



Situational Update

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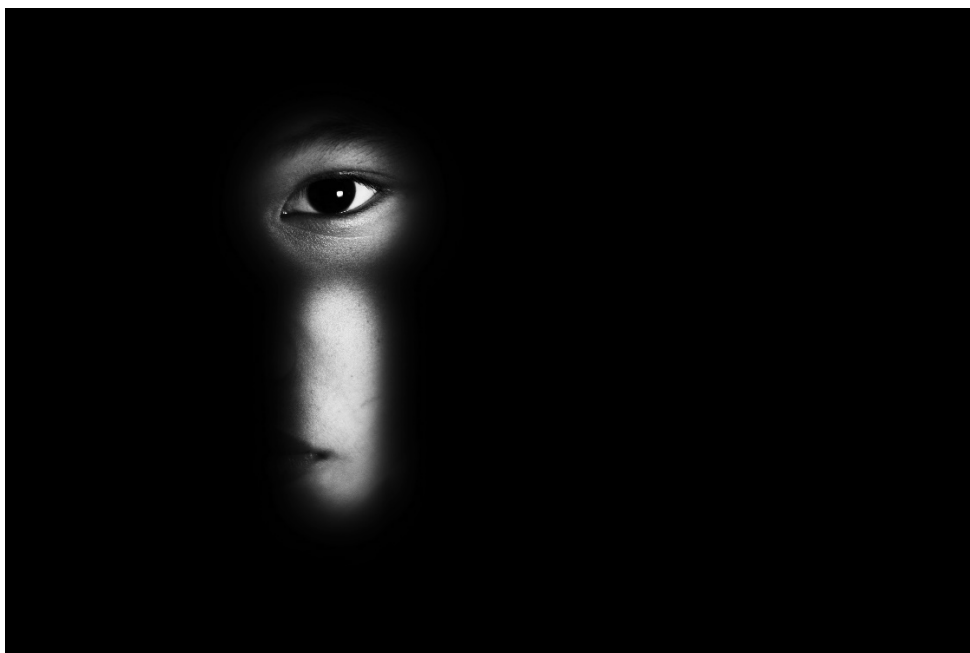


Identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking in the asylum procedure

EU legislation contains provisions to address asylum applicants with special needs who may be considered particularly vulnerable. These provisions ensure that vulnerable applicants receive adequate support to benefit from their rights and comply with the obligations, which are defined under the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This ensures that all applicants can be on an equal footing throughout the asylum procedure.

The recast Asylum Procedures Directive defines applicants who are in need of special procedural guarantees. In conjunction, the recast Reception Conditions Directive defines applicants who require special reception conditions, including victims of human trafficking.

Several factors contribute to making asylum seekers, refugees and other forcibly-displaced people an easy target for traffickers, who prey on the precariousness of their situation to exploit them. As such, victims of human trafficking in the asylum procedure require due attention and procedural safeguards.





Combatting trafficking of human beings remained at the forefront of discussions in 2022 as trafficking patterns shifted.¹ Online activities and exposure to dangerous routes which are targeted by traffickers compounded already-existing illegal activities and made it harder to identify and protect victims. A study by EMN found that the method of recruiting and exploiting victims changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with exploiters increasingly using the Internet.² In addition, temporary border closures and travel restrictions during the pandemic pushed asylum seekers to resort to irregular border crossings, putting them at a higher risk of being trafficked, according to UNHCR.³

Furthermore, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 created waves of displaced persons – notably women and children – who were particularly prone to falling victim to trafficking. The European Commission took a strong stand and quickly set up information campaigns on the prevention of trafficking, which were specifically targeted at displaced persons from Ukraine.

1. Developments at the EU level

The [EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025](#) covers various aspects, from prevention and protection to the empowerment of victims and bringing traffickers to justice.⁴ One of its key actions includes the evaluation and a possible revision of the Anti-Trafficking Directive.⁵ In December 2022, the European Commission published its [fourth report](#) on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings. The report concludes that EU Member States adopted various measures to address challenges which contribute to a more comprehensive approach to fighting trafficking. Therefore, the European Commission proposed to revise the directive,⁶ by streamlining structures and procedures in the EU and formalising national referral mechanisms to improve early identification and referral. These would then serve as the basis for developing a European Referral Mechanism.⁷

Eurostat publishes annual statistics on human trafficking based on data on registered victims, as reported by EU+ countries.⁸ Nevertheless, the trends should be interpreted with caution as not all countries report data, they may use different reporting approaches or different levels of transposition of the Anti-Trafficking Directive.⁹ The revisions of the Anti-Trafficking Directive

¹ UNODC, [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons – 2022](#), January 2023.

² European Migration Network (EMN), [EMN study: Third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings: Detection, identification and protection](#), March 2022.

³ UNHCR, [Joint Evaluation of the Protection of the Fundamental Rights of Refugees during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), July 2022.

⁴ European Commission, [Trafficking in human beings: Commission proposes stronger rules to fight the evolving crime](#), 19 December 2022.

