



## PRESS RELEASE

Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024

### **Report shows sharp 30% rise in demand for support services in Ireland by women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation**

*Former Tánaiste, Minister for Justice and MEP Frances Fitzgerald announced as new Charity Ambassador with Ruhama at the launch of its latest annual report and roadmap for the next five years, with Minister for Justice Helen McEntee launching the reports*

National charity **Ruhama** supported 30 per cent more women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation last year than in the previous year and saw a 29 per cent increase in new victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

That's according to new data contained in the organisation's latest annual report for 2023\* published today (19.09.24).

The report also outlines that 108 people accessed Ruhama's trauma and counselling service in 2023 for healing and recovery from sexual violence, representing a significant 31 per cent rise on the previous year.

**Barbara Condon, CEO, Ruhama** said, "Prostitution and human trafficking are exploitative, inherently violent and demeaning to women. We are witnessing daily the impact of sexual violence and sexual exploitation from which recovery is lifelong. We need to do more to prevent sexual exploitation and protect women and girls from sexual violence. We need more awareness of the issues that drive women into prostitution, and we need to do more to challenge male entitlement and the demand by men choosing to illegally pay for sexual acts."

'Esther' (not her real name), who together with her husband was trafficked from Cameroon to Ireland while pregnant last year, said: "At night he [the trafficker] would bring me out to sleep with various men. At this point, since I was having sex with so many people, I started bleeding heavily. I became worried about my pregnancy. I lost my child. I lost my dignity as a woman; I lost my everything. I felt like I had nothing left until I was brought to Ruhama. This is where I started receiving support while trying to restore my dignity. Little by little, I started seeing light."

'Ciara' (not her real name) from Ireland has been engaging with Ruhama's services for two-and-a-half years and she said: "I lost my place in my degree, became homeless for a second time, faced suicidal tendencies, and the shame of engaging in behaviour that would eventually lead me to Ruhama's services. Therapy helped me overcome a lot of emotional pain. I was supported while becoming a functioning member of society again. Education services supported me as I got back into education and finished my degree."

Speaking at an event to launch the publication of Ruhama's 2023 Annual Report and 2024-2028 Strategic Plan today in Dublin's Mansion House, **Minister for Justice Helen McEntee** said: "Human trafficking for sexual exploitation and the purchase of sex are crimes that prey on some of the most vulnerable. They are committed with no regard for life, dignity or for the most basic of human rights. And yet we know they are a reality and that vulnerable people are trafficked into Ireland for sexual exploitation at the hands of ruthless traffickers. As crimes that violate these rights, they have no place in a modern and civilised society. The real stories of women impacted by sexual violence and sexual exploitation supported by Ruhama highlight the vital importance of their support services and the transformative impact they can have on real lives."

Speaking at today's event about her new role, **Frances Fitzgerald** said: "It's important to raise awareness about the reality of sexual exploitation in our society and the impact that it's having on countless women and girls every day. Women who have experienced adversity, poverty and coercion, who are trafficked or coerced into prostitution, and are subjected to some of the worst examples of humanity you can possibly imagine. These are the women who access Ruhama's supports, and these are the women for whom I am speaking today and in the coming years in my role as ambassador."

Ruhama also launched its new strategic plan\*\* today, which sets out ambitious key objectives for the organisation for the next five years, in line with the growing demand for its services. One main aim is to further expand the geographical reach of its services over the next five years by adding to its current locations in Dublin, Limerick MidWest, the Midlands, and the Cork/ Kerry region. The harmful links between pornography and human trafficking and sexual exploitation are also a focus for Ruhama from a policy and public awareness perspective over the next five years.

Further information about Ruhama and its services is available at [www.ruhama.ie](http://www.ruhama.ie).

The Ruhama 2023 Annual Report is available [here](#).

The Ruhama Strategic Plan 2024-2028 is available [here](#).

**Ends**