of the revised and amended Directive 2011/36/EU by Member States by the deadline of 15 July 2026** remained a priority. To date, 6 Member States have notified the Commission of the adoption of the necessary legal provisions aligning their national laws with the amended Directive[71]. On 25 September 2026, the Commission decided to open infringement procedures by sending a letter of formal notice to 20 Member States for failing to communicate the complete transposition of Directive 2024/1712.[72] To help Member States with this, the Commission organised two transposition workshops (March 2025, January 2026) that addressed key challenges and practical questions raised by Member States, providing clarifications, examples of good practices and guidance to the Member States.

In addition to facilitating the implementation of the amended Directive and the 2021-2025 Strategy, the Commission launched the **Anti-Trafficking Hub**[73] **on 5 June 2025**, which brings together expertise and engages in three main activities: **research**, **analysis**, and **advice** in collaboration with stakeholders. During the first year of its activities the Hub released three studies on topics of primary importance (data collection, definition of trafficking for labour exploitation and the functioning of national referral mechanisms), organised workshops to present the results and supported the Commission in the related communication activities.

The **collection and sharing of statistics** lie at the heart of the national and EU anti-trafficking policies and were identified as a key priority in the 2021-2025 Strategy. This is because robust data underpins evidence-based policymaking, funding allocation and operational activities. Under the revised Directive, Member States are now obliged to collect and submit the data to Eurostat. On the occasion of the 10-year data collection on 13 October 2025, Eurostat released a report analysing 10 years (2013-2023) of EU data on trafficking in human beings[74], presenting key trends of the past decade. In addition, in June

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[70] IOM (2025). Europe and Central Asia Region on The Move: Migration Data Report 2023-2024.
[71] Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy and Portugal.
[72] Commission takes action to ensure complete and timely transposition of EU directives
[73] https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-launches-eu-anti-trafficking-hub-strengthen-fight-against-trafficking-human-beings-2025-06-06_en.
[74] Eurostat Trafficking in human beings in the EU: main findings 2013-2023.

2026 the EU Anti-Trafficking Hub published a comprehensive study[75] analysing shortcomings in the methodology, organisation and infrastructure of data collection and providing recommendations for improvement and further alignment across Member States.

As per the 2021-2025 Strategy, the Commission is **supporting Member States with funding** to combat trafficking inside and outside the EU. During the reporting period two calls to combat organised crime were published in 2023[76] and in 2026[77] respectively, each awarding EUR 2.5 – 3 million under the Internal Security Fund (ISF) for better investigation and prosecution of trafficking offences. In addition, in 2025, 8 projects were awarded to governmental and non-governmental beneficiaries under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the total amount of EUR 8 million to enhance assistance and support for non-EU victims[78].

3.2. Coordination and national action plans as pre-requisites to the comprehensive approach to addressing trafficking in human beings

The 2021-2025 Strategy acknowledges the importance of a **multi-stakeholder, coordinated approach** to effectively combat trafficking in human beings. Coordination at the EU level ensured by the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (EU ATC) has been reinforced in the amended Directive, which explicitly provides for coordination with national anti-trafficking coordinators, independent bodies, EU Agencies and the relevant civil society organisations active in the field. During the reporting period the **EU Network of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs** held three meetings under the joint chairmanship of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union[79]. They discussed child trafficking, the role of technologies and AI in committing and combating trafficking in human beings, emergency responses to crisis situations and national action plans.

Coordination is also addressed at national level. The amended Directive makes the function of **national anti-trafficking coordinators** mandatory, requiring allocation of adequate resources and describing their tasks[80]. Member States are encouraged to establish **independent national bodies** for monitoring the implementation and impact of anti-trafficking actions. Such reforms aimed at reorganising and streamlining the coordination of responsibilities and efforts related to the prevention and combating of trafficking of human beings were reported by several Member States[81].

The majority of Member States reported having multiannual national strategies or action plans dedicated to the fight against trafficking in human beings. A significant number of

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[75] Study on the collection and improvements of EU Statistics on trafficking in human beings.
[76] Call for proposals on Organised Crime (ISF-2023-TF2-AG-OC).
[77] ISF-2026-TF2-AG-OC.
[78] AMIF-2024-TF2-AG-THB; call-fiche_amif-2024-tf2-ag-thb_en.pdf.
[79] Meetings with the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs held on 5-6 May 2025 with the Polish Presidency; with the Danish Presidency on 15-16 December 2025 and with the Cypriot Presidency on 4 June 2026.
[80] Article 19 of Directive (EU) 2024/1712.
[81] Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Italy, Romania and Sweden.

Member States amended their respective strategy or action plan during the reporting period[82]. For instance, Croatia adopted its National Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2024-2030, which includes measures raising awareness among vulnerable groups, preventing online trafficking, and improving the identification of victims and assistance referral for them, including by reinforcing mobile teams. Romania approved its 2024-2028 Strategy, which strengthens criminal justice responses by prohibiting suspended sentences for trafficking offences[83]. In 2024, Germany adopted the first comprehensive National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and Protect Trafficked Persons[84]. In parallel to this, Germany also developed a National Action Plan against Labour Exploitation and Forced Labour[85].

3.3. Preventing trafficking in human beings

3.3.1 Reducing the demand that fosters the crime

Several Member States indicated that demand continues to be a central driver of sexual exploitation[86]. Demand for sexual services disproportionately affects women, with consequences for gender equality[87]. The increasing shift of trafficking into the digital environment also enables traffickers to expand and sustain the demand by enhancing anonymity and reducing visibility and traceability for law enforcement[88]. According to Member States demand is still the driving force behind labour exploitation in labour-intensive, low-wage, flexible (e.g. seasonal work) and in sectors that are not heavily regulated (e.g. agriculture, construction, manufacturing and hospitality)[89].

