

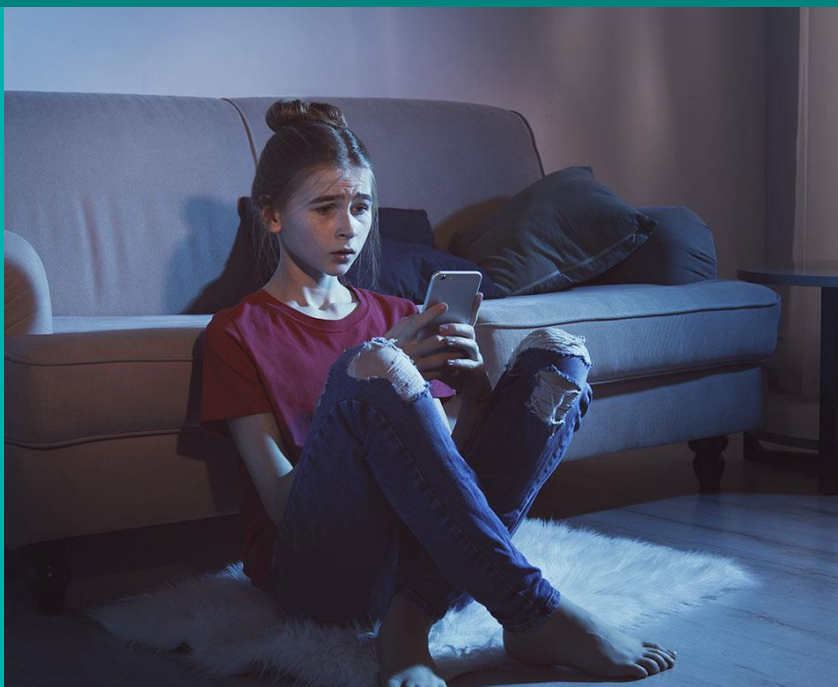
FOURTH EVALUATION ROUND

Measures to prevent and detect vulnerabilities
to human trafficking

EVALUATION REPORT BELGIUM

GRETA

Group of Experts
on Action against
Trafficking in Human Beings



Implementation of the
Council of Europe Convention
on Action against Trafficking
in Human Beings

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Preamble

In accordance with Article 38, paragraph 1, of the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings ("the Convention"), GRETA evaluates the implementation of the Convention following a procedure divided into rounds. At the beginning of each round, GRETA selects the specific provisions on which the evaluation procedure is based.

The first round of monitoring of the Convention provided an overview of its implementation by States Parties. The second evaluation round examined the impact of legislative, policy and practical measures on the prevention of trafficking in human beings (THB), the protection of the rights of victims, and the prosecution of traffickers, paying particular attention to measures taken to address new trends in human trafficking, in particular trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, and child trafficking. The third evaluation round focused on trafficking victims' access to justice and effective remedies.

GRETA has decided that the fourth evaluation round of the Convention will focus on vulnerabilities to human trafficking and measures taken by State Parties to prevent them, detect and support vulnerable victims, and punish the offenders. An additional focus concerns the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to commit human trafficking offences, which brings structural changes to the way offenders operate and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities.

A number of provisions of the Convention establishing substantive and procedural obligations are relevant to this topic. The concept of "vulnerability" appears in Articles 4 (definitions), 5 (prevention of trafficking in human beings) and 12 (assistance to victims) of the Convention. According to paragraph 83 of the Explanatory report to the Convention, "by abuse of a position of vulnerability is meant abuse of any situation in which the person involved has no real and acceptable alternative to submitting to the abuse. The vulnerability may be of any kind, whether physical, psychological, emotional, family-related, social or economic. The situation might, for example, involve insecurity or illegality of the victim's administrative status, economic dependence or fragile health. In short, the situation can be any state of hardship in which a human being is impelled to accept being exploited. Persons abusing such a situation flagrantly infringe human rights and violate human dignity and integrity, which no one can validly renounce."

GRETA refers to the ICAT Issue Brief No. 12/2022 on Addressing vulnerability to trafficking in persons which refers to vulnerability as "those inherent, environmental or contextual factors that increase the susceptibility of an individual or group to being trafficked". It classifies vulnerability factors in three categories: personal (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, disability), situational (e.g. destitution, unemployment, legal status) and contextual (e.g. discriminatory laws, policies and social norms, armed conflicts, crises) factors, which interact and may increase the risk of human trafficking for certain individuals, groups and/or communities.¹ Vulnerability to human trafficking is also subject to intersectional factors, such as gender, belonging to a minority group and socio-economic status.

In addition to the thematic focus on vulnerabilities to human trafficking, GRETA has decided that each State Party will receive **country-specific follow-up questions** related to recommendations not implemented or partially implemented after the third evaluation round.

GRETA recalls that it has adopted the use of three different verbs – "**urge**", "**consider**", and "**invite**" – which correspond to different levels of urgency for bringing the State Party's legislation and/or practice into compliance with the Convention. Thus, GRETA uses the verb "urge" when it assesses that the national legislation or policies are not in compliance with the Convention or when it finds that, despite the existence of legal provisions and other measures, the implementation of a key obligation of the Convention is lacking. In other situations, GRETA "considers" that it is necessary to make further improvements to fully comply with an obligation of the Convention. By "inviting" a country to pursue its efforts, GRETA acknowledges that the authorities are already on the right track and encourages them to continue existing action.

