

Ruhama calls for further action to reduce commercial sexual exploitation in Ireland.

Charity marks thirty years supporting women affected by prostitution & sex trafficking in Ireland.

Launching its 2018 Annual Report today, [Ruhama](#), Ireland's only dedicated NGO supporting women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking, said it provided support to **313 women of 40 nationalities** in 2018, including **122 victims of trafficking** from 29 countries.

This year, 2019, also marks three decades of the organisation supporting some of the most vulnerable and marginalized women in Ireland. The charity has evolved over the years to adapt its services to meet the often complex needs of the women who seek support.

“The good news is that we have supported literally thousands of women in very difficult situations over thirty years. So many of them have had successful outcomes and been able to move past the trauma of sexual exploitation. The bad news is that some have not survived, and the sex trade is still alive and thriving in Ireland. Unfortunately our work is still so necessary and the demand for our services is only increasing,” explained Sarah Benson, Ruhama CEO.

The 313 women connecting with Ruhama in 2018, were provided with services individually tailored to meet their needs, including: emergency response, advocacy and accompaniment, education and job-seeking programmes, housing and social welfare supports, counselling and holistic therapies.

Outlining the substantial shifts that have occurred in the Irish sex trade over 30 years, the charity emphasises how increased globalization and changes in migration flows have resulted in a highly organised, transnational and criminalized sex trade that is thriving across the country. While there is still a very vulnerable cohort of women in on-street prostitution, the majority of individuals in prostitution that Ruhama meets are based indoors in brothels, apartments, hotels and massage parlours.

One thing the charity says has not changed is the inherent harm and violence of prostitution. The sex trade is still predominantly controlled by organised criminals, and fuelled by the demand for paid sex that is driven by **8% of Irish men**. Ruhama's frontline experience has shown over thirty years that prostitution is a violation of women's bodily autonomy, and welcomes legislative and policy changes introduced in recent years to combat this.

“We are confident that effective implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 can make Ireland a hostile market for pimps and those sex traffickers who are importing young migrant women solely to profit from their exploitation, while betraying their hopes for a better life,” said Ms. Benson.

This legislation decriminalizes the individual in prostitution, and criminalizes the so-called ‘sex-buyer’ in recognition of the role they play in perpetuating sexual exploitation. “The women that we support report countless incidences of violence at the hands of pimps, traffickers and sex-buyers alike, including rape, robbery and violent assaults, including with weapons.”

While there has been some progress since March 2017 when the law took effect, Ruhama is calling on urgent further action.

“We have been informing women on the streets that they are no longer criminalised and this has been very positive. We see cases where they are more likely now to report crimes against them to Gardaí without fear. We have also seen some good examples of individuals reporting crimes committed in indoor settings through pro-active Garda liaisons and this is to be encouraged. The Gardaí are given a strong signal by the law to ensure they take a victim centred approach towards individuals in prostitution rather than a punitive one,” said Sarah Benson.

“We welcome recent Garda action to target sex-buyers in line with the law, particularly as there has been only three convictions of sex buyers to date. The government must also do more to raise public awareness of the fact that it is now a crime to pay for sex.”

Ms Benson continued; “The ‘normative’ effect is the intention of the law: to ensure the public is aware that it is not okay to purchase sexual access to another person. You cannot simply bypass meaningful consent by paying money and thereby preying on someone’s financial need or desperately precarious situation.”

Ruhama urges anyone who finds themselves in a difficult situation in Ireland’s sex trade, or who is concerned about someone they know, to contact them for support on (01) 836 0292, or text the word REACH for free to 50100 for a free, confidential call-back.

- ENDS -

For further information, or to speak to someone from Ruhama, please contact:

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Notes to editor:

1. Download report link: <https://ruhama.ie/assets/Press-Releases/Ruhama-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

2. Note on the Irish law & sex buyers:

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 explicitly decriminalizes the individual in prostitution and criminalizes the individual who pays for sex – the ‘sex-buyer.’ The law is based on the Nordic/Equality model of prostitution legislation. This partial decriminalization model aims to protect the individual in the sex trade under the law, while deterring the demand for paid sex that fuels sexual exploitation. There has been one conviction of a sex buyer in the Republic of Ireland to date: <https://ruhama.ie/assets/PR-Ruhama-welcomes-decision-to-convict-sex-buyer-in-Ireland.pdf>

A 2015 Red C poll indicated that 8% of Irish men buy sex: <https://ruhama.ie/assets/Press-Releases/New-Poll-outlines-public-perceptions-of-trafficking-in-the-sex-trade.pdf>

3. Table with key statistics highlighting the demand for services in 2018:

Number of women	Type of support
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313	Total number supported
62	Street outreach support
251	Individually tailored casework support, of whom: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 129 received general casework support • 122 received casework support as victims of sex trafficking
2,793	Face to face contacts
9,970	Phone contacts*
13,666	SMS contacts (not including WhatsApp)*
87	Education and Development
57	Received housing and social welfare support
* Phone contacts to and on behalf of service users	

About Ruhama

[Ruhama](#) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a registered charity, which works on a nationwide basis with women, including transgender women, affected by prostitution and sex trafficking. Ruhama offers free and confidential support and assistance to women who:

- Are actively involved in prostitution
- Are seeking to exit (leave) prostitution
- Are victims of sex trafficking
- Have a past experience of prostitution/sex trafficking.

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