Both the2021-2025 Strategy and the Anti-Trafficking Directive aim to reduce demand through a combination of legislative and non-legislative measures, including mandatory criminalisation of knowingly using services provided by trafficking victims. Proving the user's knowledge of the exploitative situation is a challenge reported in some Member States. In the EU in 2024, 130 individuals were suspected of using services provided by victims of trafficking, with most suspected users reported by Sweden (68), Czechia (45),

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[82] Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia.
[83] National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (Romania) / Ministry of Internal Affairs (2024). National Strategy Against Trafficking in Persons 2024–2028.
[84] Nationaler Aktionsplan zur Prävention und Bekämpfung des Menschenhandels und zum Schutz der Betroffene published by the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, March 2025 https://www.bmbfsfj.bund.de/resource/blob/252144/7fcb39c4d3309aa7e429fd29f62a4140/nationaler-aktionsplan-menschenhandel-data.pdf.
[85] Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Germany) (2025). National Action Plan against Labour Exploitation and Forced Labour.
[86] Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Italy, Malta and Slovenia.
[87] EIGE contribution.
[88] Greece and Ireland, EIGE and Myria (the Belgian independent national rapporteur that analyses trafficking and smuggling of human beings).
[89] Cyprus, Croatia Czechia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Finland, Spain and Malta.

Romania (16), and the Netherlands (1)[90]. In addition, 33 individuals were prosecuted, primarily in Greece (22).

3.3.2 Preventive measures targeting legal persons

The Commission put forward numerous actions in the 2021-2025 Strategy to prevent trafficking in the online environment through closer cooperation with the online platforms. Moreover, the 2021-2025 Strategy foresaw mandatory due diligence through the supply chain to reduce labour exploitation and the strengthened accountability of companies to ban forced labour. During the reporting period several legislative measures were adopted, further developed or implemented at EU level to pursue these objectives.

Trafficking in human beings is a criminal offence that falls within the scope of y the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**[91] specifically referred to among the offences involving a threat to the life or safety of a person that providers of hosting services are required to report to the law enforcement or judicial authorities of the Member States where they have a suspicion that such an offence has taken place, is taking place, or is likely to take place. Providers of hosting services which become aware of any information giving rise to such suspicion must notify law enforcement agencies or judicial authorities of the Member States.

Online Platforms used to commit trafficking in human beings
The different phases of the trafficking offence usually take place on various types of online platforms. 1. Perpetrators can profile, identify, target and recruit vulnerable individuals at scale. 2. Direct contact often then shifts to encrypted or private communication services. 3. Victims are advertised – particularly for sexual exploitation –on adult websites, dating platforms and other specialised services. 4. In some cases, even the exploitation itself is streamed online.

This fragmented and cross-platform nature of trafficking highlights the need for a coherent and reinforced enforcement approach combining the supervisory role of the Commission for VLOPs and VLOSEs with the oversight and investigative powers of national digital services coordinators. In line with the DSA, VLOPs and VLOSEs must also assess and mitigate systemic risks linked to trafficking, stemming from the design and functioning of their service, including their misuse for online recruitment, grooming and cross-platform amplification of exploitative services. This highlights the importance of the supervisory role of the Commission to ensure coherent and effective enforcement. To this end, **Working Group 7 (Orders and Criminal Issues) of the European Board of Digital Services, chaired by the Commission, discussed this crime area** in April 2026 to raise awareness among the Digital Service Coordinators and to hear about their experience. Members also discussed their outreach strategies to law enforcement authorities.

[90] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[91] Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj). See in particular Recital 56.

On 14 July 2025, the Commission adopted the **Guidelines on the protection of minors under the Digital Services Act (DSA)**[92], setting out a non-exhaustive list of proportionate and appropriate measures by VLOPs and VLOSEs to protect children from online risks, including with the purpose to prevent and address the grooming, control and exploitation by traffickers.

The Commission actively engages with private-sector stakeholders through the **EU Internet Forum**[93], which is a collaborative environment for EU governments, the internet industry and other partners to discuss and address the challenges posed by malicious and illegal content online. At the latest EU Internet Forum technical-level meeting on trafficking in human beings (held on 26 March 2026)[94], participation extended beyond the usual platform providers to include actors from adult service websites, short-term rental platforms and ride-sharing companies, all of whom contributed to targeted discussions on the online dimensions of trafficking in human beings. This broader engagement reflects the recognition that trafficking-related activities span a wide range of online services and business models, requiring tailored cooperation with different types of intermediaries.

The **Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence**[95] of 13 June 2024 is complementary to Directive 2011/36/EU. It sets out a cross-cutting framework to foster the contribution of businesses and their subcontractors operating in the single market to respect for human rights and the environment through their own operations and through their supply chains. Following its review in 2025 under the EU's competitiveness and simplification agenda, its scope was reduced to very large companies and obligations were recalibrated. Member States are required to transpose the rules by July 2028, and companies begin to comply from 2029 onwards, while the core duty to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence across operations and value chains remains intact.

The **Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market**[96] will start to apply on 14 December 2027 and will provide for administrative procedures to investigate and ban products made with forced labour from being placed on the EU internal market. To support the coherence of the procedures in Member States, the Commission issued Guidelines[97] on 26 June 2026 on the application of the Regulation, which recommends that Member States closely coordinate parallel administrative

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[92] Commission publishes guidelines on the protection of minors | Shaping Europe's digital future.
[93] European Union Internet Forum - Migration and Home Affairs.
[94] Report: 7a44bf6e-8352-4965-9308-7149214eb70d_en.
[95] Directive (EU) 2024/1760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and Regulation (EU) 2023/2859 (Text with EEA relevance) (OJ L, 2024/1760, 5.7.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1760/oj).
[96] Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 (OJ L, 2024/3015, 12.12.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/3015/oj).
[97] Commission Notice: Guidelines on the application of Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market. (OJ C, C/2026/4637, 3.9.2026: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52026XC04637).

proceedings to ban products and criminal proceedings on trafficking for labour exploitation to safeguard the confidentiality of the investigation.

