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ANNEX

ANNEX

to the

**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}

EU Strategy on combating trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings, though largely a hidden crime, is an increasing reality across the EU. In 2023-2024¹, more than 20 000 victims of trafficking were registered, a 16.1% increase compared to 2021-2022 data, demonstrating the persistent and evolving nature of the crime². Out of the registered victims in 2023-2024, 36% were EU citizens, while the great majority 64%, were non-EU citizens. Trafficking continued to disproportionately affect women and girls, who accounted for 63% of all registered victims in 2023-2024; most of them were trafficked for sexual exploitation. By contrast, the majority of victims trafficked for labour exploitation were men (74%³). As presented in the report on the progress made in the EU in combating trafficking in human beings (Sixth Report), the overall trends evolved significantly comparing to the period when previous Strategy was adopted⁴.

Anyone can become victim of trafficking, regardless of gender, age or citizenship status, though vulnerable populations are especially at risk. Trafficking affects all Member States and involves many forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced criminality, forced begging and forced marriage. Trafficking is a violation of fundamental rights⁵ and a serious threat to a person's security. It is closely linked to organised crime and generates substantial illicit profits⁶. It impacts societies and economies and a wide range of sectors, undermining the rule of law, distorting legitimate markets and fuelling corruption⁷.

Trafficking in human beings cannot be addressed in isolation. It requires coordinated actions across multiple policy areas and stakeholders, including competent authorities, civil society organisations and private parties at EU, national and international levels with the support of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. The four pillars of prevention, prosecution, protection and partnerships, recognised at international level⁸, remain the foundation of the EU response. Preventing exploitation, reducing vulnerabilities and addressing demand must go hand in hand with strengthening investigations and prosecutions, ensuring effective protection and support for victims and their families from criminal organisations and reinforcing cooperation among all relevant actors

¹ [Trafficking in human beings statistics - Statistics Explained - Eurostat](#), assessed on 4.9.2026.

² The actual number is likely to be significantly higher as many victims remain undetected.

³ Calculated by Eurostat (extraction based on special request from THB annual data).

⁴ [COM\(2021\) 171 final](#), 14.4.2021.

⁵ Trafficking in human beings is prohibited by the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) (Article 5 paragraph 3) and considered as a serious form of organised crime by the [Treaty on the functioning of the European Union](#) (Article 83).

⁶ Europol's [EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment \(SOCTA\)](#) underlines that trafficking in human beings remains a substantial criminal market for organised crime, increasingly facilitated online and hidden within closed communities.

⁷ Trafficking in human beings remains the second most prevalent criminal market in 2025, after financial crimes. See [Global Organized Crime Index 2025-Crime at a Crossroads](#).

⁸ The [UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons](#), adopted by the United Nations in November 2000 as part of the [United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#), is the world's primary legal instrument to combat human trafficking, aiming at preventing trafficking, protecting and assisting the victims of trafficking and promoting cooperation among States Parties. Similarly, the [United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons](#), adopted on 30 July 2010, addresses the four objectives: prevention of trafficking; protection and assistance to victims of trafficking; prosecution of the perpetrators of trafficking; and strengthening partnerships.

However, despite sustained efforts at EU and national level, trafficking remains a highly profitable and relatively low-risk crime for the perpetrators. Organised criminal networks adapt rapidly, exploiting vulnerabilities, gender inequality, migration dynamics and technological developments. Criminal networks increasingly operate transnationally, within legal economic structures and supply chains, making detection more difficult. Victims continue to be significantly under-identified, while investigations, prosecutions and convictions remain limited compared to the scale of the phenomenon. The digital transformation has further reshaped trafficking patterns, enabling recruitment, control and exploitation through online platforms, social media, encrypted communication tools and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and deepfakes. The current geopolitical, migration and security context further exacerbates trafficking risks and creates conditions that increase vulnerability to exploitation, as illustrated by the events in Ceuta, Spain, during July and August 2026.

The renewed strategy aims to ensure that the EU remains at the forefront in addressing these challenges, reflecting a sustained and continuous commitment to tackling trafficking. It identifies **six strategic pillars** to strengthen operational capacities and resilience against trafficking, including:

- the growing digital dimension of the crime, by leveraging technology to strengthen prevention, detection and investigation;
- reinforcing cooperation with the private sector to prevent trafficking and reduce exploitation risks;
- strengthening the EU's capacity to combat transnational trafficking and its links to organised crime;
- further addressing trafficking risks in the context of migration;
- enhancing prevention, preparedness and rapid response in crisis situations; and
- strengthening the protection of persons vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Furthermore, the strategy strives to ensure a victim-centred, child-sensitive, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, intersectional and rights-based approach across all actions. Under the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive⁹, Member States are required to adopt national action plans and update them regularly. This strategy would contribute to guide these national action plans by providing a framework that reflects the common EU's priorities in this area.

