

## **General overview of Trafficking in Ireland 2016 (for Renate)**

*Ireland like so many other countries is a destination and source country for women, men and children subject to trafficking, including forced labour. (TIP Report 2015).*

Ireland too has its own history of human trafficking. It was in the year 2000 when the first trafficked person was recognised and identified in Ireland. Since then human trafficking has expanded and as a country we have become better at identifying victims. In those earlier years many of the girls came from Eastern Europe and had little or no English. Today the pattern is quite different. Support providers like Ruhama have worked with women from 60 different nationalities, from every continent and representative of a wide variety of ages and ethnic backgrounds. Many still have limited or no English, no friends or family support networks here – often they do not know which country they are in, they may never have heard of Ireland. Presently many of the women are here from Africa, Brazil, Romania and South America with lesser numbers from other countries around the world.

Ireland has signed and ratified the Palermo Protocol and the Council of Europe Agreement for many years now and in 2008 introduced the key legislation of the Human Trafficking Act with amendments in 2013. This act provides for heavy penalties for trafficking – up to life imprisonment if specific means of force / coercion can be proved. It also makes provision for penalties for sex buyers who knowingly pay for sex services of a victim of trafficking although a buyer charged with this offence can claim ignorance of trafficking as their defence. The conviction rate for traffickers is very low and many are convicted not of trafficking as such but of related crimes such as sexual exploitation, possession of child pornography and sexual assault. While there is evidence of trafficking for labour and many high profile convictions, the majority of those trafficked here are women and children for sexual exploitation.

In 2015 the Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Bill was introduced following wide-spread consultation. This bill aims to criminalise the purchase of sexual services. It proposes wide ranging reforms of the law, including stronger sanctions aimed at protecting children from sexual exploitation, child pornography and on-line grooming. On publication of the bill Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald stated ***“I am committed to addressing the very real and tragic crimes of trafficking and exploitation associated with prostitution and I am convinced that targeting the demand for such services is the way forward”***. The enactment of this bill has been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances and change of Government but is eagerly awaited in the next few months.

**The Second National Plan** to prevent and combat Human Trafficking has come into operation and proposes a fundamental re-examination of the identification process; a review of victim support services; an enhanced data analysis system and further training and an awareness needs analysis – all very welcome supports and strategies to combat human trafficking.

### **Reach Project 2015/2016**

This is an all-Ireland project to raise awareness of trafficking as a form of violence against women and girls. **AHTU** (Anti Human Trafficking Unit). The Department of Justice with EU funding initiated this project. It involved working in close co-operation with State and Civil Society organisations across two different jurisdictions to develop new and innovative

ways of tracking Human Trafficking. This is the first all-Ireland initiative of its kind. The project has three strands that focus on different groups:

1. Women and girls as victims / potential victims of trafficking.
2. Men and boys as buyers / potential buyers, who fuel the demand for trafficking.
3. Front line professionals, those in a position to identify victims and offer support.

This work is challenging and engaging. It is now in the process of developing an 'App' aimed at frontline professions to develop in clear plain English information to those who are not experts in trafficking but who may encounter a person who has been a victim or is vulnerable to trafficking.

Learn more: [www.reachproject.ie](http://www.reachproject.ie).

### **Training Programmes.**

The second National Plan promises new and ongoing training services.

- On-going Garda training and awareness raising.
- Training for different Government Departments and Agencies.
- Information seminars for diplomats in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, also for staff in the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.
- There is also training for Irish Defence Forces prior to their deployment abroad on international peacekeeping missions.

The Irish Navy and Rescue Teams have worked tirelessly and effectively for the past fifteen months or more and still continue to do so on the Mediterranean to rescue refugees and migrants in most hazardous conditions at sea as they make their way to Europe. Overall, the Government is making major efforts to combat Human Trafficking as is law enforcement with the members of the Gardaí working with Interpol and Europol. So too are many NGO's and other organisations and businesses.

*Mary Ryan rsm.*