⁵ European Commission, [Trafficking in human beings: Commission proposes stronger rules to fight the evolving crime](#), 19 December 2022.

⁶ European Commission, [EU proposes new rules to fight trafficking in human beings](#), 18 December 2022.

⁷ European Commission, [Trafficking in human beings: Commission proposes stronger rules to fight the evolving crime](#), 19 December 2022.

⁸ Eurostat, [Trafficking in Europe, a rise by 10% and the share of EU nationals among the victims increased to 59%](#), 9 February 2023.

⁹ Eurostat, [Victims of trafficking of human beings up 10% in 2021](#), 9 February 2023.

now propose to address this lack of data on trafficking in human beings by formalising a reliable EU-wide data collection which would be conducted and published by Eurostat.¹⁰

During 2023, the European Parliament and the Council will examine the proposal to revise the directive, and once approved, the new rules will have to be transposed by Member States into their national laws.¹¹

Enhanced cooperation plays a crucial role for tackling trafficking. In this context, the European Commission and Morocco renewed their operational partnership, which involves border management support and awareness-raising on the dangers of unlawful migration to tackle human trafficking.¹²

The Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) published various reports during 2022, namely on [Belgium](#), [France](#), [Ireland](#), [Latvia](#), [Luxembourg](#), [Norway](#) and [Portugal](#). Overall, the reports call for additional efforts to identify victims and provide assistance. In the case of Luxembourg, for example, GRETA underlined the obligation to identify victims of trafficking among asylum applicants who are subject to the Dublin procedure. These applicants have the right to a reflection and recovery period and measures are needed to avoid any risks of reprisals or re-trafficking.¹³

Similarly, the CJEU [ruled](#) that the Dublin transfer of victims of human trafficking may not be implemented during the reflection period provided in Directive 2004/81/EC, but a transfer decision can be adopted during this time and preparatory measures taken.

2. Identification and referral of trafficking victims

EU+ countries introduced new policy and legislative changes in 2022 to better identify, refer and protect victims of human trafficking. They also focused on strengthened coordination among different stakeholders.

The French Ministry of the Interior published an [instruction](#) in April 2022 requesting the prefects to harmonise practices related to victims who were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The instruction noted the criteria to obtain a temporary residence authorisation for a third-country national who has participated in a programme to leave prostitution.¹⁴

In October 2022, Italy adopted a National Action Plan 2022-2025 against trafficking and the severe exploitation of human beings which defines long-term strategies and actions for

¹⁰ European Commission, [Questions and Answers – Trends, challenges and revision of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#), 19 December 2022.

¹¹ European Commission, [Trafficking in human beings: Commission proposes stronger rules to fight the evolving crime](#), 19 December 2022.

¹² European Commission, [European Commission and Morocco launch renewed partnership on migration and tackling human smuggling networks](#), 8 July 2022.

¹³ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings GRETA, [Third evaluation round, Evaluation report Luxembourg](#), 4 October 2022.

¹⁴ [Instruction N° DGCS/SDFE/DGEF/DIMM/2022/7 2022 du 13 avril 2022 relative à l'ouverture des droits dans le cadre du parcours de sortie de la prostitution et d'insertion sociale et professionnelle](#), Legifrance, 13 April 2022.



raising awareness, better prevention and social integration of victims of trafficking.¹⁵ In line with this, the civil courts in Italy granted protection to two Nigerian women who were victims of sexual exploitation and prostitution. One woman obtained [refugee status](#) due to the widespread occurrence of human trafficking for sexual purposes in Nigeria and her risks of being re-trafficked. In the other case, the court granted [subsidiary protection](#) since the sexual exploitation of the woman was perpetrated by a family member, and hence, she would face a high risk of being re-trafficked if returned to the country of origin.

In another [case](#) in Italy, a male trafficking victim was initially excluded from refugee protection but recognised eligible for subsidiary protection. If returned to Nigeria, he could experience inhuman and degrading treatment by his family due to his background as a victim of human trafficking.¹⁶

In Germany, the Administrative Court of Cologne [ruled](#) on the prohibition of the removal of a transsexual trafficking victim from India. The court noted that the victim's return to the country of origin would not constitute a safe environment, since the applicant would face family members or members of the Hijra community through whom she had experienced sexual abuse since childhood, violence and forced to prostitution.¹⁷

There was a case of a [perpetrator of human trafficking](#) who applied for international protection and claimed to have been threatened, arrested and abused by Hamas. He travelled to Belgium, where he was [arrested](#) on charges of human and minors trafficking and participation in criminal groups. He was sentenced to imprisonment and excluded from refugee and subsidiary protection status.¹⁸

Aligned with GRETA recommendations made earlier in the year, Ireland adopted a bill in July 2022 to amend the national referral mechanism to make it easier to identify victims and involve a broader range of actors to provide support.^{19, 20} In Finland, legislative [amendments](#) were introduced to improve the identification and referral of victims of trafficking and their right to services and assistance, irrespective of the progress of criminal proceedings. Assistance will be based on an assessment of the victim's individual situation.²¹

As part of a reform process, the Human Rights Initiatives Unit in Malta will develop a national strategy and an action plan against human trafficking, which will develop a data collection system, establish a reporting framework and then serve as the national referral mechanism. To this end, in October 2022 an Anti-Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee was created with

¹⁵ Ministry of the Interior | Ministero dell'Interno, [Piano nazionale d'azione contro la tratta e il grave sfruttamento 2022-2025](#), 19 October 2022.