¹ [ICAT Issue Brief No. 12 on Addressing vulnerability to trafficking in persons - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

Executive summary

This report, covering the period from July 2022 to June 2026, evaluates the measures taken by Belgium to prevent vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings (THB), detect and support vulnerable victims and punish the offenders. In doing so, it pays particular attention to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to commit human trafficking offences but also to the use of technological innovations to prevent THB, protect victims and prosecute traffickers. The report also evaluates progress made in selected areas examined by GRETA during previous evaluation rounds.

The Belgian authorities have taken a series of steps to develop the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against trafficking in human beings. Following a reform of the Criminal Code adopted in February 2024 (which entered into force on 1 September 2026), new forms of trafficking have been added (exploitation of illegal adoption and forced marriage), the penalties for trafficking have been reviewed and the non-punishment provision now appears in a separate article. In addition, following the expiry of the 2021–2025 National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan, the Belgian authorities have been working on a new plan, which has yet to be published. GRETA welcomes the annual reports produced by the Federal Migration Centre (Myria), which acts as the independent national rapporteur on THB. These reports contain highly valuable analyses and data for assessing trafficking in Belgium and helping the public authorities to design prevention and enforcement measures.

While Belgium is still primarily a destination country for victims of trafficking, it is also a country of origin and transit. The number of THB victims who received assistance from specialised centres for the first time was 229 in 2022, 160 in 2023 and 145 in 2024. The majority of these victims were men trafficked for economic exploitation. The number of child victims remained low (37 girls and 11 boys in 2022–2024). Every year there are almost 40 nationalities represented among THB victims, and the most common country of origin is Morocco. There has been an increase in cases of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation involving victims of Latin American origin and young Belgian girls.

According to the Belgian authorities, the categories of people most vulnerable to THB are migrants in precarious situations, in particular asylum seekers and irregular migrants; unaccompanied minors; women from disadvantaged backgrounds; homeless and unemployed persons; and children estranged from their families.

Every year, Myria's reports mention numerous cases of THB in which the victims are asylum seekers. According to the authorities, Immigration Office staff are attentive to vulnerabilities when registering and examining applications for protection, and a vulnerability assessment of individuals staying in reception centres must also be carried out by the staff of those centres. GRETA is nevertheless deeply concerned about the plight of asylum seekers who are denied support and forced to develop survival strategies, making them particularly vulnerable to THB. GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that all asylum seekers have access to decent housing and appropriate support and to increase the number of places available under the reception system. It further considers that the authorities should continue to develop the training of professionals in assessing and responding to vulnerabilities, and to raise awareness among asylum seekers of the risks of THB.

The number of detected cases of sexual exploitation involving children and young people has increased in recent years, in particular among those supported by youth care services. GRETA welcomes the measures taken by the Belgian authorities to prevent and combat this phenomenon, including the creation of dedicated working or steering groups, the development of tools and training for professionals and awareness raising among children and their parents. However, the youth care sector faces a shortage of qualified staff and resources, which undermines efforts to prevent and respond to THB cases effectively. GRETA is also concerned about the situation as regards unaccompanied children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy, who are prime targets for criminal networks. GRETA urges the Belgian

authorities to develop specific protection measures for unaccompanied children and young people in transit or living in conditions of vagrancy, and to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people supported by youth care services. It further considers that the authorities should continue their efforts to train professionals and strengthen mechanisms for co-ordination at regional and local level on trafficking in children and young people.

There has been an increase in the number of cases of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation detected in Belgium. In many cases, employers have taken advantage of migrant workers' vulnerability or developed complex legal constructs to avoid responsibility. The Regions, which are responsible for matters relating to the economy and employment, have taken steps to improve the conditions of employment of migrant workers, in particular in Wallonia and in the Brussels-Capital Region. In Flanders, a reform has introduced a minimum due diligence to prevent abuse in the subcontracting chain. At the federal level, legislation enacted in 2024 restricted the scope for subcontracting in certain high-risk sectors. In addition, GRETA welcomes the increase in the number of staff assigned to the anti-trafficking teams (ECOSOC) of the National Social Security Office (ONSS), the federal inspectorate. GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps, and in particular reduce migrant workers' dependency on their employers and make it easier to change employers, strengthen the training of regional inspectorate staff on their role in preventing trafficking and detecting victims and strengthen awareness raising among migrant workers on the risks of trafficking.

The exact number of persons irregularly present in Belgium is difficult to establish, but according to one study there were 112 000 of them in 2023. Administrative, economic and social precariousness increases their vulnerability to trafficking for various forms of exploitation. GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take steps to reduce vulnerabilities to THB among migrants in an irregular situation, in particular by improving effective access to regularisation procedures.

Since the 2022 reform of Belgium's criminal law governing sexual offences, adult prostitution has been decriminalised and social status has been introduced for sex workers. Furthermore, legislation enacted in May 2024 allows sex workers to enter into an employment contract with licensed establishments. In practice, however, the majority of sex workers are not covered by this new status owing to the fact that they are in Belgium irregularly, and the risks of exploitation persist. GRETA considers that the authorities should conduct a review of the reform of the criminal law governing sexual offences and the law on employment contracts governing sex work and of their impact on preventing and combating THB, inform persons engaging in prostitution/sex work of their rights, the statutory conditions for engaging in sex work and the risks of trafficking, and facilitate the integration of persons wishing to leave prostitution and/or exploitative conditions in prostitution.

