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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 Portugal1370 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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5.5.2. Practical tools and awareness-raising campaigns

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