This more strategic, integrated and future-proof response to trafficking in human beings includes support for actions to prevent trafficking, protect and support victims and strengthen the **technical expertise and operational capacities** of law enforcement, judicial authorities, including prosecutors and judges, and other frontline actors. Particular attention will be given to emerging challenges in the digital environment. A strong emphasis will also be placed on ensuring that responses are victim-centred, child-sensitive and gender-responsive. **Specialised training** for all professionals and frontline actors working with victims of trafficking will remain essential. Building on these efforts within the EU, the external dimension will also remain an important part of the overall approach, recognising that effective action along migration routes and in partner

⁹ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1712](#), 24.6.2024.

countries contributes directly to preventing trafficking within the EU. In this context, support will also be provided for anti-human trafficking responses along **migration routes and in partner countries**, strengthening all aspects of migration and asylum governance and border management¹⁰. Finally, **awareness raising, information and communication campaigns** and **education programmes** will remain key to preventing trafficking, identifying victims at an early stage, and increasing public understanding of the crime.

The **EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator** coordinates the EU's comprehensive response to trafficking, including by promoting cooperation between Member States, EU bodies, civil society organisations and international partners, including non-EU countries. Instrumental in this context are the **EU Network of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs (NACR)** and the **EU Civil Society Platform against trafficking in human beings**¹¹.

Trafficking in human beings also remains a priority in the context of enlargement and accession negotiations. As such, cooperation with candidate countries and potential candidates will also be strengthened, including through support for alignment with the EU acquis, fundamental rights and relevant international standards, capacity building for national authorities and reinforced operational and policy cooperation to prevent and combat the crime, while protecting its victims, building across the relevant pillars of the strategy.

The Commission will:

- monitor the **transposition and full implementation of the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive**, support Member States with appropriate measures and, where necessary, initiate infringement proceedings against Member States that fail to transpose or correctly implement the Directive;
- in line with the amended Directive, submit a **report** assessing the impact of such measures;
- support **awareness raising and information campaigns** inside and outside the EU to reduce vulnerabilities and mitigate the risk of trafficking and exploitation.

Member States are invited to:

- provide **specialised multi-sectorial training to all key actors** on trafficking in all its forms, including on emerging trends and the online dimension, to strengthen prevention and ensure effective, comprehensive and victim-centred responses;
- promote **awareness-raising activities** to improve the early identification of victims and increase public awareness of the crime. Campaigns should be reinforced to provide better information to local communities.

¹⁰ For more information, see Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Global Europe, [COM/2025/551 final](#), 16.7.2025.

¹¹ The EU Anti-Trafficking Hub also contributes to the implementation of EU anti-trafficking policies, by supporting all stakeholders with research, analysis and advice, in collaboration with experts; [EU Anti-Trafficking Hub - Migration and Home Affairs - European Commission](#).

STRATEGIC PILLARS

1. HARNESSING MODERN TECHNOLOGY TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING

Objective: *Leverage technology to prevent, detect, investigate and respond to trafficking in human beings while contributing to a safer digital environment and strengthening the protection of victims online.*

The digital transformation makes it easier for traffickers to recruit, control and exploit victims, while also making it easier to avoid detection. Online platforms, social media, encrypted communication services and digital advertising tools are increasingly used for criminal operations. Children and young people are particularly exposed to online risks, in particular of sexual exploitation and forced criminality. Emerging technologies further increase the risks of manipulation, deception and coercion. A growing concern are the set-up of scam centres (compounds linked to transnational criminal networks), initially established in South-East Asia, now also set up in other regions, including Africa and Latin America, due to their links to trafficking and transnational organised crime. Victims are often recruited through deception and then coerced into carrying out online fraud, phishing schemes and other cyber-enabled crimes. In this context, the Commission will present an **EU action plan against digital fraud** to strengthen law enforcement cooperation to combat online scams, including scam centres, in cooperation with the relevant non-EU countries.

At the same time, digital technologies can improve prevention, detection, investigations and victim support. The EU should pursue a coordinated and innovation-driven response that strengthens digital investigative capacities, digital evidence collection and responsible use of technological tools against trafficking practices. Existing EU measures provide a strong framework to address trafficking online, by improving reporting mechanisms, transparency, systemic risks awareness and accountability, supporting the protection of children, reinforcing law enforcement cooperation and strengthening digital investigative capacities, while supporting cross-border investigations and information exchange in full compliance with fundamental rights and data protection rules. This includes the **Digital Services Act**¹²; the amended **Anti-Trafficking Directive**, under which the use of information and communication technologies to commit or facilitate sexual exploitation is considered an aggravating circumstance; the proposal **strengthening support through Europol**¹³ to cross-border investigations and information exchange; the Regulation (EU) 2023/1543 on European Production Orders and European Preservation Orders for electronic evidence in criminal proceedings (“E-evidence Regulation”)¹⁴; the proposal for recast of Directive regarding the European Investigation Order in criminal matters and the European Remote Participation Order¹⁵; and the **ProtectEU: a European internal security strategy**¹⁶, which includes actions further strengthening law enforcement capacity in the digital environment.

¹² [Regulation 2022/2065/EU - DSA](#), 27.10.2022.

¹³ [COM\(2026\) 580 final](#), 24.6.2026.