¹⁶ Italy, Civil Court [Tribunali], [Applicant v Ministry of Interior \(Territorial Commission of Bologna\)](#), 6946/2019, 8 April 2022.

¹⁷ Germany, Regional Administrative Court [Verwaltungsgerichte], [X v Federal Republic of Germany](#), 4 K 2631/20.A, 17 February 2022.

¹⁸ Belgium, Council for Alien Law Litigation [Conseil du Contentieux des Étrangers - CALL], [X v Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons \(CGRS\)](#), No 272 656, 12 May 2022.

¹⁹ Government of Ireland, Department of Justice, [Minister McEntee welcomes new legislation as she marks World Day against Trafficking in Persons](#), 30 July 2022 and Government of Ireland, Department of Justice, [Minister McEntee marks EU Anti-Trafficking Day by emphasising importance of awareness](#), 18 October 2022.

²⁰ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings GRETA, [Evaluation report, third evaluation round, Ireland](#), 28 September 2022.

²¹ Ministry of the Interior | Sisäministeriö, [Assistance to be given to victims of human trafficking irrespective of the progress of criminal proceedings](#), 29 December 2022.

representatives from several ministries.²² This initiative will receive support from the Council of Europe through a 2-year project to help with the preparation of the new national anti-trafficking strategy and action plan.²³

In January 2022, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior presented the [National Strategic Plan against Trafficking and the Exploitation of Human Beings 2021-2023 \(PENTRA\)](#). It establishes five priority objectives and 16 lines of action that affect both public institutions and NGOs, using a multidisciplinary and integral approach to tackle trafficking.²⁴ In November 2022, Spain's Council of Ministers adopted a [draft bill](#) on trafficking and exploitation which focuses on prevention, assistance and the protection of victims by guaranteeing a series of rights and support measures. The draft bill also refers to measures to tackle demand and avoid exploitation in the private and business sectors by strengthening labour standards in the most sensitive sectors, with the collaboration of the Labour and Social Security Inspectorate.²⁵ A national referral mechanism for potential trafficking victims will also be created.^{26, 27}

In Estonia, the new [Victim Support Act](#) enters into force on 1 April 2023. It changes the status of a presumed victim and improves the availability and quality of victim support services.²⁸

The Romanian government approved a national identification and referral mechanism for victims of human trafficking in January 2023.²⁹ Romania's progress in combating human trafficking was noted in the U.S. Department of State's Annual Trafficking in Persons Report, which assesses how 188 countries perform in the prevention of trafficking and the protection of victims.³⁰ Romania gained a higher ranking since its adoption and implementation of a procedure to identify victims of human trafficking among asylum seekers and refugees.

In Romania, the IOM contributed to the implementation of the National Strategy for 2018-2022 and National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Persons through the "Leading a United Pathway to Anti-Trafficking Action" (LUPTA) project.³¹ The holistic approach, which provides guidance and specialised psychological, legal and financial support, has contributed to providing victims with a sense of protection, understanding and control, which in turn has increased participation in the investigations and prosecutions. The cooperation between law enforcement and Victim Protection Coordinators (VPCs) resulted in increased intelligence-gathering due to heightened trust between victims and law enforcement, improved capacity

²² Ministry of Home Affairs, [Security, Reforms and Equality, Human Rights Directorate, National Strategy and Action Plan against Human Trafficking \(2024 onwards\)](#). Accessed on 12 January 2023.

²³ Council of Europe, [Launch of the Joint Project on "Supporting Malta in the design and implementation of a new National Anti-Trafficking Strategy"](#), 6 December 2022.

²⁴ Government of Spain | La Moncloa, [Interior presenta el Plan Estratégico Nacional contra la Trata y la Explotación de Seres Humanos 2021-2023](#), 12 January 2022.

²⁵ Written input to Situational Update N° 17 received by Spanish Ministry of the Interior, 23 February 2023.

²⁶ Ministry of Justice | Ministerio de Justicia, [El Gobierno aprueba el Anteproyecto de Ley Orgánica Integral contra la Trata](#), 29 November 2022.

²⁷ Government of Spain | La Moncloa, [El Gobierno aborda de manera integral la lucha contra la trata y explotación de seres humanos](#), 29 November 2022.

²⁸ Parliament of Estonia, [Ohvriabi seadus 702 SE](#), 14 December 2022.

²⁹ Government Decision No.88 of 31 January 2023 for the approval of a national mechanism to identify and refer victims of human trafficking, [HOTĂRÂRE nr. 88 din 31 ianuarie 2023 pentru aprobarea Mecanismului national de identificare și referire a victimelor traficului de persoane](#), 3 February 2023.

