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Combatting trafficking of human beings remained at the forefront of discussions in 2022 as a shift in trafficking patterns was noted.¹³⁵⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic had spurred exploiters to turn increasingly to online activities, which made it more difficult to identify and protect victims.¹³⁵⁸ In addition, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 created waves of displaced persons – notably women and children – who were particularly prone to falling victim to trafficking. Indeed, traffickers began to target new travel routes to recruit victims. See *the EUAA's "Identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking in the asylum procedure, Situational Update No 17"* for more detailed developments in 2022.

The [EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025](#) covers various aspects, including prevention, protection, the empowerment of victims and bringing traffickers to justice. One of its key actions includes the evaluation and a possible revision of the Anti-Trafficking Directive. In December 2022, the European Commission proposed to revise the directive, by streamlining structures and procedures in the EU and formalising national referral mechanisms to improve early identification and referral. These would then serve as a basis for developing a European Referral Mechanism (see [Section 2](#)).¹³⁵⁹

Gaps in data continued to be a challenge, preventing policymakers to have a clear picture of the scope of the situation in the EU. While Eurostat publishes annual statistics on the number of registered victims as reported by EU Member States,¹³⁶⁰ not all countries report data, they may use different reporting approaches or different levels of transposition of the Anti-Trafficking Directive.¹³⁶¹ The revisions of the directive propose to address the lack of data on human trafficking by formalising a reliable EU-wide data collection which would be conducted and published by Eurostat.¹³⁶² During 2023, the European Parliament and the Council will examine this proposal, and once approved, the new rules will have to be transposed by Member States into their national laws.¹³⁶³

Enhanced cooperation plays a crucial role in combatting trafficking. In this context, the European Commission and Morocco renewed their operational partnership, which involves border management support and awareness-raising on the dangers of unlawful migration to tackle human trafficking.¹³⁶⁴

The Council of Europe's GRETA published various reports during 2022, namely on France,[1365](#) Luxembourg,[1366](#) Ireland,[1367](#) Latvia,[1368](#) Norway,[1369](#) Portugal[1370](#) and Belgium.[1371](#) Overall, the reports call for additional efforts to identify victims and provide assistance.

The European Migration Network (EMN) published a [study](#) in March 2022 which maps national practices in detection, identification and protection of third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings. National reports for 18 Member States for 2021 were subsequently released throughout 2022.[1372](#)

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5.5.1. Policy, legislative and judicial developments at the national level

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5.5.2. Practical tools and awareness-raising campaigns

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