Transgender people are considered vulnerable to THB in Belgium, in particular those from Latin America. GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to take further steps to reduce the vulnerability of LGBTI persons to THB, in particular through training and awareness raising for law enforcement agencies, in close co-operation with civil society organisations.

Several trafficking cases tried in recent years involved Roma people. To reduce vulnerabilities among Roma, the second National Roma Integration Strategy focuses on access to health, education, employment and housing. Measures are also being taken at Community and city level. GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to take further steps to prevent the trafficking of Roma, in particular by developing research on the subject and by raising awareness among Roma of the risks of trafficking.

GRETA welcomes the efforts made by specialised investigation services to proactively detect victims of THB, and to develop self-identification of victims by creating a central online contact point. However, in order to benefit from the recovery and reflection period and to continue being protected after it expires, victims must have broken off contacts with the traffickers. GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that all victims of trafficking who are in an irregular or precarious administrative situation have access to a recovery and reflection period in accordance with Article 13 of the Convention and to apply on a case-

by-case basis, with a focus on victim protection, the requirement to have broken off contacts with the traffickers. It further considers that the authorities should enhance the training and tools for frontline services in order to improve the proactive detection of child victims and victims of all forms of exploitation, including exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities and exploitation for begging.

While GRETA welcomes the increase in annual funding provided to specialised shelters, the centres do not have enough capacity to deal with the increase in first-time requests for support and also exceptional situations where a large number of victims are detected. GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that assistance is not made conditional on the victim's willingness to co-operate with the authorities in criminal proceedings and that all presumed and identified victims on Belgian territory can receive assistance, irrespective of the country of exploitation. It also calls on the authorities to provide sufficient funding to specialised centres and increase their reception capacity, and to provide specialised care for boy victims of THB in Flanders.

GRETA welcomes the acknowledgement by courts of the aggravating circumstance of abuse of a position of vulnerability in victims of trafficking. It also welcomes the significant number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions in trafficking cases, particularly for THB for the purpose of sexual or economic exploitation. The number of proceedings initiated for other forms of exploitation remains low, however. GRETA is concerned that the reallocation of resources and capacities to other priorities (terrorism, drug trafficking) is undermining the criminal justice response to THB. GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should allocate sufficient resources to investigation services, public prosecutor's offices and the courts, develop proactive investigation of cases of trafficking for the purposes of exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities or begging, and strengthen financial investigations in cases of trafficking.

The non-punishment clause for victims of THB has been used in several cases. However, GRETA was informed that victims of THB who had been exploited under bogus self-employment arrangements are forced to repay arrears of social security contributions accrued during their exploitation. Since this is contrary to the non-punishment principle laid down in the Convention, GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to take further measures to write off social security debts for victims of trafficking employed under bogus self-employment arrangements.

In order to tackle the growing use of new technologies by traffickers to recruit, control and exploit victims, awareness-raising activities are being conducted among children, young people, parents and professionals working with young people. At the same time, the reform of the criminal law governing sexual offences introduced measures to reduce the risks of exploitation via online platforms advertising sexual services. These platforms are required to designate a contact point for the law enforcement and judicial authorities and to report any suspected cases of sexual exploitation to them, and also to raise awareness of trafficking among those responsible for managing adverts. In addition, the investigation services regularly carry out digital investigations in cases of THB, although the ONSS's ECOSOC teams have more limited capacity than the federal police. GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should invest more in capacity building and digital tools for proactive investigations and strengthen co-operation with ICT companies and internet service providers.

With regard to the follow-up topics from the previous evaluation round, the barriers to accessing free legal aid persist. In practice, only a limited number of victims of trafficking are assisted by a lawyer. GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to revise the eligibility criteria for free legal aid to enable victims of trafficking to benefit from it throughout the proceedings and independently of proof of their lack of means and changes in their financial situation. It further considers that the authorities should guarantee sufficient funding for legal assistance and free legal aid and raise awareness among bar associations about the need to encourage training and specialisation of lawyers on trafficking.

GRETA welcomes the significant number of court decisions handed down awarding compensation for victims. In practice, however, victims seldom receive compensation from traffickers. In these

circumstances, it is crucial to implement an effective and efficient state compensation mechanism. Under current Belgian law, however, the restrictive conditions for access to the Commission for Financial Aid for Victims of Intentional Acts of Violence preclude many victims of trafficking from exercising their right to state compensation. GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to review the criteria for access to state compensation in order to ensure that all victims of trafficking can access it, regardless of the type of exploitation.