¹⁴ [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/1543](#), 12.7.2023.

¹⁵ [COM\(2026\) 313 final](#), 23.6.2026.

¹⁶ [COM/2025/148 final](#), 1.4.2025.

Through the **European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)**¹⁷, the EU will support innovative approaches to digital investigations. This includes **hackathons** to detect exploitation on online platforms and assist Member States in the analysis of digital data in investigations. **Closer cooperation** with financial intelligence units, online platforms, technology companies, financial institutions and fintech providers is also essential to improving the detection of suspicious activities and disrupting criminal networks. To drive this agenda forward, the Commission will enhance the dialogue with online service providers and other relevant stakeholders through the **EU Internet Forum on combating trafficking in human beings**, to support the exchange of operational expertise and practical insights on trends, good practices, challenges and actions needed.

Victims should also benefit from accessible, user-friendly, safe and readily available channels for reporting, including through digital channels. These can facilitate reporting of crimes, access to information, protection and specialised support services, particularly for victims with special needs or victims who may face barriers in accessing physical support structures.

The Commission will:

- regularly monitor the implementation of the EU Digital Services Act with regards to the crime of trafficking in human beings and undertake relevant action when necessary;
- engage **with the private sector and digital industries**, through the EU Internet Forum, and promote the exchange of good practices against trafficking in human beings, with the support of EU agencies;
- facilitate **information exchange and operational cooperation** related to online trafficking patterns and digital financial investigations, with the support of EU agencies, including within EMPACT.

Member States are invited to:

- make full use of existing instruments for **operational cooperation**, such as joint investigation teams, with support from Europol and EMPACT;
- strengthen **cooperation** between law enforcement and judicial authorities, financial intelligence units and relevant private-sector actors to strengthen online prevention, while promoting awareness of victims' rights and information about reporting mechanisms, including through digital technologies.

2. STRENGTHENING PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT TO PREVENT TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Objective: *Strengthen business accountability and deepen cooperation with the private sector to prevent trafficking, reduce exploitation risks, improve early detection and promote responsible business conduct across supply chains and high-risk economic sectors*¹⁸.

¹⁷ [EU Policy Cycle - EMPACT - EMPACT 2026-2029 Fighting crime together | Europol](#)

¹⁸ High-risk sectors include agriculture, construction, hospitality, transport, domestic work, manufacturing and care services.

Trafficking in human beings increasingly infiltrates legitimate economic activities and supply chains across the EU and beyond. Criminal networks exploit gaps in labour protections, recruitment practices and supply chains to conceal exploitation and maximise illicit profit¹⁹. Trafficking for labour exploitation remains one of the most difficult forms of trafficking to detect²⁰, investigate and prosecute. Victims often remain invisible due to the precarious nature of their employment, their dependence on their employers, their reluctance to report their exploiters to the authorities due to fear of retaliation, the language barriers they face or their illegal migration status. At the same time, complex legal rules and lack of specialisation and capacity in Member States can lead to different approaches to dealing with trafficking cases, unequal treatment of victims and a lack of standardised guidelines or procedures. As a result, cases are too often addressed only as minor labour violations rather than serious labour violations or serious trafficking offences²¹. A more strategic and coordinated response is therefore required. Member States should ensure that **specialised investigators, prosecutors and judges** are available and equipped not only with a thorough understanding of the legal aspects of trafficking for labour exploitation but also with the expertise needed to understand the broader dynamics of exploitative labour practices and their impact on victims.

The EU has boosted its framework on responsible business conduct and fair labour mobility and the prevention of forced labour through a range of legislative and policy initiatives. These include the **Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market**²², the **Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence**²³ and the **Employers Sanctions Directive**²⁴, including its evaluation, which will also assess its impact on reducing labour exploitation. Additionally, the Commission's proposal on the **revision of the Regulation establishing the European Labour Authority (ELA)**²⁵ adopted on 15 September 2026 as part of the Fair Labour Mobility Package²⁶ 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.

A more ambitious and structured partnership with the private sector in preventing trafficking in human beings is needed. **Partnerships with high-risk sectors** can help raise awareness, identify suspicious activities and facilitate early intervention²⁷, detection and reporting of trafficking indicators, through closer cooperation between authorities, the private sector and sectoral

¹⁹ While the role of technology, online platforms and other digital services has been addressed under the first pillar, this section focuses on the engagement of the private sector in relation to legitimate economic activities, labour markets, recruitment practices and supply chains.

²⁰ Nevertheless, between 2019 and 2023, the number of registered victims trafficked for labour exploitation in the EU increased by 70%. For more information, see [Eurostat report on 10 years \(2013-2023\) of EU data on trafficking in human beings](#)

²¹ For more information, see [Study on the concept of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation](#). One example is the criminal offence under Article 9(c) and (d) of the Employers Sanctions Directive 2009/52/EC.

²² [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/3015](#), 12.12.2024.

²³ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1760](#), 5.7.2024.

²⁴ [Directive 2009/52/EC](#), 30.6.2009.

²⁵ [COM\(2026\) 985 final](#), 15.9.2026.

