

# New EMN study examines international efforts to combat trafficking in human beings

Press release:

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## Overview

**The European Migration Network (EMN) has published the study 'Trafficking in human beings – the international dimension', outlining efforts by 25 EMN Member and Observer Countries to combat trafficking in human beings. The study examines policies aligned with the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, covering prevention, law enforcement, victim support, and international partnerships. The study highlights challenges, good practices, and ongoing discussions to strengthen future policies.**

*Brussels, Belgium*

## Trafficking in human beings: a complex crime

Trafficking in human beings constitutes a serious violation of human rights under international law and the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights (Article 5(3)).<sup>1</sup> Trafficking in human beings involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or control of individuals through coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability, or financial inducements for the purpose of exploitation.

While many trafficking victims within the EU are EU nationals, data from third-country nationals comprised 63.1% of victims of trafficking in human being in 2022, compared to roughly 43% for the period 2019-2021.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, many victims remain undetected.

## Strengthening the EU's response

Recognising the increasing international dimension of trafficking in human beings, the EU designated this issue as a priority under the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025<sup>3</sup> to reinforce efforts to combat trafficking in human beings beyond EU

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>, accessed 11 June 2025.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, 'Report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings (Fourth Report)', <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0736>, accessed 11 June 2025.

<sup>3</sup> EU Strategy on combatting trafficking in human beings 2021-2025, COM(2021) 171 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0171>, accessed 11 June 2025.

borders. The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive<sup>4</sup> was amended<sup>5</sup> in 2024 and entered into force on 14 July 2024. The modifications introduced stronger rules to fight trafficking in human beings and provided reinforced tools for public authorities to investigate and prosecute trafficking offences. It also provides for better support to victims of trafficking. Based on the Strategy and the Directive, the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (EU ATC)<sup>6</sup> promotes a coordinated and coherent approach to address trafficking in human beings.

## **EMN Member and Observer Countries' initiatives**

Within this framework, EMN Member and Observer Countries have implemented a range of policy measures to tackle the international dimension of trafficking in human beings. Prioritised thematic areas include crime prevention, victim protection, law enforcement coordination, and prosecution of perpetrators. Many countries focus on specific third countries, regions, or migrant groups, reflecting tailored approaches to address trafficking risks effectively.

Most of the national measures specifically targeting third-country nationals in EMN Member and Observer Countries are implemented by international organisations (primarily IOM) and/or NGOs and CSOs and were funded through a combination of national and EU funds.

Most countries addressed the international dimension as part of broader anti-trafficking strategies, interlinking policies with migration, asylum, border management, and organised crime efforts. Although no country has a dedicated policy exclusively focused on the international dimension of trafficking in human beings, many integrated human trafficking responses within existing national strategies.

## **Operational cooperation and strategic partnerships**

The EU plays an important role in supporting EMN Member and Observer Countries through funding, operational coordination, and information exchange, such as through the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

Cooperation with EU agencies has been highlighted by 11 countries<sup>7</sup>, which reported active participation in initiatives coordinated by EU agencies like EUROPOL, Frontex, and EUROJUST implemented in third countries.

The EU has also directly managed and/or funded development cooperation programmes in third countries, in line with the EU Strategy on combating trafficking in human beings, focusing both on law enforcement and judiciary authorities, but also on the digital and illicit financial dimensions of trafficking in human beings as well as identification and support of trafficking victims. Several EU programmes also address migrant smuggling, an issue often linked to trafficking in human beings. In November 2023, the European Commission presented a package to counter migrant smuggling consisting of a proposal<sup>8</sup> for a new Directive laying down minimum

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<sup>4</sup> Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (OJ L 101, 15.4.2011, ELI) <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/36/oj>, accessed 10 July 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (OJ L, 2024/1712, 24.6.2024, ELI) <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1712/oj>, accessed 10 July 2024.

<sup>6</sup> [EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator - European Commission](#)

<sup>7</sup> BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, IT, LV, NL, SI, and GE.

<sup>8</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a common procedure for international protection in the Union and repealing Directive 2013/32/EU, (Asylum Procedure Regulation (EU) 2024/1348), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L\\_202401348](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401348), accessed 19 June 2025.

rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the EU and a proposal for a Regulation to reinforce police cooperation and Europol's role in the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. The latter reinforces the European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling<sup>9</sup> within Europol to build further capacities for cross-border investigation both in migrant smuggling and in trafficking in human beings. Both proposals are being discussed by the co-legislators.

## **Good practices in preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings**

Thirteen EMN Member and Observer Countries identified good practices in relation to policies and measures aimed at preventing trafficking in human beings towards them in third countries of origin and transit of victims.<sup>10</sup>

Nine countries identified awareness-raising measures as good practices for the prevention of trafficking in human beings in third countries<sup>11</sup>, while some countries have strengthened their engagement with countries of origin or partner countries.<sup>12</sup> Others have relied on cooperation projects with CSOs to address the international dimension of trafficking in human beings.<sup>13</sup>

Countries also praised the deployment of police liaison officers in third countries and support from EU agencies to support judicial and law enforcement response.