On 8 May 2026 the Commission adopted the **implementation report of Directive 2009/52/EC** (Employers Sanctions Directive), which includes criminal offences covering particularly exploitative working conditions suffered by illegally staying third-country national workers and the use of their exploited services by employers who know that the illegally staying third-country nationals are victims of trafficking. Moreover, the European Labour Authority (ELA) together with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) developed a guide for workplace inspectors on how to detect labour exploitation. This guide is a practical tool for labour inspectors and focuses on non-national workers in the EU, who work in a country other than their own[98]. Additionally, the Commission's proposal on the **revision of the Regulation establishing the European Labour Authority (ELA)**[99] adopted on 15 September 2026 as part of the Fair Labour Mobility Package[100] aims to strengthen labour monitoring, information exchange and the protection of mobile workers across the EU, including by facilitating cooperation between labour inspectorates. The revision also clarifies ELA's role in supporting Member States in cases involving non-EU citizens.

3.3.3 Cooperation with the private sector

The majority of Member States launched new cooperation initiatives with the private sector during the reporting period[101] targeting specific sectors, notably hospitality, agriculture, information technology, transport, sports and finance. Several Member States concluded public-private partnerships[102]. In France, an agreement was signed in 2024 with Gites de France and Airbnb to combat sexual exploitation[103]. Italy signed a Memorandum of Understanding with large companies and trade associations for Legality in Public Procurement Contracts in the Fashion Supply Chain in 2025, which aims to combat illegal employment and exploitation by ensuring transparency and fair working conditions. In other Member States, e.g. in Bulgaria and Poland, cooperation with the private sector is part of their national strategy, which can take concrete forms and target concrete industries depending on specific needs. The private sector is increasingly engaging on a voluntary basis. For example, ECPAT Germany signed a code of conduct with 25 travel agencies against child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism[104].

3.3.4 Awareness-raising campaigns

In line with the 2021-2025 Strategy in which the Commission committed to organise prevention campaigns, the Commission launched the awareness-raising campaign **'End**

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[98] New guide empowers workplace inspectors to combat labour exploitation in the EU | European Labour Authority.
[99] COM(2026) 985 final, 15.9.2026.
[100] COM(2026) 970 final, 15.9.2026.
[101] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden.
[102] Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania.
[103] https://www.citoyens-justice.fr/k-stock/data/pdf/miprof_rapport_dactivite_2023-2024.pdf.
[104] The Code – ECPAT Deutschland e. V.

human trafficking. Break the invisible chain' on 18 October 2023[105], which entered its second phase in February 2026. This campaign targeted specific Member States[106] aiming to raise awareness on trafficking in human beings, including for sexual and labour exploitation, and for forced begging.

In both the first phase and the second phase, the Commission created a campaign page, where it made available an online video and online materials in all official languages that can be freely used by anybody, a list of national helplines and a list of indicators of exploitation. In the national campaigns, posters were also placed in public places including transport hubs and highly frequented commercial spaces. EU Agencies also engaged in awareness-raising during the reporting period on the EU Anti-Trafficking Day (18 October).

During the reporting period, awareness-raising continued to play a central role in national prevention efforts to combat trafficking and address demand. In the Member States a **gradual shift can be observed from ad hoc initiatives, prevalent in the past, towards more targeted and diversified approaches**, including the use of sector-specific outreach and interactive formats, alongside traditional public information campaigns. The campaigns adopted at national level aimed to increasingly address distinct forms of exploitation in a more targeted manner and reach those sectors where trafficking risks are higher. Campaigns targeting potential users of exploited services were conducted in several Member States[107], including targeting employers active in high-risk sectors, the financial sector and consumers.

3.3.5 Training

Training and capacity-building are key requirements in preventing and fighting trafficking in human beings and are key elements of the 2021-2025 Strategy. The amended Directive requires Member States to promote regular and specialised training for professionals likely to come into contact with potential victims of trafficking in human beings. In most Member States this resulted in a significant **shift from one-off initiatives towards strategic and systemic training and capacity-building programmes anchored in the national anti-trafficking strategies or action plans**.

During the reporting period, Member States offered a broad range of multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral training activities to various stakeholders, including competent authorities, civil society organisations and the private sector. Several Member States implemented sector-specific training targeting high-risk environments for trafficking, in particular the hospitality, transport, retail and accommodation sectors, focusing on prevention, trafficking indicators and referral pathways[108].

At EU level, several EU agencies conducted training activities.

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[105] End human trafficking. Break the invisible chain - European Commission (europa.eu).
[106] Bulgaria, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands.
[107] Slovenia, Sweden, Finland and Ireland.
[108] Belgium, Sweden; Finland and France.

- The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) continued to provide multi-layered training on investigating sexual and labour exploitation and child trafficking. This includes onsite and online courses and training packages available online. This CEPOL training focuses specifically on enhancing expertise in digital investigation, which has become mandatory for investigators to participate in Hackathons.
- In partnership with CEPOL, the ELA also delivered training modules and onsite courses on labour exploitation for labour inspectors.
- The European Judicial Training Network (EJTN)[109] provided training for judges and prosecutors on the judicial aspects of child trafficking and the challenges for criminal proceedings.
- The European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) delivered specialised trafficking training through dedicated modules on awareness of trafficking and on interviewing possible victims of trafficking and offered regular, operational and ad hoc support to national authorities. The EUUA's vulnerability-related training modules also integrate aspects on trafficking.