³⁰ Government of Romania | Guvernul României, [Romania gains credibility and recognition in the fight against human trafficking](#), 20 July 2022.

³¹ IOM Romania, [Leading a United Pathway to Anti-Trafficking Action \(LUPTA\)](#), September 2022.



amongst law enforcement and more successful prosecutions. Romanian authorities requested the IOM to conduct a series of capacity-building sessions for prosecutors, judges and police specialised in combatting organised crime, based on the results and good practices of the project.³²

The Greek National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking, which is a coordinating mechanism that includes all stakeholders from national authorities and civil society organisations involved in identifying and protecting trafficking victims, published its report for the first semester of 2022. During this period, there were 134 referred cases, of which 98 were from public authorities and 36 from NGOs and international organisations. African countries comprised the main countries of origin of the victims, notably the Democratic Republic of Congo (24 victims), Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Eritrea, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Congo, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Mali and Somalia. Moldova, Romania and Russia were also reported as European countries of origin. The majority of victims were women (92) and girls (14).³³

Organisational changes in the Polish Department of International Affairs and Migration of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration included the creation of a separate unit for the coordination of anti-trafficking in human beings.³⁴

Civil society organisations made recommendations to the EU and national authorities for improved efforts in the prevention of human trafficking. For example, the European Disability Forum noted a lack of awareness among stakeholders about how human trafficking affects people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities can be at a higher risk of trafficking and exploitation, for example children with physical disabilities may be forced to beg on the streets and women with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities can be sexually exploited. Some of the recommendations include measures and services that are accessible to all persons with disabilities, taking into consideration their special needs and specific training on disabilities for all relevant stakeholders.³⁵

The German Institute for Human Rights (*Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte*) introduced an independent monitoring and reporting unit on human trafficking. The objectives are to sensitise policy-makers and other stakeholders, and to ensure that international regulations are implemented more effectively by collecting and evaluating data.³⁶ This project receives funding from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for a period of 4 years.³⁷

³² Written input to Situational Update N° 17 received by IOM, Regional Office for the European Economic Area, the EU and NATO, 8 March 2023.

³³ Greek National Referral Mechanism for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking EMA, [ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΜΗΧΑΝΙΣΜΟΣ ΑΝΑΦΟΡΑΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ ΘΥΜΑΤΩΝ ΕΜΠΟΡΙΑΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝ](#), 2022.

³⁴ Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Department for International Affairs and Migration, [Internal organisation units of the Department](#). Accessed on 30 January 2023.

³⁵ European Disability Forum, [Combating trafficking in persons with disabilities](#), March 2022.

³⁶ German Institute for Human Rights | Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, [Über die Berichterstattungsstelle Menschenhandel](#), 1 November 2022.

³⁷ Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth | Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, [Bundesregierung verstärkt Kampf gegen Menschenhandel](#), 18 November 2022.

3. Capacity-building and raising awareness about trafficking

In 2022, several EU+ countries conducted awareness-raising activities and targeted campaigns, especially to inform refugees from Ukraine in several languages. More studies were undertaken to better understand the situation of trafficking of human beings. National authorities organised specialised training and developed practical tools to help case officers.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and Translators Without Borders (TWB) joined forces to launch a global campaign to empower frontline workers and partners in the fight against sexual exploitation. A comprehensive package of information material was developed in 22 languages, thus widening the outreach of the global campaign.³⁸

On the occasion of the EU Anti-Trafficking Day, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the company SLOVNAFT, launched a new [information campaign](#) aimed at combating human trafficking.³⁹ The ministry also ran training activities throughout 2022 on the prevention and identification of signs of human trafficking to about 3,000 staff.⁴⁰

The IOM in Slovakia focused on capacity-building of relevant stakeholders, in particular related to sensitisation and victims' survival approach. The local IOM Capacity Building Unit trained Labour Inspectorates in six regions and the border police on counter-trafficking.⁴¹

In Austria, the IOM hosted six [training sessions](#) on identification and assistance to trafficked persons in the asylum procedure. The sessions were given by the police and victim protection organisations, and attended by representatives of the asylum authority, as well as legal counsellors, return counsellors, social workers in reception centres and interpreters.^{42, 43}

Czechia created a reference card for the identification of possible victims of human trafficking and launched a new project to map the situation of child trafficking.⁴⁴

In Croatia, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, in cooperation with the Judicial Academy, organised a seminar in the framework of the implementation of the National Plan for Combating Human Trafficking 2018–2021. The seminar aimed to raise

³⁸ IOM, [IOM, WFP and Translators Without Borders Raise Awareness on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), 26 October 2022.

³⁹ Ministry of the Interior, [Pri príležitosti Európskeho dňa boja proti obchodovaniu s ľuďmi sme spustili infokampaň na čerpacích staniciach](#), 18 October 2022.

⁴⁰ Ministry of the Interior, [O nástrahách obchodovania s ľuďmi besedujeme v centrách pre deti a rodiny](#), 8 June 2022.