Key good practices in identifying and supporting victims in third countries included cooperation with NGOs and stakeholder capacity building activities.<sup>14</sup> Good practices included, among others, mentoring and training of law enforcement authorities, the establishment of specialised law enforcement units or victim assistance, support and referral systems and the organisation of capacity building activities for key stakeholders.

Nine EMN Member Countries, along with Serbia and Georgia, have established various forms of structured cooperation with third countries to tackle the cross-border aspects of trafficking in human beings - such as through bilateral agreements, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), protocols, etc.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, other countries indicated they engage with third countries mainly at an operational level, often on an ad hoc basis.<sup>16</sup> Targeted regions include the Sahel,<sup>17</sup> the Horn of Africa,<sup>18</sup> North Africa,<sup>19</sup> Eastern Europe<sup>20</sup> and the Western Balkans.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and on enhancing Europol's support to preventing and combating such crimes and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794 , <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023PC0754>, accessed 19 June 2025.

<sup>10</sup> BE, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, LV, NL, PL, SE, and GE.

<sup>11</sup> BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, FR, NL, PL, SE.

<sup>12</sup> FI, LV, SE.

<sup>13</sup> DE, FR, NL, PL.

<sup>14</sup> AT, BE, DE, ES, FR, IE, NL.

<sup>15</sup> AT, BG, DE, EL, FR, HU, LT, NL, PL, and GE, RS.

<sup>16</sup> FI, FR, LU, SK, and GE.

<sup>17</sup> BE, IE, IT, NL.

<sup>18</sup> AT, DE, FI, FR, IT, NL.

<sup>19</sup> AT, BE, IT, NL.

<sup>20</sup> AT, BE, BG, FR, IE, LT.

<sup>21</sup> AT, BE, DE, FR, IT.

While the form of cooperation with international organisations greatly varies, international organisations with whom EMN Member and Observer Countries most commonly cooperate to address trafficking in human beings include UNODC,<sup>22</sup> OSCE,<sup>23</sup> ICMPD,<sup>24</sup> and IOM.<sup>25</sup>

## Challenges in combatting trafficking in human beings

EMN Member and Observer Countries face recurring challenges in addressing trafficking in human beings, including prevention and demand reduction, law enforcement and judicial response, victim identification and support, and international cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased victim vulnerability and accelerated the shift of trafficking in human beings into the digital space, making detection and intervention more difficult in several countries.<sup>26</sup> This calls for the development of new methods to fight trafficking in human beings in the digital space.

Nine EMN Member Countries identified challenges in preventing trafficking in human beings towards EMN Member and Observer Countries, particularly in third countries of origin and transit of (potential) victims.<sup>27</sup> Over half of these mentioned low trust levels and/or cultural differences with third countries as a challenge.<sup>28</sup> These factors hindered joint action, such as the sharing of information and resources to combat trafficking in human beings.

## Outlook: reinforcing international responses

EMN Member and Observer Countries identified the need to strengthen the identification and protection of victims also through financial investigations, digital monitoring and labour exploitation responses. Other institutional challenges include the need for reinforced cooperation with certain third countries and additional capacity building for competent authorities.

Several countries are currently discussing how future policies could address these needs. At the end of 2023, several EMN Member and Observer Countries were reviewing or establishing their national anti-trafficking strategies,<sup>29</sup> including measures to reinforce international cooperation.<sup>30</sup> Some countries are evaluating agreements with third countries to reinforce cooperation with third countries of origins and transit of victims.<sup>31</sup>

### The study:

**Title:** Trafficking in human beings – the international dimension

**Subject:** The latest EMN study explores efforts to combat trafficking in human beings across third countries of origin and transit, as well as within EMN Member and Observer Countries. Based on contributions from 25 EMN Member and Observer Countries, it examines policies that were adopted or ongoing between 2021-2023 and aligned with the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025. Covering prevention, law enforcement, victim support, and international partnerships, the study highlights key challenges, good practices, and ongoing discussions to reinforce future policies.

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<sup>22</sup> AT, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, SE, SI, SK.

<sup>23</sup> AT, BG, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and GE.

<sup>24</sup> EL, IE, NL, SI, SK, and GE.

<sup>25</sup> AT, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LV, NL, SE, SK, and GE.

<sup>26</sup> AT, IT, LT, SE, SI.

<sup>27</sup> AT, BE, DE, ES, FR, LV, PL, SE, SI.

<sup>28</sup> AT, FR, LV, PL, SI.

<sup>29</sup> BE, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, SE, SK, and GE, RS.

<sup>30</sup> DE, EL, and RS.

<sup>31</sup> FR, SI, and RS.

## About the EMN:

The European Migration Network (EMN) is a Europe-wide network consisting of [National Contact Points \(NCPs\)](#) in the EMN Member (EU Member States except Denmark) and Observer Countries (NO, GE, MD, UA, ME, AM, RS, MK, AL), the European Commission and is supported by the EMN Service Provider, providing information on migration and asylum.

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