3.4. Breaking the criminal business model of traffickers

3.4.1 Investigations

Europol's 'EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2025' (EU-SOCTA) and report on 'Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks'[110] confirm that there has been a profound shift in the nature of organised crime in the EU, with direct implications for trafficking in human beings. It highlights the fact that organised crime has evolved into a **highly adaptive, system-level threat**, increasingly digital, technologically enhanced and deeply embedded in the legal economy. In this context, human trafficking has shifted from a standalone offence to part of a **broader polycriminal ecosystem**, where criminal networks simultaneously engage in multiple activities such as migrant smuggling, fraud, cybercrime, document fraud and money laundering. SOCTA underscores that these networks are **more professional, flexible and transnational**, using complex business structures, digital tools and global supply chains to maximise profits and minimise risks.

To respond to other emerging developments, the Commission will propose to **modernise the legal framework on organised crime** in order to facilitate the fight against high-risk criminal networks and to identify and prosecute their ringleaders. On 24 June 2026 the Commission proposed to **revise the Europol and Eurojust Regulations**[111] with a view to consolidating Europol's role as the EU's criminal information hub, enhancing Europol's operational support to national investigations, and reinforcing Europol's role as a technological hub.

In addition to the transposition and implementation of the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive, Member States stepped up efforts to prevent and detect new and emerging forms of exploitation,

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[109] European Judicial Training Network (EJTN).
[110] Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks: Blueprint-of-criminal-opportunism.pdf.
[111] Commission strengthens Europol and Eurojust: 2026/0165 (COD) and 2026/0164 (COD).

especially **exploitation of forced marriage, social security fraud and trafficking for organ removal**. Those efforts included studies to understand the situational picture and the legal background, screening databases of existing cases and preparing operational guidelines[112]. In the Netherlands, a national focal point was established to monitor patients who travelled abroad for an organ transplant and to share this information in a pseudonymised form. This would help detection of potential trafficking offences for organ removal.

Law enforcement cooperation at EU level remained intensive during 2024-2025[113], despite a **7% decrease** in the total number of **suspected** traffickers compared to 2021-2022. Nevertheless, the figure remains significantly higher than in previous years[114]. EU citizens accounted for 73% of all suspects registered in the EU in 2023-2024, which is a 1% increase compared to the previous reporting period[115].

Trafficking in human beings is one of the priorities of the **European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)**. The new operational EMPACT cycle for 2026-2027 identified 15 operational actions along the political and operational priorities reflecting the situational picture, emerging trends, increasing use of technology and the main countries of origin and transit. In 2024, EMPACT THB operational actions resulted in 4 985 victims being identified and reported, 876 arrests, 869 new investigations and the seizure of EUR 4 625 650 in cash and cryptocurrency.

The major global outreach of EMPACT is the annually organised **'Operation Global Chain' Joint Action Days.** These action days took place in June 2026 in 59 countries, led by Austria and Romania, with support from Europol, Frontex, Ameripol and Interpol. The operations targeted sexual exploitation, forced criminality and forced begging, and it resulted in 334 arrests for human trafficking and the identification of 2 070 potential victims, including 162 children[116].

EMPACT hackathons continue to be instrumental in countering the growing threat of online-enabled human trafficking that transcends borders. In September 2025, EU Member States joined forces with non-EU countries[117] to monitor, detect and investigate leads on human trafficking activities enabled by the internet. They did this by checking 44 online platforms and targeting trafficking enabled by social media and dating apps with the support of Europol and Eurojust. In order to facilitate digital investigations, Europol and 12 countries held a '**Digital sprint to disrupt sexual exploitation of Ukrainian**

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[112] Italy, France, the Netherlands.

[113] Europol supported 80 operational meetings in 2023, 90 in 2024 and 116 in 2025. There were 23 Joint Operational Action Days and 2 Operational Task Forces in 2023 while in 2024-2025 there were 28 action days.

[114] 16 437 suspects were registered in 2023-2024 as compared to 17 711 in 2021-22, 15 214 in the period 2019-2020 and 11 788 in 2017-2018.

[115] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).

[116] 1 024 arrests in global operation against human trafficking - Operation 'GLOBAL CHAIN' took place on five continents and focused on trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced criminality, and forced begging | Europol.

[117] Over 30 potential victims identified in action against human trafficking enabled online - 73 experts from 26 countries participated in the operation | Europol.

nationals'[118] in February 2025 to detect and disrupt human trafficking networks online. The sprint checked 690 entities (including online platforms, usernames and locations) and identified 41 potential victims and 21 suspected traffickers.

The **EMPACT Joint Action Day targeting trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation**, with a special emphasis on the agricultural sector, took place in autumn 2025. Led by France and the Netherlands and carried out by authorities from 32 countries with support from Europol and the European Labour Authority (ELA), it resulted in the arrest of 54 persons and the identification of 404 potential victims. Moreover, the **INVERT project financed under the ISF**[119] delivered a set of risk indicators and technological solutions to identify companies which are likely to engage in trafficking for labour exploitation.

Criminal networks increasingly rely on decentralised and technology-enabled financial channels to move and obscure profits from human trafficking. Alongside cash couriers and informal value-transfer systems, traffickers use crypto-assets to launder proceeds to fragment and hide financial trails. These digital and hybrid methods are often combined with money-laundering transactions through seemingly legitimate businesses, such as travel agencies or real-estate intermediaries, to further mask illicit earnings. Despite increasing confiscation results, Europol considers the absence of comprehensive financial data related to human trafficking offences to be a major intelligence gap. To address this challenge, law enforcement agencies need to enhance their understanding and invest in specialised resources and establish close cooperation with financial institutions[120].

Directive (EU) 2024/1260 on asset recovery and confiscation[121] will have to be transposed and implemented by 23 November 2026. The Directive will reinforce the capacity of law enforcement, prosecutors and judges to trace and confiscate the profits that organised criminal groups gain through their illicit activities, including trafficking in human beings.