⁴¹ Written input to Situational Update No 17 received by the IOM, Regional Office for the European Economic Area, the EU and NATO, 8 March 2023.

⁴² Written input to Situational Update No 17 received by the IOM, Regional Office for the European Economic Area, the EU and NATO, 8 March 2023.

⁴³ IOM Austria, [Trainings for identifying trafficked persons and acquiring intercultural competences in the Austrian asylum procedure](#), 6 March 2023.

⁴⁴ Ministry of the Interior, [The Ministry of the Interior commemorates the European Day against Trafficking in Human Beings with new prevention projects](#), 18 October 2022.



awareness among judicial officials about human trafficking and how to prosecute perpetrators efficiently.⁴⁵

In Greece, 73 professionals from the National Public Health Organization (EODY) and from the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum participated in training on preventing the trafficking of human beings, which was organised by the Centre for Social Action and Innovation (ΚΜΟΠ - ΚΜΟΡ) within the framework of the European Project AMELIE.⁴⁶ In addition, 130 frontline professionals attended a thematic seminar on anti-trafficking, which was organised by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (Ε.Κ.Κ.Α).⁴⁷

The French Ministry of Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities published a training manual on the identification and protection of victims of trafficking.⁴⁸ The manual was developed with various stakeholders, including OFPRA, OFII, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice and civil society organisations. The manual contains information on support measures, the rights of victims applying for international protection, accessing procedures and reception conditions.

As part of its national action plan against trafficking in human beings, France conducted a survey focused on unaccompanied minors. It found that they were mostly victims of coercion to commit crimes.⁴⁹

Portugal launched a new 2-year project to improve prevention, protection and support to trafficking victims. The project will assess national mechanisms which are currently in place and were affected by COVID-19 measures. It will also map the sociodemographic characteristics of victims and traffickers.⁵⁰

The Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration published a handbook on the practical aspects of conducting proceedings in cases of human trafficking,⁵¹ and the Icelandic Ministry of Justice issued guidelines in three languages (Icelandic, English and Polish) on signs of trafficking in human beings.⁵²

⁴⁵ Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, [U Splitu održan peti stručni seminar "Suzbijanje trgovanja ljudima"](#), 29 April 2022.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Migration and Asylum, [Εκπαίδευση επαγγελματιών υγείας για την εμπορία ανθρώπων \(trafficking\) στο Υπουργείο Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου/Training of health professionals on human trafficking at the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum](#), 22/12/2022.

⁴⁷ National Centre for Social Solidarity Ε.Κ.Κ.Α, [2ο θεματικό σεμινάριο - Ευρωπαϊκή Ημέρα κατά της Εμπορίας Ανθρώπων, στις 18 Οκτωβρίου 2022/2nd thematic seminar - European Day against Trafficking in Human Beings, on 18 October 2022](#), 18 October 2022.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities | Ministère de l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes, de la Diversité et de l'Égalité des chances/, [L'identification et la protection des victimes de traite des êtres humains : guide de formation](#), 7 October 2022.

⁴⁹ Ministry of the Interior and Overseas | Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-Mer [La traite des êtres humains en France: le profil des victimes accompagnées par les associations en 2021](#), 20 October 2022.

⁵⁰ Government of Portugal, [Projeto para prevenir e monitorizar as vítimas de exploração sexual foi hoje apresentado](#), 17 July 2022.

⁵¹ Prokuratura Krajowa, [Wydanie specjalne "Handel ludźmi. Praktyczne aspekty prowadzenia postępowań"](#), 2022.

⁵² Government of Iceland, [Þekkir þú vísbendingar um mansal?](#), 15 March 2022.

4. The evolving use of technology in human trafficking

New methods of coercion and exploitation create new challenges for its prevention. Traffickers are increasingly moving activities online by using social media platforms, dating apps and various fora to lure victims, in particular minors. Many EU+ countries are aware that there has been a growing use of online means to recruit, exploit and control victims, a trend which gained ground during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵³

This shift has prompted national authorities to adapt their strategies and practices. In fact, to combat human trafficking administrations are now active in the online environment by monitoring platforms and launching awareness-raising campaigns to a wider audience. Nonetheless, traffickers try to mislead law enforcement and avoid detection online,⁵⁴ and data encryption, the volume of data, the lack of technical equipment, capacity and resources, and legislative tools can make identification difficult for national administrations.⁵⁵

A new report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) highlighted the latest trends in human trafficking, including the increasing use of technology. While countries have made progress, the report calls for governments to invest in addressing new areas of trafficking activity.⁵⁶

Similarly, GRETA called on countries, civil society organisations and tech companies to work together to counter the use of technology to recruit victims. It also recommended sharing knowledge and building capacity with law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges.⁵⁷

In 2022, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF) provided a total of EUR 13 million for anti-trafficking activities and to support trans-national projects, such as on improving early identification, assistance to victims and the integration of third-country trafficking victims.⁵⁸

5. Higher risk of human trafficking during the war in Ukraine

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, an estimated 11.3 million people have crossed from Ukraine to the EU, while 7.4 million have crossed back into Ukraine.⁵⁹ Many of those travelling across the borders are women and children, including unaccompanied minors, placing them at a greater risk of falling victim to human trafficking.