²⁶ [COM\(2026\) 970 final](#), 15.9.2026.

²⁷ For example see [Doc 10171 - Manual on a Comprehensive Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in the Aviation Sector](#) by ICAO on guidance and recommendations for combating human trafficking in the aviation sector.

operators. Such partnerships should be used more systematically to improve prevention, strengthen victim protection and increase accountability throughout economic sectors. This would require closer cooperation with businesses, employers, recruitment agencies, industry associations, trade unions and civil society organisations. The Commission is aiming at strengthening engagement with the private sector, including on a voluntary basis, on prevention and due diligence, through meetings and exchanges of good practices and by bringing together actors from different economic sectors as part of a **European business coalition against trafficking in human beings**²⁸.

Labour inspectors and frontline professionals need enhanced training and operational guidance to identify trafficking and severe exploitation in the private sector. Training should be mandatory for all key actors, including police officers, magistrates and labour inspectors. Greater coordination between labour inspections and criminal investigations is essential to ensure that serious exploitation is correctly identified, effectively investigated and prosecuted²⁹.

Victim protection and labour rights enforcement should remain mutually reinforcing objectives. It is essential to strengthen labour inspections, enforce labour standards and address exploitative working conditions. This would not only help prevent trafficking and identify victims at an early stage but also ensure that victims can access their rights and pursue recovery without fear of retaliation, penalisation or loss of protection.

The Commission will:

- strengthen **cooperation between labour inspectors** through ELA;
- support cross-border cooperation and information exchange related to labour exploitation and trafficking risks in the context of EMPACT;
- enhance cooperation towards a **European business coalition** against trafficking, including through voluntary engagement of the private sector and existing networks such as the European Social Partners and the Labour Migration Platform.

Member States are invited to:

- increase **cooperation with the private sector** to prevent, identify and address trafficking risks within supply chains and business operations;
- improve **coordination and cooperation** between labour authorities, law enforcement authorities and judicial authorities and strengthen labour inspections and monitoring mechanisms in high-risk sectors;
- improve access to **support, compensation and reintegration measures** for victims of trafficking;
- promote **responsible recruitment practices** and effective **due diligence** across supply chains.

²⁸ The private sector may include, among others, partners from the aviation, hospitality and accommodation, tourism, transport, agriculture, construction sectors.

²⁹ Victims need to be enabled to talk to labour inspectors freely and protection against possible reprisals must be ensured.

3. DISRUPTING TRANSNATIONAL TRAFFICKING LINKED TO ORGANISED CRIME

Objective: *Strengthen the EU's capacity to disrupt, dismantle and prosecute trafficking in human beings as a core component of organised crime, through enhanced cross-border cooperation, intelligence-led policing, financial investigations and effective asset recovery.*

Trafficking in human beings is increasingly carried out by sophisticated, adaptive and highly threatening organised criminal networks operating across borders³⁰. Profit remains a key driver of trafficking, which promises significant illicit gains for relatively low exposure to risk. To maximise profit, criminal networks are able to exploit differences in legal systems, enforcement capacities and operational coordination. Trafficking is often closely linked to other forms of serious crime, including migrant smuggling, drug trafficking, document fraud, corruption and money laundering. Disrupting financial flows, targeting assets and strengthening financial intelligence are therefore essential components of an effective response.

The EU is reinforcing national efforts to combat trafficking and disrupt the criminal networks behind it through a stronger legislative and operational framework designed to target traffickers not only as individual perpetrators but as part of a broader criminal ecosystem, including through the **Directive on asset recovery and confiscation**³¹. The **new sanctions regime targeting organised crime including migrant smuggling and trafficking**³² will empower the EU to freeze criminals' assets, restrict their movements, cut off their profits and disrupt their business model. Additionally, the upcoming **proposal to modernise rules to combat organised crime** will target all organised crime, including criminal networks involved in trafficking, with a view to increasing penalties, improving the intelligence picture and strengthening the prevention of criminal infiltration. **Anti-corruption measures** are also important in disrupting enabling environments for trafficking networks, including those facilitating the movement of victims, the falsification of documents and the avoidance of detection. Against this broader context, the Commission will present the **EU anti-corruption strategy**, which will set out the EU's priorities and its action to prevent and fight corruption in a comprehensive and coherent manner within and beyond the EU. To address Member States' operational needs in tackling serious crime and terrorism, in addition to the proposed new mandate for Europol, the Commission has also proposed to revise the **Eurojust regulation**³³, which will contribute to a more efficient fight against serious, organised and cross-border crimes, including trafficking in human beings.

In this context, **operational cross-border cooperation** through joint investigation teams and EMPACT remains essential. Financial investigations are an important tool for preventing organised crime from infiltrating the illicit economy³⁴. **Victims' rights, support and protection** should also remain an integral component of law enforcement and judicial responses; such

³⁰ For more information, see [Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks - Issue 2 | Europol](#).

³¹ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1260](#), 2.5.2024.

³² Press Release, [Commission and High Representative propose new sanctions regime](#), 9 July 2026.

³³ [COM\(2026\) 570 final](#), 24.6.2026.