At EU level, institutional developments have reinforced the operational capacity to address trafficking within a broader organised-crime framework. A key development under the reinforced Europol Regulation[122] has been the formal **establishment of the European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling** within Europol, which strengthens the EU's ability

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[118] https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/digital-sprint-to-disrupt-sexual-exploitation-of-ukrainian-nationals.

[119] INVERT Project – Disrupting Exploitation Networks; Assessing the Risk of Labour Exploitation in Legal Business Supply Chains - Transcrime - Transcrime.

[120] Europol contribution.

[121] Directive (EU) 2024/1260 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on asset recovery and confiscation (OJ L, 2024/1260, 2.5.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1260/oj).

[122] Regulation (EU) 2025/2611 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2025 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794 as regards the strengthening of Europol's support and enhancing police cooperation, for preventing and combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, OJ L, 2025/2611, 22.12.2025, Regulation - EU - 2025/2611 - EN - EUR-Lex.

to counter migrant smuggling. In parallel, the trafficking in human beings team in Europol has been integrated into the Organised Crime Directorate.

3.4.2 Prosecutions and convictions

The number of prosecutions and convictions for trafficking in human beings continued to rise in 2023-2024. **Prosecutions (13 126) increased by 49% compared to 2021-2022 (8 804), and convictions increased by 3.8%, with 4 908 persons convicted compared to 4 728 in 2021-2022**. EU nationals accounted for 67% of all prosecuted and 75% of all convicted individuals in 2023-2024[123]. This upward trend in prosecution and conviction contributes significantly to breaking the business model of the traffickers and to the fulfilment of one of the four pillars of the 2021-2025 Strategy.

Several Member States provide regular training courses for prosecutors and the judiciary. Eurojust reported that **judicial cooperation in trafficking cases has stabilised after a period of decline; the numbers of cases, coordination meetings and joint investigation teams (JITs) remain steady**[124]. A recent example of Eurojust analytical work is a leaflet on trafficking for sexual exploitation and related crimes, which aims to raise awareness of the challenges identified by Eurojust in judicial cooperation regarding legal qualifications and the interpretation of facts constituting a trafficking offence for sexual exploitation and related crimes[125].

In line with the 2021-2025 Strategy, the **Focus Group of Specialised Prosecutors against Trafficking in Human Beings** ('THB Focus Group') continued to hold its regular meetings to discuss the latest developments in the fight against human trafficking and exchanges on how to reinforce judicial cooperation and improve prosecution for trafficking in human beings[126]. The meetings focused on awareness-raising on trafficking for the purpose of organ removal, the role of AI in human trafficking, challenges and best practices in cross-border investigations and judicial cooperation in cases of trafficking involving child victims, the implementation of the non-punishment principle and cooperation with Latin-American countries[127]..

Cooperation between national prosecution and judicial authorities will be elevated to a new level and further reinforced through **a dedicated EMPACT operational action and a specific action on judicial cooperation** led by the Netherlands. This initiative aims to increase prosecutions and convictions by facilitating the exchange of expertise and best

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[123] Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).
[124] Eurojust had 349 cases (12 new cases and 229 ongoing from the previous year); 38 JITS of which 13 were new; it held 53 case-specific coordination meetings.
[125] Trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and related crimes | Eurojust | European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.
[126] 24-25 September 2025 and 17-18 June 2026.
[127] Outcome Report THB 2025.

practices among Member States in concrete cases, fostering real-time cooperation and ensuring better integration between judicial and law enforcement efforts[128].

The concept and definition of trafficking for labour exploitation was analysed by a study of the EU Anti-Trafficking Hub[129] comparing the legislation and judicial practices in five Member States. Key findings show that proving trafficking for labour exploitation in court requires the fulfilment of strict legal criteria, which sets a high threshold for applying the human trafficking framework. The report notes that accurate identification of trafficking cases has implications for victims' access to rights and support, as trafficked persons are entitled to specialised assistance and protection measures.

3.5. Early identification, assistance and protection of the victims

During the reporting period, victim protection and support in the EU were further strengthened through a combination of legislative developments, operational measures and reinforced coordination at both EU and Member State levels. The ongoing implementation of the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive has played a central role, with a clear shift towards a more structured, victim-centred and multidisciplinary approach, notably through the new obligation of Member States to establish national referral mechanisms (NRMs) and national focal points for the cross-border referral of victims.

The **Victims' Rights Directive**[130] as revised in June 2026 by Directive (EU) 2026/1472 further strengthens the rights, protection and support of victims of crime in the EU, including the rights of the most vulnerable victims, such as victims of trafficking in human beings. In particular, those victims will benefit from an improved individual assessment, as well as better access to information, reporting, support, protection, access to justice and compensation. The revised Victims' Rights Directive applies to victims irrespective of their residence status and obliges Member States to ensure that victims who are non-EU nationals are not discouraged from reporting a criminal offence, such as trafficking, and that they are treated in a non-discriminatory manner.

This key development has been supported by the work of the EU Anti-Trafficking Hub since the **Hub's dedicated study provided model provisions and practical guidelines**, which have been facilitating Member States' endeavours to design or upgrade their NRMs[131]. These mechanisms define more clearly roles and procedures for the identification, referral, assistance and protection of victims, bringing together law enforcement, judicial authorities, immigration authorities, labour inspectorates and civil society organisations. In parallel, several Member States have strengthened or newly

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[128] Specialised prosecutors meet at Eurojust to strengthen the fight against human trafficking | Eurojust | European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.

[129] Study on the concept of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation based upon the legislation and case law across selected EU Member States: Italy, Finland, France, Spain and the Netherlands.

[130] Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA

[131] Policy Paper on National Referral Mechanisms in the EU: Mapping, Analysis and Further Guidance | Migration and Home Affairs

designated their national referral mechanisms and national focal points, ensuring better coordination at national level and more effective cross-border cooperation[132]. Together, these developments are expected to contribute to a more systematic and operational approach to victim identification and support, including in complex and cross-border cases.

