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In its new EU strategy on combatting trafficking in human beings 2021-2025, the European Commission strives to provide a comprehensive response and cover all aspects from prevention to the conviction of traffickers.1381 The document notes instances when traffickers took advantage of national asylum systems and gives examples of the instruments under the Pact on Migration and Asylum to ensure that smuggling networks are dismantled and victims can safely reach the EU.

In response, several Member States, for example Slovakia and Slovenia, adopted new national action plans for combating trafficking in human beings.1382 The Spanish government adopted the National Strategic Plan against Human Trafficking for 2021-2023 with 16 action lines and 62 measures. This is considered to be the first comprehensive plan to address all forms of trafficking in the country, involving several ministries, the judiciary, the state prosecutor's office, international organisations and civil society organisations.

The Council of Europe's GRETA published reports on Bulgaria,1383 Denmark,1384 Malta1385 and Romania1386 in 2021 and on France1387 in early 2022.

The Slovak government adopted a resolution to outline its plan for addressing the 2020 recommendations from GRETA.1388 As part of the changes, authorities have started to implement the updated national referral mechanism in 2021, laying down the roles and responsibilities for the identification of and support to survivors of human trafficking.1389

In preparation for GRETA's visit to Ireland,1390 the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission prepared a report on Ireland's compliance with the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The report welcomes the approval of the National Referral Mechanism1391 and underlines that it needs to apply to all suspected victims of trafficking regardless of their nationality and immigration status. The report underlines that the development of specific accommodation for trafficking victims needs to be a priority under the reform of the Irish reception system.1392

The Working Group on Asylum and Human Trafficking in Switzerland published its

recommendations for the State Secretariat for Migration. Some of the recommendations have already been implemented as a result of the discussions within the working group, for example a 30-day recovery and reflection period for potential victims of human trafficking who are identified during the asylum procedure. The authority is planning to further improve its processes, for example by introducing a special interview for survivors of human trafficking, harmonising rules for identification and assistance, and facilitating communication among support, medical and security staff, as well as legal advisors.1393

A consultative group was established in Bulgaria to launch an online platform offering guidance and support to victims of trafficking. The group includes the State Agency for Asylum, the Agency for Social Aid, the Agency for Quality of Social Services, the State Agency for Child Protection, the Prosecutor's Office, Directorate Generals National Police, Combating Organized Crime, border police, as well as the IOM and UNHCR. The launch of the platform is part of the activities under the project "ACTIVATE – Improving the identification of victims, prevention of trafficking in human beings and support mechanisms", funded by AMIF and implemented by Animus Association Foundation. Following the standard operating procedures of the Bulgarian National Mechanism for Guiding and Assisting Traffic Victims which was approved by a Council of Ministers' decree in 2016, the platform will include information on the stakeholders involved in the national mechanism, an interactive map of social services for victims of trafficking, information on international, European and Bulgarian legislative frameworks, and research, reports and data on trafficking in human beings.

Under the same AMIF project, 126 Greek reception and public health employees working in reception facilities received training on the identification of victims of human trafficking.1394

The Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, the Minister for Justice and the police signed a memorandum in Cyprus to strengthen cooperation for the referral and support to survivors of human trafficking.1395 The national reception strategy also established assessments and referral mechanisms as core objectives.1396

Fighting human trafficking has remained a priority for the Finnish government. In July 2021, it adopted the national Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings, including five strategic objectives and 55 actions.1397 The Finnish Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment requested the Non-Discrimination Ombudsperson to analyse practices related to issuing a special residence permit to victims of human trafficking. The request came from the Finnish parliament inquiring about the need for legislative amendments on the grounds of the special residence permit.1398

The report concluded that most victims were granted international protection or a residence permit based on humanitarian reasons, but the provisions on the special residence permit created for victims of human trafficking were rarely applied.1399 In addition, several other initiatives were ongoing to revise the identification of and support to survivors of human trafficking in general, for example by developing a comprehensive legislative framework to combat trafficking,1400 a pilot programme on job training for victims of human trafficking,1401 and a general revision of support to survivors to avoid re-victimisation.1402

UNHCR and the Italian National Commission for Asylum published new guidelines for the identification of victims of trafficking in an effort to standardise the procedure across territorial commissions.1403 Italian tribunals were faced with several asylum claims by trafficked applicants, for example women from Nigeria (see here and here). The CNDA in France noted that a Nigerian woman from Lagos, escaping a prostitution network, could not be considered to belong to a particular social group, as the scale, methods and traffickers' means of control over the victims were not comparable to that in Edo or other southern states in Nigeria. Still, due to the risks after escaping from prostitution, the court concluded that she should be granted subsidiary protection.

In contrast, the Swiss Federal Court concluded in a case that an applicant from Edo who was forced into prostitution after she arrived to Europe could return to Nigeria and re-establish her life there, given that she remained in constant contact with her family and there were no indications that they would not support her upon return.

The French action plan on vulnerabilities foresees an evaluation of the 300 places dedicated to victims of human trafficking and female victims of violence.1404

The Dutch Court of the Hague referred questions to the CJEU seeking clarification on the issuance of a residence permit for victims of trafficking in human beings in conjunction with the Dublin III Regulation. The Council of State questioned the impact of an appeal on the counting of the Dublin transfer time limit in a case involving human trafficking *(see Section 4.2).*

Several civil society initiatives provided their input and expertise in the area of human trafficking and asylum. For example, the COALESCE project was launched in January 2021 with AMIF funding to provide support to female migrant victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. It is led by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies in Cyprus, and project partners include the European Network of Migrant Women and civil society organisations from Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania.1405 Throughout 2021, Mind the Gap reports were published for each project country, analysing the needs to integrate survivors.1406

The AMIF-funded project "Identification of Trafficked International Protection Beneficiaries' Special Needs (TRIPS)" is a 2-year initiative coordinated by Forum Réfugiés-Cosi which aims to identify and address specific integration needs of trafficked beneficiaries of international protection, both at the EU and national levels.1407 The project is implemented with civil society partners from Czechia, Ireland and Italy and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe. Country-specific project updates were published throughout 2021,1408 as well as a European level comparative report leading to recommendations to European and national policymakers and national authorities.1409

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