General information on trafficking in human beings in Belgium (covering the period from 2022 to 2026)

Entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings	1 August 2009
Previous evaluations by GRETA	First evaluation report (published on 25 September 2013) Second evaluation report (published on 16 November 2017) Third evaluation report (published on 20 October 2022)
Co-ordination of national action against THB	Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit for Action against Trafficking in and Smuggling of Human Beings and its Bureau
Independent National Rapporteur	Federal Migration Centre (Myria)
Specialised bodies	- Federal Public Service for Justice: human trafficking and smuggling unit, - Prosecutor's offices and <i>auditorats du travail</i> (prosecution service for labour-law cases): prosecutors specialising in action against human trafficking and smuggling, - Board of Prosecutors General: network of expertise on human trafficking and smuggling, - Federal police: Centre of Expertise on action against human trafficking and smuggling (CENTREX) and specialised units at local level, - National Social Security Office (ONSS): thematic directorate on THB and ECOSOC teams.
NGOs	- Specialised reception centres: Pag-Asa (Brussels), Payoke (Flanders) and Sürya (Wallonia), - NGOs that take in child victims of THB and children at risk of THB: Esperanto (Wallonia) and Minor-Ndako (Flanders).
National Strategy/Action Plan	2021-2025 Anti-Trafficking Action Plan (new plan in preparation)
Relevant legislation	- Criminal Code: Articles 433quinquies to 433novies (Articles 258 to 264 following the entry into force of the new Criminal Code on 1 September 2026), - Law of 15 December 1980 on Foreign Nationals: Article 61, paragraphs 2 to 5 (recovery and reflection period and residence permit).
National Referral Mechanism (NRM)	Circular of 23 December 2016 relating to the implementation of multi-agency co-operation concerning victims of trafficking in human beings and/or certain aggravated forms of human smuggling (currently being revised)
Trafficking profile	Belgium is primarily a country of destination for victims of trafficking, and to some extent also a country of transit and origin. Over the 2022-2024 period, the majority of victims granted assistance for the first time by specialised centres were men trafficked for economic exploitation, followed by women, most of whom were victims of sexual or economic exploitation. The number of child victims remained low. The main countries of origin of the victims were Morocco, Brazil, the Philippines and Bangladesh. There was an increase in the number of Belgian victims.

I. Introduction

1. Since the entry into force of the Convention in respect of Belgium on 1 August 2009, the Belgian authorities have taken a series of steps to develop the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against trafficking in human beings (THB). The measures include strengthening criminalisation of trafficking, the introduction of a provision concerning the non-punishment of victims, the establishment of a National Referral Mechanism and the designation of an independent National Rapporteur on trafficking. National action plans to combat trafficking are regularly adopted, and efforts have been made to implement multi-agency co-operation for the purpose of identifying and protecting victims, including NGOs accredited as specialised centres. In addition, the Belgian authorities have developed specialisation of professionals, strengthened the investigation and prosecution of trafficking and improved efforts to combat labour exploitation. After three rounds of evaluation, however, GRETA concluded that there were persistent gaps in several areas, in particular in victims' access to free legal aid and compensation. It also urged the authorities to ensure that all victims of THB received specialised assistance regardless of their willingness to co-operate in criminal proceedings and to provide the police and labour inspectorates with increased resources to conduct proactive investigations in trafficking cases.

2. On the basis of GRETA's third report, on 25 November 2022 the Committee of the Parties to the Convention adopted a recommendation to the Belgian authorities, requesting them to inform the Committee within a two-year period of measures taken to comply with the recommendation. The report submitted by the Belgian authorities was considered at the 35th meeting of the Committee of the Parties (29 November 2024) and was made public.²

3. On 13 February 2025, GRETA launched the fourth round of evaluation of the Convention in respect of Belgium by sending the questionnaire for this round to the Belgian authorities.³ The deadline for submitting the reply to the questionnaire was 13 February 2025 and the authorities' reply was received on that date.

4. An evaluation visit to Belgium took place from 3 to 7 November 2025 in order to hold meetings with relevant governmental and non-governmental actors, collect additional information and examine the practical implementation of adopted measures. The visit was carried out by a delegation composed of:

- Mr Thomas Ahlstrand, member of GRETA;
- Ms Ulrike Haberl-Schwarz, member of GRETA;
- Ms Parvine Ghadami, Administrator in the Secretariat of the Convention.

5. During the visit, the GRETA delegation met officials from the federal authorities, in particular the Federal Public Service for Justice, the Federal Public Service for Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, and the Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs, as well as the National Social Security Office (ONSS), the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), the Immigration Office, the Guardianship Service, the federal police, the Board of Prosecutors General and the Federal Prosecution Service, and the Commission for Financial Aid for Victims of Intentional Acts of Violence. The GRETA delegation also met members of the Justice Committee of the Belgian Federal Parliament. In addition, the delegation met with representatives of all the federated entities: the French Community (the Wallonia-Brussels Federation), the German-speaking Community, the Flemish Community and Region (Flanders), the Walloon Region and the Brussels Region.

² <https://rm.coe.int/rapport-soumis-par-les-autorites-de-la-belgique-pour-etre-en-conformit/1680b2bd6c>.

³ <https://rm.coe.int/reponse-de-la-belgique-au-questionnaire-pour-l-evaluation-de-la-mise-e/1680b6c19e>.

6. The GRETA delegation held separate meetings with members of the Federal Migration Centre (Myria), which acts as independent National Rapporteur on THB, and the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA). The delegation also met with Mr Soulayman Laqdim, General Delegate for Children's Rights in the French Community, and Ms Caroline Vrijens, Children's Rights Commissioner in Flanders (*Kinderrechtencommissaris*).

7. In the course of the visit, the delegation travelled to Ghent where it met law enforcement officials, labour inspectors and members of the judiciary specialising in THB cases, and visited a reception centre for asylum seekers. It also visited a shelter for child victims of THB and children at risk of THB run by an NGO in Flanders.