In addition, increasing links have emerged with the **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum** because of implications for the early detection and identification of victims, particularly upon arrival in the EU. Early detection within asylum and migration procedures is essential, as many victims are first encountered in reception facilities or during asylum interviews. The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive's new binding obligations on early detection, identification, assistance and cross-border referral need to be embedded within the asylum, reception and return architecture introduced with the Pact and its implementation at the national level. In this context, the annual meeting of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator with ICAT (Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons)[133] further highlighted the links between trafficking in human beings and the implementation of the Pact, underlining the need to ensure that anti-trafficking safeguards are fully embedded in migration management systems.

During the reporting period the EUAA developed information materials, scripts and guidance documents for frontline personnel. It implemented awareness-raising sessions on human trafficking concerning applicants for international protection and fostered early identification and referral mechanisms. Furthermore, the EUAA implemented and updated procedures in Italy and Greece to strengthen the identification and referral of potential victims of trafficking in human beings, focusing particularly on unaccompanied minors.

In 2025, the EUAA successfully provided structural support to Belgian authorities deploying the Agency's personnel at the Immigration Office Vulnerability Unit in Brussels for the pre-identification and activation of the referral mechanism for people with special needs, with a specific focus on victims of trafficking. Additionally, in Cyprus the EUAA supported the management of a safe zone in Pournara where vulnerable applicants, including trafficking victims, are hosted.

One of the challenges highlighted by Member States is that dedicated and sustainable funding is not always explicitly provided for in national anti-trafficking legislation or accompanying frameworks, creating risks for discontinuity of services and uneven implementation. Many Member States reported the adaptation of support services for victims of human trafficking in need of specialised care as a key challenge[134]. Some Member States reported a lack of adequate specialised services for male victims, underage victims and asylum seekers who are victims of trafficking[135]. Insufficient shelter space and

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[132] Poland, Italy, Romania and Slovakia; see also Grenzüberschreitende Verweisung von Betroffenen des Menschenhandels | Institut für Menschenrechte.

[133] From policy to action: emerging trafficking trends demand a united response | The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons.

[134] Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands and Slovenia.

[135] Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia.

the provision of legal and psychological support for victims, especially for those with special needs, remained a critical issue in some Member States[136].

Some Member States[137] identified the reintegration of victims into their communities or the integration of non-EU victims into society as particularly difficult, mainly due to the lack of available housing or the difficulty of integration into the labour market.

At EU level, stakeholder engagement has also been reinforced. On 30 September 2025, the Commission renewed the EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings, bringing together 77 civil society organisations. The renewed platform reflects improved geographical balance and a broader thematic scope, ensuring that civil society continues to play a central role in victim identification, assistance and policy development[138].

3.6. International dimension

The **European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy** firmly places the 'whole-of-route' approach at the centre of its anti-trafficking response, requiring strong international partnerships. This approach is further underpinned by the persistent reality that a majority of victims identified in the EU are non-EU nationals. This strategic orientation has also been reaffirmed at political level by Council conclusions **on 'combating trafficking in human beings, with particular attention to the situation related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine',** adopted during the Polish Presidency in June 2025[139].

Accordingly, the EU's engagement with partner countries aims to address trafficking along the entire criminal chain, from recruitment and coercion in countries of origin, through transit routes, to exploitation in destination countries. This includes strengthening legal and institutional frameworks in partner countries, enhancing law enforcement and judicial capacities, and supporting victim identification and assistance systems. Increasingly, such cooperation is put into operation through EMPACT enabling partner countries to participate in concrete actions targeting priority crime areas and through various cooperation partnership frameworks. Moreover, political, human rights and migration and mobility dialogues with partner countries also include combating trafficking in human beings as a policy area of major importance[140].

Trafficking in human beings is addressed within the EU **enlargement process**. Enlargement partners are required to align their legislation with the EU *acquis*, including the Anti-Trafficking Directive. In this context, legislative revisions and reforms have been undertaken in particular in Serbia, Moldova and Montenegro, strengthening their legal frameworks and operational capacities. They also need to demonstrate that procedures

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[136] Cyprus, Greece, Poland and Spain.
[137] Belgium, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland.
[138] Intensifying a coordinated and comprehensive response to trafficking in human beings - Migration and Home Affairs.
[139] Council conclusions on combating trafficking in human beings, with particular attention to the situation related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the protection of minors.
[140] Latin-America, Nigeria, China, Pakistan, Morocco, Bangladesh, Western Balkans, Türkiye, etc.

work in practice, including to identify, protect, support and compensate victims, and to develop a solid track record in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating cases of trafficking in human beings.

Ukraine remains a particularly important partner. In addition to the **Common Anti-Trafficking Plan**[141] developed under the leadership of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the implementation and subsequent **extension of the Temporary Protection Directive until 4 March 2028**[142] have provided an important protective framework for displaced persons from Ukraine and has contributed significantly to reducing vulnerability. However, risks of exploitation persist, particularly in informal labour markets and online environments. While EU statistics indicate a decreasing number of registered Ukrainian victims, this trend is to be interpreted cautiously. Evidence from national authorities and insights from bodies such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) continue to show that Ukrainian nationals – especially women – remain highly vulnerable to exploitation[143].

Recent cases in Poland and Spain illustrate this vulnerability. In Poland, Ukrainian nationals were coerced into participating in sophisticated online drug trafficking[144], while in Spain vulnerable Ukrainian women were recruited through gaming platforms for money-laundering operations[145]. These cases highlight the evolving nature of trafficking, where victims are increasingly forced into cyber-enabled criminal activities, blurring the lines between trafficking, fraud and financial crime.

Ukraine is committed to developing its anti-trafficking legislative and institutional framework and currently participates in 14 EMPACT operational actions.