³⁴ The Europol Financial Intelligence Public Private Partnership (EFIPPP) issued a guide on successful operational cooperation between financial institutions and investigative authorities to combat financial crime. See [EFIPPP Practical Guide for Operational Cooperation between Investigative Authorities and Financial Institutions | Europol](#).

responses should be conducted in a victim-centred, trauma-informed, child-sensitive, gender-responsive and rights compliant manner to foster trust and cooperation with competent authorities.

The Commission will:

- streamline anti-human trafficking priorities within the broader EU policy against organised crime;
- follow up on the implementation of the new sanctions regime once adopted, led by the European External Action Service and in coordination with Member States;
- support **law enforcement and judicial cooperation** among Member States and external partners, including in cross-border and international cases, targeting trafficking networks and their links to organised crime, with the support of EU agencies, including within EMPACT.

Member States are invited to:

- strengthen **cross-border operational cooperation** through joint investigation teams with the support of Europol and Eurojust, including within EMPACT and share information with relevant EU agencies;
- improve **cooperation** between law enforcement, judicial authorities and financial intelligence units and use **financial investigations** and asset recovery tools in trafficking cases;
- increase **criminal intelligence sharing and coordination** with EU agencies;
- ensure that **operations** are victim-centred, child-sensitive, gender-responsive and accompanied by effective victim identification and protection.

4. PREVENTING EXPLOITATION LINKED TO MIGRATION STATUS

Objective: *Strengthen the EU's capacity to prevent trafficking in human beings by integrating robust anti-human trafficking safeguards into migration, asylum and border management systems, and by ensuring early identification of victims among persons on the move, their protection and referral to appropriate services.*

Trafficking in human beings is increasingly linked to migration and displacement flows. Since 2021, the majority of registered victims of trafficking in the EU have been non-EU citizens, accounting for 64% of all registered victims in 2023-2024³⁵. This reflects a shift in the victims' demographic and underscores some links between trafficking and the migratory status of the victim. Migrants, asylum seekers and displaced persons are particularly vulnerable to exploitation at all stages of their journeys, including in countries of origin, transit and destination. Criminal networks exploit illegal migration routes, administrative complexity, limited access to information and protection gaps to recruit, transport and exploit victims.

³⁵ Calculated based on Eurostat (online data code [crim_thb_vctz](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_vctz_custom_22684785/default/table)), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_thb_vctz_custom_22684785/default/table.

While migrant smuggling and trafficking may often involve the same criminal networks and affect migrants in vulnerable situation in overlapping ways, the two criminal offences remain distinct and require differentiated but closely coordinated operational and policy responses. Non-EU citizens may be smuggled into the EU for exploitation, while others may be exploited along the migration route or after arrival. However, trafficking is not limited to illegal migration, when it concerns non-EU citizens. Often, victims who arrive legally with work or study visas issued by Member States subsequently become victims of trafficking. Recent trends show an increasing number of victims originating from Latin American countries, alongside a growing presence of trafficking networks with links to Latin America. In some cases, traffickers take advantage of visa liberalisation regimes to move victims throughout the EU, to the cities and countries, where they will be exploited³⁶. Regardless of whether they have arrived in the EU legally or illegally, victims of trafficking are rights-holders and are entitled to protection, and particular efforts should be put in place to avoid the risk of re-trafficking. The revised Victims' Rights Directive³⁷ applies to victims irrespective of their residence status and obliges Member States to ensure that victims who are third-country nationals, are not discouraged from reporting a criminal offence, such as trafficking, and that they are treated in a non-discriminatory manner.

The implementation of the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**³⁸ provides further opportunity to systematically integrate anti-human trafficking safeguards into migration management. It provides a legal framework that allows Member States to address the specific challenges the Member States face in protecting persons in vulnerable situations, including victims of trafficking³⁹. In this context, being identified as a victim of trafficking and receiving support meeting the specific needs often runs in parallel with the migration process. These procedures should be complementary⁴⁰. Close cooperation between migration authorities, asylum services, border guards, law enforcement authorities and judicial actors is essential. Clear referral mechanisms are needed to ensure the rapid identification of victims of trafficking and their access to protection and support services.

Moreover, the 2023 legislative package to counter migrant smuggling⁴¹ consists of a **proposal for a new Directive laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union**⁴² and a proposal for a **Regulation to reinforce police cooperation and Europol's role in the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings**⁴³. The **Regulation** was adopted in 2025⁴⁴ and has built further capacities for cross-border investigations in both migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. In parallel, the **Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling** emphasises that efforts

³⁶ Europol's [Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks - Issue 2](#) mentions that Latin America is a key region of interest, due to its interconnections with trafficking in human beings.

³⁷ [Directive \(EU\) 2026/1472](#), 17.6.2026.

³⁸ [Pact on Migration and Asylum - Migration and Home Affairs](#). See also [Report on the state of play on the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum](#), presented on 8 May 2026.

³⁹ For more information, see [Screening Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1356](#), [Asylum Procedure Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1348](#) and [Reception Conditions Directive \(EU\) 2024/1346](#) from 22.5.2024.