⁵³ European Migration Network EMN, [EMN study: Third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings: detection, identification and protection](#), March 2022.

⁵⁴ Europol, [20 countries spin a web to catch human traffickers during a hackathon](#), 21 September 2022.

⁵⁵ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings GRETA, [Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings](#), April 2022.

⁵⁶ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), [Steady progress made in national anti-trafficking efforts, but challenges persist, OSCE report says](#), 18 July 2022.

⁵⁷ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings GRETA, [Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings](#), April 2022.

⁵⁸ European Commission, [Questions and Answers – Trends, challenges and revision of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#), 19 December 2022.

⁵⁹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUA), Ukraine Crisis: Data and Analysis, <https://eua.europa.eu/ukraine-crisis-data-and-analysis>. Accessed on 1 February 2023.



FRA noted that displaced persons from Ukraine may have been in susceptible conditions to human trafficking due to trauma, language barriers, financial needs and the presence of organised trafficking networks. A recent UNODC report also describes the lack of income-generating opportunities, shortage of essential services, internal displacement and the risk of exploitation during war as factors which play into exposing Ukrainians to the possibility of being trafficked and affect a person's coping strategies and pursuit of safety and security.⁶⁰

The risk of trafficking was higher in the early days of the war as unmonitored individuals offered transport and housing to people moving across the Ukrainian border.⁶¹ Civil society organisations in Slovakia reported to the Council of Europe that they observed suspicious movements at the border, where a group tried to prevent the registration of some arriving Ukrainians.⁶² A few EU+ countries started a registration system to better monitor private offers.⁶³ In addition, the EUAA made [practical recommendations](#) on the provision of private accommodation to displaced persons from Ukraine to guide relevant stakeholders.⁶⁴

National authorities raised concern about human trafficking risks since the beginning of the war, and border crossing points were specifically monitored for potential trafficking victims.⁶⁵ Some countries agreed on increased cooperation at the external borders. In December 2022, "Operation Fox" began on the Austro-Hungarian border to fight trafficking in human beings and prevent abuse of the asylum system.^{66, 67} Austria also established temporary controls on the borders with Slovakia in order to combat trafficking, since temporary border controls previously introduced in Czechia could have led to a possible shift in trafficking routes through Austria.⁶⁸

It is difficult to have accurate data on the number of incidents as many cases are not reported. Unaccompanied minors have been particularly at risk of being exploited by traffickers when crossing from Ukraine. The European Commission pointed to some gaps in the registration of children as some EU countries did not systematically register or report unaccompanied minors, so the exact number of children who have arrived from Ukraine is unknown. Unaccompanied minors, including those from Ukrainian institutions, were not always referred to national child protection authorities for their care.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), [Conflict in Ukraine: Key evidence on risks of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants](#), 22 December 2022.

⁶¹ Council of Europe, [Report of the fact-finding mission to the Czech Republic by Ms Leyla Kayacik Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees 4-6 May 2022](#), 5 July 2022.

⁶² Council of Europe, [Report of the fact-finding mission to the Slovak Republic Ms Leyla Kayacik Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees 2-4 May 2022](#), 5 July 2022.

⁶³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), [The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine – The broad fundamental rights impact in the EU](#), Bulletin 2, October 2022.

⁶⁴ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), [Private accommodation for displaced persons from Ukraine](#), May 2022.

⁶⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), [The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine – The broad fundamental rights impact in the EU](#), Bulletin 2, October 2022.

⁶⁶ Federal Ministry of the Interior | Bundesministerium Inneres, [Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit](#), 3 October 2022.

⁶⁷ Federal Ministry of the Interior | Bundesministerium Inneres, [Asylbremse in Ungarn soll durch Unterstützung der österreichischen Polizei erfolgen](#), 15 December 2022.

⁶⁸ Federal Ministry of the Interior | Bundesministerium Inneres, [Schleppereibekämpfung](#), 6 October 2022.

⁶⁹ European Commission, [Unaccompanied and Separated Children fleeing from war in Ukraine – FAQs on Registration, Reception and Care](#), 2022. Accessed on 6 February 2023.