The EU has also intensified cooperation with key regions along trafficking routes. In the Western Balkans, the **EU4FAST programme** funded under IPA III has been reinforced through an increased budget of EUR 9 million, allowing expanded operational activities, training and cross-border coordination. This reflects the region's continued strategic importance in addressing trafficking flows.

Cooperation with Türkiye has delivered results through the P-ACT project financed by the EU under the Migration Partnership Facility framework, which has addressed all four pillars of anti-trafficking policy – prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership. The project has supported law enforcement capacities, enhanced victim assistance and

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[141] An Anti-Trafficking Plan to protect people fleeing the war in Ukraine - European Commission (europa.eu).
[142] EU countries agree to extend temporary protection for those fleeing Ukraine until March 2028 - Consilium.
[143] Fundamental Rights Agency, Seeking Safety from War: Violence and rights abuses against women from Ukraine,
[144] https://tvpworld.com/91288874/call-center-scam-exposes-human-trafficking-drug-lab-in-warsaw.
[145] 12 members of money laundering scheme exploiting Ukrainian women arrested in Spain - Authorities identified 55 victims following Europol-supported investigation | Europol.

introduced innovative tools such as AI-supported translation for victim communication. It has also fostered regional cooperation, including with Central Asian partners.

Engagement with **Latin-American countries** has also been strengthened, particularly within EMPACT frameworks. Joint operational actions and awareness-raising initiatives – such as those under EMPACT actions targeting victim protection and global trafficking chains – demonstrate the increasing scope of EU external action. These efforts are closely linked to broader cooperation on organised crime and migration, ensuring a coherent and integrated approach. In addition, within EU programmes such as El PAcCTO 2.0 and EUROFRONT, cooperation continues across multiple fronts, encompassing judicial cooperation, border management and the dismantling of criminal networks operating along major trafficking corridors.

Cooperation with the region is also advancing through the EU-CLASI (Latin American Committee for Internal Security) and EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) frameworks. In the EU-CLASI Ministerial Declaration of March 2025[146], the Ministers of Interior and Security from both regions reaffirmed their commitment to cooperate against organised crime, including trafficking in persons, by identifying and jointly tackling priority criminal networks. As agreed in that Declaration, CLASI undertook to launch a platform modelled on EMPACT and develop its own Operational Action Plans ('CLASI OAPs'), focusing initially on three priority areas, one of which is trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants[147].

The EU continues to support **Common Operational Partnerships** against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, focused on law enforcement and judicial cooperation and covering cooperation with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kosovo*, Mauritania, Moldova, Montenegro, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Senegal, Serbia, The Gambia, and Türkiye.

In the southern Mediterranean, regional cooperation has been complemented by bilateral EU support to key countries along major trafficking and migration routes, including Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Libya, aimed inter alia at strengthening investigative capacities, cross border cooperation, identification and referral of victims and the disruption of criminal networks. For instance, the *"Partnership to Counter Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons in Egypt" (PACSOM)* project[148] dedicates EUR 30 million and the *"Action to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in Tunisia (ACTT)"*

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[146] Strengthening EU-Latin America security cooperation: EU-CLASI ministerial meeting adopts joint declaration and roadmap - International Partnerships.

[147] The action on trafficking and smuggling is led by Uruguay, with the Dominican Republic as co-leader. Participants are Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay and AMERIPOL.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

[148] PRESS RELEASE Official Launch of the EU-Funded Project "Partnership to Counter Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons in Egypt" - PACSOM Egypt.

project[149] dedicates EUR 18 million to support detection, investigation and victim assistance on a bilateral basis.

A particular development of concern is the **rise of scam centres** operating outside the EU, mainly in Southeast Asia and increasingly in Latin America and in Africa but targeting trafficking and fraud victims globally. These centres frequently rely on trafficked persons who are coerced into carrying out online fraud, phishing and other cyber-enabled crimes. The EU has stepped up its efforts to combat this phenomenon, recognising its strong links to trafficking in human beings and organised crime networks. In this context, the EU has engaged actively with international partners and partner countries, also within EMPACT, and is supporting global initiatives, including cooperation under UNODC, such as the intended signature of the **Joint Statement by the Global Partnership against Online Scams**.

In South Asia the EU is funding the *"Preventing and Addressing Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling of Migrants"* project[150] with EUR 9 million for the period of 2024-2027, which is implemented with the help of UNODC.

In parallel to operational and partnership-based approaches, the EU is advancing tools to enhance accountability for trafficking and related crimes. On 9 July 2026, the Commission and the High Representative proposed a **new cross-cutting sanctions regime to counter threats from migrant smuggling, human trafficking and other forms of organised crime**[151]. The regime would complement existing criminal-law instruments by enabling the freezing of assets and the imposition of travel bans on key actors involved in transnational criminal networks.

In October 2024, in line with the EU's strategic priorities, restrictive measures were adopted in relation to Myanmar, where trafficking-related abuses have been documented[152]. Moreover, on 30 July 2026 the EU imposed restrictive measures on seven persons and three entities responsible for serious human rights violations in scam centres in Southeast Asia[153]. These measures demonstrate the EU's commitment to addressing trafficking not only as a criminal justice issue but also from fundamental rights perspective.

An important dimension of international cooperation lies in strengthening border management capacities to better detect and prevent trafficking at an early stage. Frontex plays a key role in this regard. Frontex has given more attention to addressing human trafficking with the creation in 2024 of a multi-target THB Focus Group aimed at further enhancing Frontex's efforts to combat trafficking in human beings and emphasising the need for coordinated and coherent actions to combat this complex crime. This has involved

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[149] Chef.fe de projet / Coordinat.eur.rice - Civipol
[150] GLO.ACT South Asia
[151] Commission and High Representative propose new sanctions regime.
[152] Myanmar/Burma: EU lists three individuals and one entity responsible for scam operations entailing serious human rights violations and threatening the peace, security and stability of Myanmar and the region - Consilium.
[153] Scam centres in Southeast Asia: EU lists seven persons and three entities responsible for serious human rights violations - Consilium.

increased efforts and enhanced synergies among different actors, also including the members of the Frontex Consultative Forum. Frontex uses the network of frontex liaison officers - deployed in several partner countries[154] to support cooperation between Member States and partner countries - also to combat human trafficking[155].

