



Irish government continues to fall short in efforts to eliminate human trafficking, according to US Department of State

Identification procedures are insufficient, while impunity reigns for traffickers – but Ireland acknowledged for prevention efforts in targeting the demand for victims of sex trafficking.

Ireland has been further downgraded by the US Department of State for failing to meet the minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking, despite making significant efforts to do so, according to the US Department of State's Trafficking In Persons report 2020 released this evening.

Every year this report provides the most comprehensive global overview of actions in each country to prevent and respond to human trafficking. In 2018, Ireland was downgraded from a Tier 1 to a Tier 2 country according to the Department of State's criteria for measuring country actions. The 2020 report further downgraded Ireland to a Tier 2 Watchlist for not increasing its overall efforts during the reporting period.

Ireland identified only 34 suspected victims of sex trafficking in 2019. The report criticised Ireland for the low numbers of identified victims and its identification procedures.

Reacting to the report, Ruhama CEO, Barbara Condon, highlighted the major gaps in Ireland's identification procedures and the protection of victims: "Unfortunately, EEA citizens, including Irish citizens, and those in the asylum-seeking process are ineligible for formal identification as victims by the State. Formal identification and entry into the National Referral Mechanism is only granted to third-country nationals who report their situations to Gardaí and cooperate in an investigation. Many victims are too fearful of violent repercussions from their traffickers for them and their families to report them. Traffickers also instil a deep fear of authorities in their victims to prevent them from coming forward."

She continued: "Suspected victims from the EEA, including Ireland, are not being counted in Ireland's official numbers, and nor are those who are in the asylum process. This, coupled with the fact that the vast majority of trafficking victims remain undetected, means that we are underestimating the numbers of victims. This has serious implications for their access to services, which is aggravated by the Habitual Residence Condition for EEA nationals."

"We must be under no illusions-sex trafficking is happening in every city, town and village across the country, and it overwhelmingly women and girls who are sacrificed to fill the demand for sexual gratification from so-called 'sex buyers.' Sex traffickers make enormous profits from their victims – it's a crime with low risks and high rewards as impunity continues to reign for traffickers. There have been no convictions for traffickers since the law was changed in 2013."

"Ireland was acknowledged in the report for its efforts to target the demand that leads to sex trafficking through actions related to implementation of the 2017 Sexual Offences Act throughout 2019. This law must continue to be implemented effectively going forward in order to reduce demand and the enormous profits being made by sex traffickers."

Ms. Condon continued: “Victims of sex trafficking continue to be accommodated in Direct Provision centres. This environment is completely unsuitable for women who have gone through severely traumatic experiences. They’re also at risk of re-trafficking and further sexual exploitation within this system. Safe, secure, gender-specific accommodation should be progressed as a matter of urgency. Progress must also be made on establishing multi-agency identification procedures to ensure victims feel safe to come forward and get the protection and support they need.”

She finished by highlighting increasing concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic: “The global Covid-19 pandemic has left victims more isolated than ever, and we are extremely concerned about all of the victims trapped without any escape route and forced to see so-called ‘sex-buyers.’ Traffickers have also been exploiting the situation to groom victims online, and take advantage of the precarious financial situations people are finding themselves in. We must remain vigilant to all of the risks and respond appropriately.”

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 please contact:

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Read the full TIP 2020 report here: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

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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