

5th Progress Report on Fight Against THB



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News

Trafficking in human beings (THB) constitutes the second most widespread illicit economy in the world, reaching USD 20,000 profit per victim per annum, with the exploitation of victims in Europe and Central Asia being the most profitable. The risks for perpetrators remain low.

The European Commission's [fifth report on the progress made in the EU in combating Trafficking in Human Beings](#) (published on 20 January 2025) identifies key trends and main anti-trafficking actions from 2021 to 2024 and provides an analysis of statistics for the period 2021-2022:

- 17,248 victims of trafficking were registered in the EU during the 2021-2022 reporting period, representing an increase of 20.5% compared to the 2019-2020 period. At the same time, the actual number of victims is likely to be significantly higher than the reported data suggests, as many victims remain undetected.
- 65% of all the victims in the EU were women and girls.
- While most of the victims of sexual exploitation were female (92%), men represent the majority of the victims trafficked for labour exploitation (70%).
- 46% of the registered victims in 2021-2022 were EU citizens and 54% were third country nationals, indicating a shift from previous years when the majority of registered victims were EU citizens (55%).
- The top-five EU citizenships of trafficked victims were Romanian, French, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and German.
- The top-five non-EU citizenships of trafficked victims were Nigerian, Ukrainian, Moroccan, Colombian, and Chinese.
- 34% of all victims were citizens of the country in which they were registered (internal trafficking).

Sexual exploitation remains the most common and labour exploitation the second most common form of trafficking in the EU. Forms of THB, other than sexual and labour exploitation, accounted for 14% of all victims. Such forms of exploitation include, for instance, forced criminal activities, forced begging, and illegal removal of organs.

- There was a 51% increase in victims of labour exploitation in 2021-2022 (5940), compared to the previous period (3940).
- Recruitment is carried out online with fraudulent job advertisements.
- High-risk sectors for labour exploitation include construction, agriculture, forestry, food processing, assembly lines, hospitality, retail, carwashes, beauty and cleaning services, transportation and housekeeping. Newly emerging sectors are, for example, domestic care and nursing services, and parcel delivery. The football sector has emerged as a special area of exploitation in Portugal and Belgium.

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Looking at child trafficking, the report states that children in the EU are trafficked for all forms of exploitation, mainly sexual exploitation, but also for forced criminality, forced begging, forced marriage, and labour exploitation. The decreasing trend of registered child victims in some Member States may be linked to the increase in online sexual exploitation, where many victims remain hidden.

To combat THB, the report examines the comprehensive approach taken under the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025 (→ [eucrim 2/2021, 92](#)). It outlines the following measures:

- The revision of Directive 2011/36/EU;
- The forthcoming launch of an Anti-trafficking Hub;
- The introduction of mandatory collection and sharing of statistics;
- National Strategies and Action Plans;
- Guidelines, protocols, and procedures;
- The new obligation for Member States to adopt and implement national Anti-trafficking Action Plans;
- The allocation of financial resources for combatting THB;
- The strengthened role of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator;
- The mandatory establishment of national anti-trafficking coordinators.

The report emphasizes the need to reduce the demand for THB with various legislative measures, e.g., criminalising the knowing use of exploited services and addressing the responsibility of companies, including online platforms, to reduce demand and detect potential cases of THB. Further key actions in combatting THB are partnerships with third countries and international organizations, law enforcement cooperation, (digital) and financial investigations, and operational actions to disrupt criminal networks engaged in THB and break their criminal business models.

Given that THB is closely linked with migrant smuggling, the report also underlines the need to address the legislative, operative, and funding measures related to the fight against migrant smuggling together with combating trafficking in human beings in the context of irregular migration. Ultimately, it calls for a victim-focused, gender- and child sensitive approach. While legislative measures have been taken, such as amendments to the Anti-Trafficking Directive or revision of the Victims' Rights Directive, non-legislative measures are also needed to achieve early identification, assistance, and protection of the victims.

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