International organisations remain essential partners in shaping and implementing the global response to trafficking. UNODC is a strategic partner for the EU through its analytical, normative and operational work. Its global reports and policy guidance provide an essential evidence base, while its field programmes support capacity-building in partner countries. Supported with EU funding, UNODC acts as the Secretariat to the Niamey process, supporting countries in West Africa and the Central Sahel in implementing the commitments of these countries to counter trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling in the Niamey Declaration of 2018.

In November 2025, UNODC and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) organised a joint thematic meeting of the Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey processes in Nigeria to analyse current challenges in countering trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling and to identify opportunities for cooperation. Another joint thematic meeting will take place in October 2026 in Brussels.

The EU-funded 'Promoting global action and cooperation against trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants (PACTS)', implemented by UNODC, has facilitated key platforms for exchange and cooperation, including international prosecutor forums held in Vienna and Marrakech. The primary objective of PACTS is to increase the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling cases, to strengthen the human rights protection and assistance framework for trafficking victims and smuggled migrants, and to step up engagement at the global level in policy debates and exchanges of best practices on these crimes. Within PACTS, UNODC also organised the **first Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors** on 24-25 June 2025[156].

In the field of civil aviation, in 2025 the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) updated the recommendations (provisions 8.49 and 8.50)[157] on combating trafficking in human beings by air, in Annex 9 (Facilitation) to the Civil Aviation Convention, to standards, which leads to greater harmonisation of prevention and detection measures concerning potential victims of trafficking at the airports and on the aircraft. The Commission continues to work with the ICAO to monitor the implementation of the standards to gain a better understanding of the potential gaps and challenges.

At national level, Member States have contributed to the strengthening of relations with partner countries and international organisations. In particular, they have improved information sharing and criminal intelligence on various aspects of trafficking with partner

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[154] Türkiye, Serbia, Albania, Senegal, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Morocco.
[155] Frontex contribution.
[156] First Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors – Voices of Resilience.
[157] Manual on a Comprehensive Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in the Aviation Sector.

countries, notably with the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. They also participated in awareness-raising and prevention activities, for example the Netherlands has funded the School Anti-Trafficking Education and Advocacy Project in Nigeria. This project aims to support the Nigerian government in tackling human trafficking through education within the school community.

4. CONCLUSION

During the reporting period trends in trafficking in human beings indicate a continued increase in the number of detected victims across the EU, confirming the growing scale and complexity of the phenomenon. The gender dimension of trafficking remained pronounced, with women and girls continuing to represent the majority of registered victims, particularly for sexual exploitation. At the same time, labour exploitation continued to account for a significant share of identified cases, reflecting the diversification of exploitative practices across sectors. The trends also point to a considerable growth in the proportion of non-EU nationals among victims of trafficking. At the same time, the number of suspects, prosecuted and convicted persons also increased, demonstrating a strengthened criminal justice response and more robust operational, law-enforcement and judicial cooperation at both EU and international levels.

The findings of this report provide compelling evidence that the 2021-2025 Strategy has delivered substantial and measurable results across all four pillars – prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership. Underpinned by a significantly strengthened legal framework, in particular the reinforced Anti-Trafficking Directive, the EU has enhanced its capacity to prevent exploitation, improve victim identification and support, and step up investigations and prosecutions. The 2021-2025 Strategy has also driven a higher level of coordination at EU and national levels, fostered operational cooperation through instruments such as EMPACT, and deepened engagement with key stakeholders, including civil society and international partners. It remains essential to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Directive across all Member States as a key condition for achieving a consistent and effective EU-wide response.

This report also confirms that the rapidly evolving nature of trafficking requires the EU to further adapt and deepen its response. Growing geopolitical instability and emerging conflicts call for a stronger focus on preparedness and resilience to ensure that the EU and its Member States are equipped to anticipate, prevent and respond swiftly to heightened risks of exploitation.

Technology plays an increasingly central role in shaping trafficking patterns, including through the rise of online scam centres and other forms of technology-facilitated exploitation, requiring more sophisticated tools, enhanced digital capabilities and targeted responses.

Furthermore, the increasing interlinkage between trafficking and migration, as demonstrated by the increasing number of non-EU nationals exploited in the EU, underlines the importance of ensuring coherence with the implementation of the Pact on

Migration and Asylum, including through strengthened identification, referral and protection mechanisms.

In addition, further efforts are needed to intensify action against labour exploitation, particularly in sectors employing non-EU nationals, and to reinforce cooperation with labour market actors and relevant authorities. In parallel, the creation and strengthening of effective cross-border referral mechanisms, as well as the provision of coordinated cross-border victim support, will be essential to ensure that victims are identified, protected and assisted seamlessly across jurisdictions.

Stronger engagement with the private sector will also be indispensable, alongside increased accountability across key industries, including the technology sector, the financial sector and other high-risk sectors. Given the growing sophistication of criminal networks and the increasing use of seemingly legitimate businesses and activities to conceal exploitation, it will be essential to ensure enhanced cooperation and coordination across sectors. Continued multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches will be pivotal to effectively addressing trafficking in all forms and to deepen the collective understanding of this complex and evolving crime.

Building on the strong achievements to date and addressing the gaps identified in this report, these elements provide a robust foundation for the development of a new, forward-looking EU Strategy as annexed to this report – one that is better equipped to respond to emerging threats, harness innovation and ensure a sustained, coordinated and effective EU response to trafficking in human beings.