Recognising the increase in the activities of criminal organisations that targeted persons displaced from Ukraine, the European Commission implemented the [Common Anti-Trafficking Plan](#) to prevent risks, support potential victims and raise awareness.⁷⁰ In addition, the EUAA's practical tool for guardians representing displaced unaccompanied minors brings attention to the risks surrounding offers of private accommodation and the role of social media and the Internet in luring children.⁷¹

Civil and international organisations play a crucial role in the prevention of trafficking and supporting potential victims. Early on, UNHCR and UNICEF established Blue Dot Hubs, a one-stop safe place to support displaced persons from Ukraine by providing information and various support services like counselling and psychosocial support. The hubs are located in the border regions or transit routes of several EU Member States (for example in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). A key role for the staff in hubs has been to identify and provide support to the most vulnerable persons who face a higher risk of becoming victims of gender-based violence, exploitation, trafficking and abuse.⁷²

UNHCR and the European Disability Forum published a report on the key challenges faced by persons with disabilities fleeing Ukraine. They noted that women and girls with disabilities, in particular, are at an increased risk of human trafficking and made several recommendations on accessible accommodation and access to information and services.⁷³

The IOM published an annual report about their assistance in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, which included awareness-raising efforts to prevent falling victim to human trafficking.⁷⁴

The Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) published a guidance note to address the risks of trafficking of displaced persons from Ukraine. It underlined the importance of adequately registering all displaced persons and recommended actions for all frontline actors.⁷⁵

Access to essential services, information, employment and education are essential for the prevention of migrant smuggling and of trafficking.⁷⁶ The possibility of visa-free travel for Ukrainians to enter the EU and granting temporary protection which provided access to services and employment, combined with extensive anti-trafficking measures in EU+ countries, helped to prevent trafficking. However, the international NGO network,

⁷⁰ European Commission, [Swift response to conflicts critical to preventing human trafficking](#), 31 October 2022.

⁷¹ European Union Agency for Asylum EUAA, [Practical Tool for Guardians, Temporary protection for unaccompanied children fleeing Ukraine](#), November 2022.

⁷² UNHCR, [UNHCR, UNICEF establish dozens of support hubs in countries hosting Ukrainian refugees](#), 21 September 2022.

⁷³ UNHCR/European Disability Forum, [Ensuring the protection of persons with disabilities fleeing from Ukraine](#), December 2022.

⁷⁴ International Organisation for Migration IOM, [Ukraine Crisis 2022-2023: 1 year of response](#), 24 February 2023.

⁷⁵ Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings [GRETA issues Guidance Note on addressing the risks of trafficking in human beings related to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing humanitarian crisis](#), 4 May 2022.

⁷⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), [Conflict in Ukraine: Key evidence on risks of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants](#), 22 December 2022.



La Strada, pointed out that third-country nationals fleeing Ukraine were at a greater risk of human trafficking if they did not obtain temporary protection.⁷⁷

In further efforts to help, EU+ countries published targeted information and launched information campaigns on trafficking in human beings. They distributed leaflets and posters, trained frontline workers and created dedicated websites, phone hotlines and social media posts to warn about trafficking and how victims could receive assistance. The aim was to raise awareness among displaced persons from Ukraine and also the general population in order to identify and report cases.⁷⁸

The IOM in Austria, in cooperation with the police and victim protection organisations, jointly developed two briefing documents for frontline workers on [Indicators of Human Trafficking amongst Arrivals from Ukraine](#) and [Preventing Human Trafficking in Private Accommodation](#). The IOM, the police and victim protection organisations held hybrid information sessions with first responders, which focused on assistance to and referral of victims of human trafficking from Ukraine.⁷⁹

The Danish Centre against Human Trafficking developed a guide on detecting signs of human trafficking for competent authorities, the police, municipalities and civil society organisations, such as the Red Cross and the Danish Refugee Council. The organisation also produced a leaflet for displaced persons from Ukraine to raise awareness.⁸⁰

In Norway, a multilingual [information poster](#) on the risks of trafficking was handed out to all displaced persons from Ukraine who registered for protection. This information, including contact details and a QR code leading to the more information on the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration's website, was made available on screens and posters at all registration places. The police also prepared two [information films](#) warning about the risks of trafficking, which were available on the website of the police, social media and [posters](#).

The regional resource centres on violence, traumatic stress and suicide prevention ([RVTS](#)) in Norway expanded its web resources to provide information to staff in reception facilities, health services and municipalities on the care of vulnerable persons from Ukraine, including guidance for the identification of and follow-up to victims of human trafficking.⁸¹ IOM Norway in coordination with the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration held [information meetings](#) for staff on trafficking and supporting arriving Ukrainians.⁸² The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research ([NIBR](#)) published a report on [Ukrainian refugees - experiences from the first phase in Norway](#), and the research foundation [Fafo](#) published on [assessing future migration among Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Norway](#).

⁷⁷ La Strada International/The Freedom Fund, [Preventing human trafficking of refugees from Ukraine A rapid assessment of risks and gaps in the anti-trafficking response](#), Hoff, Suzanne & de Volder, Eefje, May 2022.

⁷⁸ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), [Analysis of measures to provide protection to displaced persons from Ukraine: Situational Report](#), 6 July 2022.

⁷⁹ International Organisation for Migration (IOM), [Ukraine: IOM Austria And Partners Raise Awareness Of Risks](#), 15 July 2022.

⁸⁰ The Danish Centre Against Human Trafficking, [Ukrainske fordrevne og risiko for menneskehandel](#), 1 September 2022.

⁸¹ Written input to Situational Update No 17 received by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), 8 March 2023.