8. Separate meetings were held with officials from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and lawyers.

9. GRETA wishes to place on record the excellent co-operation provided by the Belgian authorities and in particular by the contact person appointed to liaise with GRETA, Mr Jean-François Minet, representative of the Federal Public Service for Justice and Head of the Bureau of the Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit for Action against Trafficking in and Smuggling of Human Beings.

10. The draft version of the present report was approved by GRETA at its 56th meeting (2-6 March 2026) and was submitted to the Belgian authorities for comments. The authorities' comments were received on 19 May 2026 and were taken into account by GRETA when adopting the final report at its 57th meeting (22-26 June 2026). The report covers the situation up to 26 June 2026; subsequent developments are not covered by the following analysis and conclusions. GRETA's conclusions and proposals for action are summarised in Appendix 2.

II. Overview of trends and changes in the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against human trafficking

11. While Belgium is still primarily a destination country for victims of trafficking, it is also a country of origin and transit. The number of referrals of presumed victims of THB and/or aggravated smuggling of human beings⁴ to specialised centres (PAG-ASA in Brussels, Payoke in Flanders and Sürya in Wallonia) was 1 409 in 2022, 1 549 in 2023 and 1 558 in 2024, which represents an increase compared with the previous reporting period.⁵ The number of THB victims who received assistance from the centres for the first time was 229 in 2022, 160 in 2023 and 145 in 2024. Although the number rose sharply in 2022 following the discovery of a major THB case near Antwerp (the Boréalis case, see paragraph 81), it later returned to levels similar to those seen in the years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022-2024, the majority of THB victims granted assistance for the first time were men trafficked for the purpose of economic exploitation. Next came women, mainly victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual or economic exploitation. The number of child victims remained low (37 girls and 11 boys in 2022-2024). There were also few victims of other forms of exploitation such as exploitation in criminal activities or exploitation through begging. Every year there are almost 40 nationalities represented among the victims, and the most common country of origin is Morocco. The number of Belgian victims is rising (1 in 2022, 14 in 2023 and 23 in 2024); these are mainly female victims of sexual exploitation.

12. GRETA reiterates that the figures cited above do not capture the full scale of trafficking in Belgium as they only cover victims assisted by specialised centres. There are still no data on presumed victims of trafficking (those who have been detected by frontline services and referred to the National Referral Mechanism) or on formally identified victims (those who have been granted victim status by decision of the public prosecutor). Also, the data do not include victims who do not meet the conditions for access to specialised centres (e.g. victims who do not agree to co-operate in criminal proceedings or who have been exploited abroad).

13. Several **new trends** have been highlighted by Myria in its annual reports, including an increase in cases of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation involving victims of Latin American origin and young Belgian girls, as well as a rise in cases of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation linked to social dumping and long subcontracting chains. The authorities have also noted an increase in the use of new technologies by traffickers to recruit, control and exploit victims, particularly in cases of sexual exploitation and/or involving the “loverboy” method.

14. As regards **legislative changes**, a comprehensive reform of the Criminal Code (CC) was adopted on 29 February 2024 and will enter into force on 1 September 2026.⁶ The offence of trafficking in human beings, previously governed by Articles 433quinquies et seq. of the CC, will appear in the new Articles 258 et seq. New forms of trafficking have been added, in particular the exploitation of illegal adoption and forced marriage. The penalties for trafficking have been reviewed: the offence will carry a sentence of three to five years’ imprisonment, compared with one to five years currently. In cases involving aggravated forms of trafficking, however, the penalty has been reduced (five to ten years, compared with ten to fifteen years currently). Lastly, the non-punishment provision now appears in a separate article (new Article 258), but its scope has been reduced (see paragraph 176).⁷

15. Following the reform of Belgium’s criminal law governing sexual offences (“Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Reform Law”) in March 2022 which, in particular, decriminalised prostitution, legislation was

⁴ “Aggravated smuggling of human beings” is an aggravated form of migrant smuggling where the offence was committed against a minor, where it was committed by exploiting a person’s vulnerability or where it was committed with recourse to fraudulent acts, violence, threats or other forms of coercion.

⁵ These figures cover all referrals to specialised centres for trafficking and aggravated smuggling, including some that may not be relevant. By way of comparison, the number of referrals was 953 in 2017, 898 in 2018, 988 in 2019, 841 in 2020 and 1 003 in 2021.

⁶ The entry into force of the new Criminal Code scheduled for 8 April 2026 has been postponed to 1 September 2026.

⁷ For further information on the reform of the Criminal Code, see Myria’s 2024 Annual report, pages 57-61.

enacted on 3 May 2024 and entered into force on 1 December 2024 allowing sex work to be carried out under an employment contract (see paragraph 93).

16. Other legislative changes were introduced with regard to the obligations of subcontracting companies (see paragraph 82), the employment of foreign workers (see paragraphs 69-70) and the protection of asylum seekers (see paragraph 39), which may have an impact on vulnerabilities to trafficking.

