Ruhama
Fighting Sexual Exploitation, Prostitution and Human Trafficking

PRESS RELEASE

Monday, 19th October 2026

New report shows 31% rise in number of women trafficked to Ireland for sexual exploitation seeking support

The number of victims of human trafficking to Ireland for sexual exploitation supported by national NGO Ruhama has increased by 31 per cent on 2024, according to its latest Annual Report for 2025 published today (19.10.26).

Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is a systematic violation of victims' bodily autonomy, usually made possible through repeated sexual assault, threats and physical abuse. The vast majority of victims presenting to Ruhama were women across 62 nationalities, primarily from the global south, highlighting how gendered sex trafficking is and the huge disparity in power it involves.

The 2025 report highlights:

- 1,242 individuals engaged with Ruhama in 2025, representing a 10% increase on 2024.
- Caseworkers noted a 77 per cent increase in people seeking help around suicide prevention compared with 2024.
- A significant interaction between homelessness and women who have experienced sexual exploitation.
- The ongoing challenge of securing suitable accommodation, with service users requiring support with IPAS transfers, the housing crisis and inappropriate accommodation.
- The urgent need to address the harms associated with unregulated technology, artificial intelligence (AI) and online pornography.
- The harmful effects of commercial sexual exploitation on mental health and wellbeing, as well as on life opportunities, including access to employment.

The report outlines the lived experiences of survivors, supported by Ruhama, including one who lost her mother to suicide at the age of 10 and became involved in street prostitution at 20, amid family involvement in crime and a chronic drug addiction. In 1999, she was fined £100 for loitering for the purposes of prostitution. After becoming drug-free in 2011, She completed her Leaving Certificate and qualified as a home care assistant. But just as she was starting a job in home care, a disclosure on her Garda vetting form relating to her conviction cost her the opportunity.

The Ruhama service user said: “All I wanted to do was work and I couldn’t. I wasn’t suitable. I wanted to die; I reached out for help, not really thinking I’d even get it. Today, slowly I’m getting there, but this conviction still haunts me. I don’t deserve this life sentence of poverty and limited opportunity because I sold sex at a time in my life when I was struggling to cope.”

Speaking at an event today (19.10.26) to launch the publication of Ruhama’s 2025 Annual Report, Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration Jim O’Callaghan said: “Human trafficking for sexual exploitation is a heinous crime that robs people of their dignity, freedom and safety, causing profound and lasting harm. Victims of commercial sexual exploitation are often living through dire circumstances, shaped by trauma, abuse, addiction or poverty, and must be met with compassion and support, never judgement.

“I welcome Ruhama’s report, which highlights the devastating impact of this crime and the importance of listening to those affected. The Government remains committed to tackling human trafficking, holding perpetrators to account and strengthening the identification and protection of victims, including through the National Referral Mechanism.”

Barbara Condon, CEO, Ruhama said: “The growth in demand for our services in 2025 reflects how the global epidemic of violence against women is happening every day and in every corner of Ireland. Human Trafficking is among the worst examples of what one human being can do to another. Victims/survivors need specialist supports to navigate the horrendously traumatic and complex experiences they have encountered. Safe, appropriate and specialist accommodation is a fundamental prerequisite for recovery and protection. Without a secure place to live, it is almost impossible for women to rebuild their lives. The current situation where many victims are housed inappropriately in direct provision congregated settings needs to be addressed as a priority.”

Ruhama Ambassador Frances Fitzgerald said: “The rise in demand for Ruhama’s services show that it’s more important than ever to address the egregious human rights violations of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Solutions demand sustained political leadership and cooperation at national, EU and international level. We must also focus on urgently addressing the rising and related problems of pornography and technology-facilitated sexual violence. Turning this engagement into

meaningful action is a vital part of Ruhama's work in helping inform policy and strengthen responses to trafficking and DSGBV. The rights, dignity and voices of survivors must remain at the heart of our response."

Further information about Ruhama and its services, along with its full 2025 Annual Report are available at www.ruhama.ie.

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Notes to Editor

Media Spokespersons

- Barbara Condon, CEO, Ruhama.
- Frances Fitzgerald, Ruhama Ambassador and former Tánaiste, Minister for Justice and MEP.

Contact Alice Public Relations on the details above to arrange an interview.

About Ruhama

Ruhama is a national NGO supporting women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It is headquartered in Dublin, with hubs in the Midlands, Limerick Mid-West and the Cork/Kerry region.

Ruhama provides a diverse range of holistic supports using a trauma-informed approach. Supports offered include Outreach, Casework, Trauma Therapy/Counselling, Education and Development Programme, Bridge to Work Programme, Seeking Safety Programme, Survivor Engagement Programme and Game Changer Programme.

Ruhama provides training to frontline services on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. In addition to our frontline services, we also advocate and campaign for better social, political and legal measures to address the systems and conditions that lead to, and perpetuate, the system of prostitution and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation of women and girls.

Ruhama is one of the lead partners on Game Changer, a first-of-its-kind programme in Ireland that seeks to harness the positive influence of Gaelic Games to challenge the social and cultural norms that contribute to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). The programme is led by Ruhama, White Ribbon Ireland and the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), supported by the LGFA (Ladies Gaelic Football Association) and the Camogie Associations and Cuan.

Ruhama won Charity of the Year 2024 at the Charities Institute Ireland, Charity Excellence Awards.

The official website is www.ruhama.ie.