



Press release

Ruhama sees a 35% increase in demand for services by victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation

According to Ruhama, the charity that offers support to women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking, there has been a significant increase in women engaging with the service, despite the hidden nature of the sex trade.

In its Annual Report published today, on the eve of EU Anti-Trafficking Day, Ruhama details how it engaged with 497 individuals over the year, an increase of 35% from the previous year. 147 were victims of human trafficking, which represents a 68% increase in new referrals of victims from 2021.

“Ruhama works with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable women in society and witness daily how prostitution and sex trafficking is inherently violent, exploitative and demeaning to women,” said Barbara Condon, CEO. “The violence and complex trauma encountered can have a lifelong impact. We need to do more to prevent both and protect women and girls from sexual violence and sexual exploitation”.

The Annual Report includes a direct account of one woman’s horrendous and traumatic experience of being trafficked to Ireland.

“I would often sleep with numerous men a day, 7 days a week. I had to be available to have sex with every man that was brought to me, at any time. Sometimes, if I was in pain or feeling unwell, I would refuse to sleep with them; to which they would respond by assaulting me. I was raped many times”.

Chair Ian Carter stated in the report that service provision had expanded in Counselling & Trauma Therapy, Outreach, Casework teams and delivery of Training.

“The sex trade continues to perpetuate threat and danger to individuals experiencing vulnerabilities such as poverty, coercion, immigration and addiction”.

Ruhama supported more than 200 service users in the Education and Development Programme, and 102 individuals were supported with job coaching, gaining and maintaining employment through The Bridge to Work programme. Training on prostitution and sex trafficking increased by 50%, enabling frontline professionals to identify and signpost potential victims of sexual exploitation. Ruhama expanded and opened a service in Limerick, their second hub based outside Dublin.

Launching the annual report today in Ruhama, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee stated:

“Firstly, I commend Ruhama for the crucial work that they carry out supporting women affected by prostitution, sex trafficking and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

“This Annual Report is a stark reminder not only of the fact that that these crimes are happening and that they are happening in Ireland, but also importantly that there are real and vulnerable women behind the statistics.

“Supporting victims of trafficking and working to prevent, detect and prosecute those who prey on the vulnerability of others, is a priority for me.”

“Recent initiatives to do this include developing a new National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which will make it easier for victims of human trafficking to come forward and access supports. This new NRM will be put on a statutory footing by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023, which is currently before the Houses.

“My Zero Tolerance plan to tackle domestic, sexual and gender based violence also has a range of actions, including on reducing demand for prostitution and ensuring that those, primarily women, in prostitution have access to safety, health care, support and exit routes.”

“I also look forward to publishing the new National Action Plan on Human Trafficking shortly. This will set out how the multi-agency work to combat human trafficking and support victims will be taken forward over the next 4 years.”

ENDS