17. With regard to the **institutional framework**, the Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit for Action against Trafficking in and Smuggling of Human Beings together with its Bureau is still the main co-ordinating body and are chaired by the Federal Public Service for Justice.⁸ The composition of the Unit and its Bureau remains unchanged.⁹ The reception centres for minor victims (Esperanto and Meza) are still not full members. GRETA was informed by the authorities that discussions are under way to improve the effectiveness of the Unit. A working group has been set up to revise the Circular of 13 December 2016 relating to the implementation of multi-agency co-operation concerning victims of trafficking in human beings and/or certain aggravated forms of human smuggling (the National Referral Mechanism) with regard to the protection of child victims (see paragraph 116).

18. For regional or local co-ordination, meetings continue to be organised at judicial district level by lead prosecutors and *auditeurs* specialising in THB and aggravated human smuggling cases (see paragraph 156). In Flanders, there is a steering group on child sexual exploitation that brings together all the relevant agencies, and the Flemish authorities have recently decided to extend it to all forms of exploitation.

19. The Federal Migration Centre, Myria, continues to act as independent **National Rapporteur** on trafficking in human beings.¹⁰ GRETA welcomes Myria's annual reports which contain highly valuable analyses and data for assessing trafficking in Belgium and helping the public authorities to design prevention and enforcement measures.

20. In February 2022, a Special Commission was set up by the Federal Parliament to evaluate legislation and policy on THB and human smuggling. After hearing from a wide range of professionals, the Commission concluded its work by adopting a report on 12 June 2023.¹¹ This report includes 100 recommendations covering various areas such as the co-ordination of action against trafficking and victim protection, data collection and intelligence gathering, and the activities of the judiciary, the police and other agencies. It also contains recommendations for better combating economic exploitation, sexual exploitation and the exploitation of minors, and improving THB prevention.¹² Several of these recommendations are mentioned in this report (see paragraphs 82, 117, 136, 157 and 216). In December 2025, the Federal Parliament held a hearing with the Federal Public Service for Justice on the implementation of the Special Commission's recommendations. **GRETA welcomes the Federal Parliament's commitment to combating trafficking.**

⁸ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 16; GRETA's second report on Belgium, paragraphs 21-22.

⁹ Under the revised Royal Decree of 16 May 2044, the Unit comprises representatives of the Prime Minister, the Federal Public Services for Justice, the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Employment, Social Affairs, Social Integration, Development Co-operation and Equal Opportunities, the six federated entities (Regions and Communities), the Board of Prosecutors General, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Federal Police, the State Security Service, the Immigration Office, the Social Legislation Inspectorate, the National Social Security Office (ONSS), the Tax Inspectorate, Myria, the three specialised centres and Child Focus. The Bureau is composed of representatives from the Federal Public Services for Justice and Foreign Affairs, Myria, the Immigration Office, the Federal Police, the National Social Security Office (ONSS), the Social Legislation Inspectorate, the specialised centres, and the College of Public Prosecutors.

¹⁰ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 17; GRETA's second report on Belgium, paragraph 23.

¹¹ <https://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/55/2530/55K2530002.pdf>.

¹² For a detailed analysis of the recommendations made by the Special Commission: Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 74-81.

21. The 2025-2029 federal coalition government agreement, concluded on 31 January 2025, includes various measures to combat THB. Following a recommendation from the Special Parliamentary Commission, the coalition agreement provides for the setting-up of a National Co-ordination Centre for Combating Human Trafficking and Smuggling (see paragraph 117). Other measures aim to strengthen the police, inspection services and the justice system, develop training for members of the judiciary, increase criminal penalties, and review the funding of specialised centres and optimise their capacities. While these measures are included in the asylum and migration section of the coalition agreement, there have been concerns that responsibilities relating to trafficking could be moved to the Federal Public Service for the Interior. To date, however, the Federal Public Service for Justice has retained its central role.

22. The Belgian authorities have continued to implement the 2021-2025 **Anti-Trafficking National Action Plan**.¹³ Several important measures in the plan have not been implemented, however, such as the revision of the multi-agency circular of 2016 (see paragraph 116), the cancellation of social security debts for victims of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation (see paragraph 180) and the assessment of the impact of reforms in relation to prostitution (see paragraph 95). The Belgian authorities justified the delay, citing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which required the Unit to shift its focus to preventing trafficking in refugees from Ukraine.

23. At the time of GRETA's visit, a new national anti-trafficking action plan was being finalised. According to the latest information provided by the Belgian authorities, the draft of the new action plan was submitted to the Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit on 2 April 2026 and was due to be adopted in June. Some measures (in particular, an awareness-raising campaign and training materials) have already been allocated funding and are currently being implemented.

24. An action plan to combat labour fraud over the period 2026-2027 was adopted in December 2025 and contains several measures aimed at strengthening efforts to combat THB, economic exploitation and organised labour fraud.¹⁴ In particular, it provides for an increase in staffing levels in inspectorates, the police and other agencies (see paragraph 74).

25. GRETA welcomes the efforts made by the Belgian authorities to develop the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against trafficking in human beings. Because of Belgium's complex administrative structure, a wide range of actors are involved in preventing and combating THB at federal, federated and local level. During its visit, GRETA was impressed by the knowledge, professionalism and commitment of all the professionals it met. It is concerned, however, that co-ordination problems remain between them all, at both policy and operational levels, whether between federal and federated agencies, between the different federated entities, or within the same federated entity. **GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should continue their efforts to improve the co-ordination of policies and activities to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings.**

¹³ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 20. This plan is centred around the following objectives: enhancing legislative or regulatory instruments and continuing to implement them effectively; training specialised and non-specialised stakeholders; refining victim status and improving the situation of reception centres; maintaining international vigilance in combating trafficking in human beings; and raising awareness and informing the public.