⁸² IOM Norway, [Awareness training on human trafficking and migrant exploitation](#), 10 June 2022.

The German Federal Police [warned](#) young people and women travelling alone not to accept suspicious accommodation offers. The IOM in Germany and Violence against Women Support Hotline published a [leaflet](#) in German, Ukrainian, Russian and English with important safety information for displaced persons from Ukraine. The German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings (KOK) carried out a study to evaluate measures on awareness and prevention in Germany, but it concluded that it was too early to comprehensively assess the situation of trafficked victims from Ukraine in Germany.⁸³

The Netherlands focused on information provision among displaced persons by handing out brochures and flyers in relevant locations. The authorities developed guidelines for the "Identification of children and young people from Ukraine".⁸⁴

The Ministry of Justice in Iceland [published](#) guidelines on indicators of trafficking in human beings, highlighting that displaced persons from Ukraine are more exposed to the risk of trafficking due to the on-going situation.

In Slovakia, information leaflets in [various languages](#) were distributed directly at the borders, in cooperation with district authorities, NGOs and the police. The Slovak Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of the Interior operates Victim Information Offices in the larger-capacity registration facilities, which assist and identify potential victims of trafficking among the displaced persons from Ukraine.⁸⁵ The IOM in Slovakia worked closely with implementing partners and other service providers to provide training on how to refer cases of trafficking. In addition, IOM Slovakia is working on new counter-trafficking tools, such as a web page and the [Safe Application](#).⁸⁶

The IOM in Hungary published a [flyer](#) to raise awareness on the prevention of trafficking in human beings among displaced persons from Ukraine. The flyer also provided information on getting assistance.⁸⁷

Estonia provided with [leaflets](#) informing about the risks of human trafficking and how to find help and made [video clips](#) informing on the signs of potential trafficking and on how to report suspected cases.

A major legislative change was introduced by the Law on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine, which places stricter penalties for committing the crime of human trafficking, as provided for in the Criminal Code. The Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, in cooperation with police headquarters, developed a procedure to verify the legality of operations of foreign entities and undertake security checks of persons declaring their will to help refugees from Ukraine.

⁸³ German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings (KOK), [Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation in the Context of the Ukraine War - An Investigation from the Perspective of Specialised Counselling Centres on the Situation in Germany](#), 13 December 2022.

⁸⁴ Response to EUAA Survey PCYS.2022.004 - Implementation of temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine, 16 January 2023.

⁸⁵ Response to EUAA Survey PCYS.2022.004 - Implementation of temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine, 16 January 2023.

⁸⁶ IOM Slovakia, [SAFE-Mobile application to prevent Human Trafficking](#). Accessed on 13 March 2023.

⁸⁷ IOM Hungary, [Leaflet Welcome to Hungary](#), 17 May 2022.



In addition, displaced persons arriving in Poland obtained comprehensive information on potential threats and the number of the National Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking and a special police hotline.⁸⁸ The Presidential Office of the Border Guard Headquarters and the Department of International Affairs and Migration of the Ministry of Interior and Administration in Poland jointly developed a [graphical leaflet](#) addressed to Ukrainian citizens crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border to inform them about the risk of trafficking.⁸⁹

Romania developed internal instruments on trafficking of displaced persons from Ukraine, including indicators, steps for referral and contact information for competent authorities. This is used in conjunction with the national framework and internal procedure for early identification of vulnerable people which are in place.⁹⁰

In Slovenia, the [Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings](#) focused on awareness-raising and information provision to displaced persons from Ukraine and on the identification of potential victims.⁹¹

6. Conclusions

New methods for human trafficking continue to emerge, as witnessed in the most recent global crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Criminal networks have adapted quickly to new migratory patterns in order to continue to target victims. Additionally, the widespread use of Internet fora, social media and dating apps now play a significant role in the recruitment of victims at the international level.

COVID-19 travel restrictions pushed some asylum seekers to resort to irregular border crossings, exposing them to the risk of human trafficking, particularly for unaccompanied minors and women. In addition, the war in Ukraine spurred waves of displaced persons to enter the EU, sometimes crossing through routes targeted by traffickers. A lack of information about their rights, language barriers and limited financial resources further put them at risk.

EU+ countries responded to emerging patterns and launched multilingual awareness-raising campaigns to better inform potential victims, including displaced persons from Ukraine. New policy and legislative developments strengthened national referral mechanisms to better identify victims and provide them with adequate support and protection.

The evolving role of technology and new trafficking patterns will continue to bring new challenges in the future and EU+ countries will have to keep up to speed with changing trends.

⁸⁸ Written input to Situational Update No 17 received by the Polish Office for Foreigners UDSC, 7 March 2023.

⁸⁹ Polish Border Guard, [Handel ludźmi](#). Accessed on 25 January 2023.

⁹⁰ Response to EUAA Survey PCYS.2022.004 - Implementation of temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine, 16 January 2023.

⁹¹ Response to EUAA Survey PCYS.2022.004 - Implementation of temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine, 16 January 2023.