⁴⁰ See Article 11(4)(c) and recital 21 of the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive.

⁴¹ For more information, see [Legislative package to counter migrant smuggling](#)

⁴² [COM/2023/755 final](#), 28.11.2023.

⁴³ [COM/2023/754 final](#), 28.11.2023.

⁴⁴ [Regulation \(EU\) 2025/2611](#), 22.12.2025.

to counter migrant smuggling should be accompanied by measures addressing trafficking in human beings⁴⁵. Additionally, the **Pact for the Mediterranean Action Plan**⁴⁶ further reinforces cooperation with partner countries along key migration routes, including operational and institutional border management capacities, information exchange, victim protection and law enforcement and judicial cooperation.

EU agencies play a crucial role in this context, by strengthening early identification, operational coordination and information-sharing among national authorities and international actors. National authorities are encouraged to intensify their cooperation with EU agencies to improve operational coherence, situational awareness and overall effectiveness. The strengthened mandate of **Frontex** further contributes to improving border management, risk analysis and cross-border cooperation, thereby supporting the identification of indicators of trafficking and of persons in vulnerable situations. The **EUAA** supports national administrations in identifying and referring potential victims of trafficking to specialised care and support services, as well as in providing training modules, practical tools and guidance material for addressing and managing the needs of trafficking victims in asylum and reception⁴⁷.

The Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) will **strengthen and deepen cooperation** with key international partners. This includes close engagement with relevant United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Organisation for Migration, as well as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other organisations active in the field. With a view to strengthening prevention, cooperation with **countries of origin and transit of victims** will be further intensified, including through security and migration mobility dialogues with partner countries and via EEAS. Cooperation will focus on capacity-building and information exchange, victim protection, support and assistance and effective law enforcement and judicial responses, in due respect of fundamental rights. In addition, the **European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers** (ILO Network)⁴⁸ will contribute to improving the collection and exchange of information on trafficking trends and risks in non-EU countries, thereby enhancing the EU's situational awareness. Furthermore, under the **Global Alliance Rapid Response Initiatives**⁴⁹, the EU aims at delivering swift and context-specific communication responses to address evolving migration dynamics and emerging trafficking patterns in key non-EU countries.

The Commission will:

- support the European Parliament and the Council in their negotiations on the **proposed Anti-Smuggling Directive**, by facilitating discussions, where appropriate, to help advance the legislative process;
- ensure that relevant EU agencies integrate **trafficking risks and assistance to national authorities on victim identification, support and protection** in their actions, including

⁴⁵ For more information, see [Call to action](#) and [Global Alliance Joint Declaration final.pdf](#).

⁴⁶ For more information, see [EU presents first Action Plan under the Pact for the Mediterranean - Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf](#)

⁴⁷ For more information, see European Asylum Agency, [Situational update of July 2025](#).

⁴⁸ [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1240](#), 25.7.2019.

⁴⁹ For more information, see the [Info Note](#) on Global Alliance Rapid Response Initiatives .

through the development of operational guidance and training on the identification, support and protection of victims of trafficking;

- together with the European External Action Service, strengthen **cooperation with partner countries**, including with the support of EU agencies, the European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILO Network), international organisations and other relevant international partners along migration routes and raise rights-compliant, gender-responsive and children-sensitive responses to trafficking in political dialogues, including human rights dialogues, as relevant⁵⁰.

Member States are invited to:

- establish and maintain **clear referral mechanisms** for victims and potential victims of trafficking within migration and asylum systems;
- ensure effective **coordination** between migration, asylum, border and law enforcement authorities, with the support of EU agencies;
- strengthen **cooperation** with partner countries and international organisations on trafficking prevention and response.

5. ANTICIPATING AND ADDRESSING TRAFFICKING IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Objective: *Strengthen prevention, preparedness and rapid response to trafficking risks, including in the context of crises, conflicts, public health emergencies, climate-related disasters and large-scale displacement situations.*

Emergencies and crisis situations often disrupt protection systems, weakening institutional capacities, and expose affected populations and migrants, particularly women and children, to heightened vulnerability and risks of exploitation and trafficking. **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine** has demonstrated the heightened risks of trafficking that can arise in situations of conflict, displacement and humanitarian crises. The swift mobilisation of the EU, its Member States and Ukraine to identify and address these risks highlighted the importance of preparedness, early prevention measures, a coordinated crisis response and effective protection mechanisms for persons in vulnerable situations⁵¹. Building on this experience, anti-human trafficking safeguards should be systematically integrated into crisis response mechanisms at EU and national level. These should be accompanied by strengthened inter-agency cooperation, contingency planning, early identification systems, referral mechanisms and targeted victim protection measures. In humanitarian settings, the Commission will support actions through humanitarian partners that contribute to reduce the vulnerability to exploitation, including trafficking risks and ensure the inclusion of trafficking victims into humanitarian services.

⁵⁰ In line with [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027](#) which sets out that the EU will promote measures to prevent and fully eradicate trafficking in human beings, including by countering impunity for all perpetrators involved, as well as to assist and protect all victims, in particular women and children, according to their respective needs, including through the provision of mental health and psycho-social support, gender responsive and child sensitive approach.