¹⁴ https://www.sirs.belgique.be/sites/default/files/2026-01/SIOD_Actieplan_2026_2027_FR.pdf.

III. Addressing vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings

1. Prevention of trafficking in human beings

a. Introduction

26. Prevention is crucial in combating trafficking in human beings. Article 5 of the Convention therefore requires States Parties to establish and/or strengthen effective policies and programmes to prevent THB in co-ordination between relevant public agencies, non-governmental organisations and other elements of civil society. Such policies and programmes should have a particular focus on persons vulnerable to trafficking and professionals concerned with trafficking in human beings, and shall include research, information, awareness-raising and education campaigns, social and economic initiatives and training programmes. In the development and implementation of prevention measures, States Parties are required to promote a human rights-based approach and to use gender mainstreaming and a child-sensitive approach, taking specific measures to reduce children's vulnerability to trafficking. Furthermore, Article 5 of the Convention requires States parties to take measures to enable migration to take place legally. In addition, Article 6 of the Convention places a positive obligation on Parties to adopt measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons which leads to trafficking.

27. According to the Belgian authorities, the categories of people most vulnerable to THB are migrants in precarious situations, in particular asylum seekers and irregular migrants; unaccompanied children; women from disadvantaged backgrounds; homeless and unemployed persons; and children who are estranged from their families.¹⁵ Further, according to Myria, transgender people from Latin American countries are particularly vulnerable, as are Vietnamese people forced to work to repay debts related to their migratory journey.¹⁶ Roma people are also considered vulnerable but there is very little information on this subject.

28. The 2021-2025 National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan mentions various vulnerabilities, in particular those related to age and gender. As part of its activities to prevent THB, the plan focuses on training and awareness raising for professionals, measures to reduce demand such as due diligence, and informing the general public. Every year, as part of the Blue Hearts and European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) campaigns, the authorities organise initiatives with various partners to raise public awareness of trafficking.

29. Combating THB is primarily a matter for the federal authorities. The federated entities play a very important role in preventing trafficking and reducing vulnerabilities, however. The Communities (the French Community, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community) are responsible for 'person-related' matters, such as education and youth care. The Regions (Wallonia, Brussels-Capital and Flanders) are responsible for matters relating to employment and economic migration (work permits). Some aspects of policies on social assistance and the integration of migrants may fall within the remit of one or other entity. For that reason, this report focuses in greater detail than previous reports on the measures taken by all these federated entities, each acting within the scope of its specific responsibilities.

30. The role of municipalities in crime prevention, including trafficking and exploitation ("municipal administrative approach"), is also worth highlighting. Since legislation was enacted on 15 January 2024, municipalities have been able to conduct "integrity investigations" into establishments accessible to the public within their jurisdiction and refuse, suspend or revoke a licence if there is a risk of abuse, including trafficking. In Namur province, for example, inspectors found that a car wash was employing an irregular migrant who was working in highly precarious conditions and living in substandard accommodation. Criminal penalties were imposed but the business was able to continue operating. Following a further

¹⁵ See the Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, pages 5-6.

¹⁶ Myria, 2024 and 2023 reports, Trafficking and smuggling of human beings.

inspection, which revealed problematic but less worrying practices, the municipal authorities took the decision to close the establishment under an administrative procedure. Other examples of the municipal administrative approach include the introduction of regulations on car wash operations and sex work establishments in Genk (Flanders).¹⁷ GRETA welcomes the commitment shown by certain local authorities to preventing human trafficking through a local government-led approach.

31. GRETA was not informed of any initiatives specifically designed to take account of the experience of victims and survivors of THB. According to the Belgian authorities, various organisations and agencies represented on the Bureau of the Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit speak out on behalf of victims. GRETA underlines the importance of taking into account the lived experiences and views of victims and survivors of trafficking, including children, when designing and implementing anti-trafficking policies and measures. It refers to the OSCE/ODIHR guidance on establishing and maintaining National Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Councils and the ICAT Issue Brief on ensuring ethical survivor inclusion.¹⁸ **GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to set up a human trafficking survivors' advisory council.**

b. Measures to prevent the vulnerability of specific groups to trafficking in human beings

32. This section examines the preventive measures taken with regard to certain groups identified as being particularly vulnerable to THB on the basis of the information provided by the Belgian authorities as well as non-state actors. GRETA underlines that not every individual belonging to one of these groups is vulnerable to trafficking *per se*, there are usually additional vulnerability factors involved. The different groups selected should be viewed with due regard to the complexity and intersectionality of vulnerabilities to trafficking.

i. Asylum seekers

33. Every year, Myria's reports mention numerous cases of THB in which the victims are asylum seekers. For example, in 2025, a Belgian court convicted a trafficker for trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation in the construction sector. She had recruited and exploited 15 victims who were in the country irregularly or seeking asylum. She had visited reception centres for asylum seekers in order to recruit the most vulnerable. The court found that the trafficker had taken advantage of the victims' vulnerable position, in particular their precarious administrative status.¹⁹

34. Belgium has become a major destination country for people in need of international protection. According to data from the Immigration Office (OE, Federal Public Service for the Interior), 25 971 people applied for protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) in 2021, 36 871 in 2022, 35 507 in 2023, 39 615 in 2024 and 34 439 in 2025.²⁰ The majority of them are adult men. The main countries of origin of the applications are Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Eritrea and Türkiye. At the same time, the number of decisions made by the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA), the independent authority responsible for examining asylum applications in the first instance, has increased,²¹ with a protection rate of between 43% and 47% depending on the year.²²

¹⁷ Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 63-67.