⁵¹ For more information, see [A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine](#).

The amended **Anti-Trafficking Directive** strengthens preparedness and preventive measures to address risks of trafficking arising from crises. It provides that the national anti-trafficking coordinators or equivalent mechanisms may include contingency response plans to prevent the threat of trafficking in the event of major emergencies. The revised Victims' Rights Directive requires Member States to ensure that specialist support services remain fully operational for victims in times of crisis, such as health crises, humanitarian situations or other states of emergency.

In parallel, the implementation of the EU Preparedness Union strategy⁵², the Pact on Migration and Asylum⁵³, including the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation⁵⁴, the ProtectEU: a European internal security strategy and future EU crisis-management initiatives provides an important opportunity to mainstream anti-human trafficking safeguards across preparedness and emergency-response frameworks. Furthermore, the **Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint** network provides the operational framework for monitoring and anticipation of migration flows and migration situations, building resilience as well as organising a coordinated response to any relevant migratory situation. **Reliable data** is also essential for anticipating and responding to challenges⁵⁵.

The Commission will:

- **strengthen coordination** among EU agencies, Member States, international organisations and civil society **during crisis situations** to mitigate the risks of trafficking and exploitation among persons in vulnerable situations;
- develop **operational guidance** for different actors involved on identifying and addressing trafficking risks during crises, with the support of EU agencies, Member States and civil society.

Member States are invited to:

- integrate **anti-human trafficking measures on preparedness and crisis response mechanisms** into national action plans on the risks of trafficking caused by humanitarian crises;
- strengthen **cross-border operational cooperation** and systematically exchange data and information on trafficking risks during crisis situations;
- improve the **capacity of relevant national authorities** for the early identification and victim's referral and support, to ensure victims basic needs during emergencies and humanitarian situations are addressed including at least emergency care, shelters and measures of physical protection and psychological support of victims.

⁵² [JOIN\(2025\) 130 final](#), 26.3.2025.

⁵³ [EU Pact on Migration and Asylum](#).

⁵⁴ [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1359](#), 22.5.2024.

⁵⁵ Eurostat provides an important evidence base for identifying emerging trends, assessing evolving risks and improving situational awareness across the EU. Europol supports the situational awareness of trafficking through the analysis of information provided by Member States and other partners and helps develop a better understanding of the threat.

6. STRENGTHENING PROTECTION OF PERSONS VULNERABLE TO TRAFFICKING

Objective: *Strengthen the protection of persons most vulnerable to trafficking in human beings by embedding child-sensitive, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, intersectional and rights-based safeguards across prevention, identification, assistance, protection and justice systems.*

Trafficking in human beings disproportionately affects individuals exposed to structural vulnerabilities, including women and girls, children, migrants, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to marginalised communities, including Roma, LGBTIQ+ persons and individuals facing social exclusion, racial or ethnic discrimination or economic hardship. Vulnerable groups which can become potential victims of trafficking include unemployed adults and young people Not in Employment, Education or Training if they have no source of income. These vulnerabilities are often compounded in an intersectional manner by migration status, poverty and homelessness, dependency relationships or lack of access to social protection systems. Women and girls make up the majority of registered victims in the EU, trafficked mainly for sexual exploitation both in physical and digital environments. Children represent 15% of registered victims in the EU and are particularly vulnerable to the risk of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced criminality and forced begging.

Ensuring the effective protection of victims remains at the heart of the EU's response to trafficking in human beings. The revised **Victims' Rights Directive** sets out stronger rules on victims' rights, including victims of trafficking, and the upcoming **strategy on victims' rights** will further support the protection of victims of all crimes. Moreover, the EU has significantly strengthened its legal framework with the revised victim-centred **Anti-Trafficking Directive**, which reinforces provisions that provide for heightened protection of victims. Additionally, several other legislative proposals aim to strengthen EU rules on child sexual abuse, such as the Commission's **proposal for a Regulation laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse**⁵⁶ and the **proposal for a Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse material**⁵⁷.

The **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**⁵⁸ ("VAW Directive") includes specific prevention, protection and support measures to fight violence against women, complementary to the measures laid down in the Anti-Trafficking Directive. As 63% of victims of trafficking in human beings are women and girls, most of them trafficked for sexual exploitation, such victims are at the same time victims of violence against women under the VAW Directive. As such, they are entitled to the Directive's protection, justice and support measures. Also, the Directive requires Member States to adopt preventing measures to reduce the demand for victims of sexual exploitation. In its Recommendation on integrated child protection⁵⁹, the Commission invites Member States to strengthen child protection systems in a more coordinated

⁵⁶ [COM/2022/209 final](#), 11.5.2022.

⁵⁷ [COM/2024/60 final](#), 6.2.2024.

⁵⁸ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1385](#), 24.5.2024.

⁵⁹ [Commission Recommendation \(EU\) 2024/1238](#), 23.4.2024.

way, centred on children's needs, to fight any forms of violence against them, including human trafficking.

The Union of Equality strategies, including the 2026-2030 gender equality strategy⁶⁰, the 2026-2030 anti-racism strategy⁶¹, the 2026-2030 LGBTIQ+ equality strategy⁶², the Communication on enhancing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030⁶³ and the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030⁶⁴ help address the specific situations of vulnerabilities and needs of persons at heightened risk of exploitation and raise awareness on the specific risks they are facing. Additionally, the Commission's upcoming **action plan on the protection of children against crime** will set out a coherent and coordinated response to the multiplicity of threats faced by children from crime, both online and offline.

Strengthening victim protection is not only essential to safeguarding fundamental rights but also to preventing re-trafficking and supporting the successful prosecution of traffickers. In this context, the **early identification of victims** is a prerequisite for effective protection. Member States should strengthen mechanisms for the proactive identification of victims and potential victims across all relevant sectors, including law enforcement; labour inspection; migration and asylum systems; healthcare, education, social services and child protection systems. Multidisciplinary and inter-agency cooperation should be strengthened at national and local level, including with civil society organisations. By building trust, such organisations can often play a key role in identifying victims, who are often reluctant to come forward through official channels.

Clear referral pathways, shared understanding of indicators and well-defined roles and responsibilities are essential to ensuring that potential victims are referred to appropriate support and assistance services. Member States should also facilitate cross-border referrals by appointing a focal point for the cross-border referral of victims in line with the amended Anti-Trafficking Directive.

The effective implementation of the **non-punishment principle** is equally essential to victim protection. Victims of trafficking shall not be penalised for unlawful activities that they were compelled to commit as a direct consequence of their exploitation.

Victims should also have access to **appropriate, safe and specialised accommodation**, as well as to **medical and psychological care, legal assistance, interpretation services, education, training and employment opportunities and compensation from the employer which was responsible for the exploitation**⁶⁵. Equally important are safe and supportive environments in which frontline staff understand the ways in which trauma can affect behaviour, memory and the ability to establish trust. Particular attention should be paid to the specific needs and rights of

⁶⁰ [COM/2026/113 final](#), 5.3.2026.

⁶¹ [COM/2026/12 final](#), 20.1.2026.

⁶² [COM/2025/725 final](#), 8.10.2025.

⁶³ [COM\(2026\)541 final](#), 6.5.2026.

⁶⁴ [COM\(2020\) 620 final](#), 7.10.2020.

⁶⁵ Article 4(1) of Protocol 29 amending the ILO Forced Labour Convention C29 states: «Each Member shall ensure that all victims of forced or compulsory labour, irrespective of their presence or legal status in the national territory, have access to appropriate and effective remedies, such as compensation».

Protocol 29 has been in principle endorsed by the EU Member States, although some Member States have not yet ratified it.

children, including through integrated child-friendly procedures and guardianship for unaccompanied children. Not least to avoid the risk of re-victimisation and re-trafficking, **reintegration** into society is also a key element of sustainable protection and should include access to education, vocational training, employment, housing and community-based support.

The Commission also recognises the **invaluable insights and expertise, based on their lived experience, that survivors** of trafficking can bring to shaping effective and victim-centred policies and responses. In this respect, the Commission will cooperate with civil society, including through **the EU Civil Society Platform against trafficking in human beings**, also by ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of victims are taken into account and inform policy.

The Commission will:

- support the **development and implementation** of child-sensitive, gender-responsive disability-inclusive and rights-based anti-human trafficking measures and initiatives;
- support **cooperation among Member States' focal points for victims' referral** in cross-border cases;
- support Member States in ensuring the **consistent application of the non-punishment principle**, including through the exchange of good practices among judicial and law enforcement authorities.

Member States are invited to:

- ensure the **effective functioning of national referral mechanisms** and appoint a focal point for the cross-border referral of victims;
- provide for **safe accommodation, specialised support services** (including legal assistance) **and reintegration programmes** for victims, while making full use of available EU funding opportunities;
- strengthen **cooperation** between law enforcement, the judiciary, social services, healthcare systems and civil society organisations.

CONCLUSION

This renewed strategy recognises that trafficking in human beings cannot be addressed in isolation and that it requires a whole-of-society and whole-of-government response, bringing together Member States, EU institutions, EU agencies, civil society, social partners, the private sector and international organisations and partners, including non-EU countries. Progress will be supported through existing coordination mechanisms, including the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, together with the EU Network of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs and the EU Civil Society Platform, as well as relevant EU agencies and international organisations. Data collection, knowledge-sharing and operational cooperation will remain essential components of implementation.

A successful implementation will require **sustained and targeted investment at EU, national and international levels**. The Commission will work to ensure that addressing trafficking in human beings remains a priority in the future, post-2027, multiannual financial framework,

reinforcing its capacity to prevent trafficking, reduce vulnerabilities, support victims, dismantle criminal networks and strengthen partnerships in the EU and globally.

The EU will continue to play a leading role globally in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, promoting international cooperation, supporting partner countries, addressing root causes and ensuring that safeguarding human dignity and fundamental rights remain at the centre of its internal and external action.