¹⁸ OSCE/ODHIR, *Guidance on establishing and maintaining National Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Councils (NSTACs)*, 2024; ICAT, *Ensuring Ethical Survivor Inclusion, Issue Brief*, 2025.

¹⁹ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 105-106.

²⁰ Sources: annual statistics provided by the Immigration Office (https://dofi.ibz.be/sites/default/files/2025-12/STAT_IB-DPI_FR_2015-2024.pdf); <https://www.rtl.be/actu/belgique/politique/lepoque-ou-la-belgique-etait-une-destination-favorite-des-demandeurs-dasile-est/2026-01-14/article/776469>.

²¹ The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA) delivered 18 513 decisions concerning 23 248 people in 2021 (with a protection rate of 43.5%), 20 514 decisions concerning 25 066 people in 2022 (with a protection rate of 43%), 25 356 decisions concerning 29 885 people in 2023 (with a protection rate of 43.5%) and 27 471 decisions concerning 34 052 people in 2024 (with a protection rate of 47.2%).

²² Source: CGRA <https://www.cgrs.be/en/figures>.

35. According to the Belgian authorities, OE staff are attentive to vulnerabilities and use a "special procedural needs" questionnaire. A Vulnerability Unit is present at the Brussels registration centre, the main location for filing asylum applications in Belgium.²³ Its role is to refer unaccompanied children to the Guardianship Service, to alert the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) to any specific vulnerabilities and to inform potential victims of human trafficking about the procedure for receiving assistance from specialised centres. It comprises around 20 staff who have received specific training, including on conducting interviews with children and on human trafficking. In addition, as a general rule, members of the team responsible for registering asylum applications must also pay attention to detecting vulnerabilities and are provided with guidelines, worksheets and other tools for this purpose. Furthermore, under the terms of the Law of 12 January 2007 on the reception of asylum seekers and other categories of foreign nationals (known as the "Reception Law"), an individual assessment including a vulnerabilities review must be conducted within 30 days from the date on which asylum seekers arrive at a reception facility and throughout their stay. When considering asylum applications, the CGRA also conducts an assessment of the applicants' procedural needs and vulnerabilities and has staff trained in interviewing vulnerable persons.

36. An e-learning module on vulnerabilities is offered to staff of Fedasil and its partners (for example the Red Cross), covering the definition, identification and management of vulnerabilities, with a focus on gender-based violence and THB. GRETA welcomes the existence of an e-learning training module on vulnerabilities, including the issue of THB. Noting that this module lasts only 45 minutes and is not mandatory, GRETA emphasises that the training and tools available to Fedasil staff in relation to vulnerabilities should be improved.

37. People interviewed by GRETA raised concerns about the vulnerability assessment conducted by OE staff when registering applications, which they said was carried out too quickly and was not thorough enough. According to the Belgian authorities, the time available to assess vulnerabilities at the time of registering asylum applications is limited, given the high number of people to be registered every day. However, there was more time to detect vulnerabilities during the subsequent interview that most asylum seekers had with the Immigration Office to determine the merits of their claims, as well as in Fedasil reception centres for those who were able to stay there (see below). The authorities also pointed out that a project had been launched in 2024 with funding from the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) to improve the detection of vulnerabilities by all agencies involved in the protection of asylum seekers (Immigration Office, Fedasil, Guardianship Service and CGRA).²⁴

38. The Reception Law provides that asylum seekers are to have access to material assistance, including accommodation, meals, medical, social and psychological support and a daily allowance, as well as access to legal assistance and other services. This material assistance is mainly provided within the structures operated by Fedasil or its partners. Some facilities or places are reserved for unaccompanied minors, whose protection comes under the purview of Fedasil and not the youth care services (see paragraph 53). On 1 October 2025, there were 104 reception centres for asylum seekers, as well as individual accommodation. With 35 270 places in total, the system is under severe pressure from the high number of asylum applications. As a result, thousands of people deemed non-vulnerable (in particular single men) are on a waiting list for accommodation and forced to live on the streets.

39. In July 2023, in the case of *Camara v. Belgium*, the European Court of Human Rights held that there had been a violation of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights because of the Belgian State's refusal to comply with a decision handed down by a domestic court, ordering it to grant material assistance to an asylum seeker. The Court also found that there had been a systemic failure on the part of the Belgian authorities to enforce domestic court decisions concerning the reception of asylum

²³ Asylum applications may also be made at the border, as well as in prisons and closed centres for foreign nationals in an irregular situation.

²⁴ See the Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, pages 41-45.

seekers.²⁵ Since the Camara judgment, several measures have been taken by the Belgian authorities and the number of people waiting for accommodation has been reduced. In the opinion of Myria and the Federal Institute of Human Rights (IFDH), however, these measures are insufficient, if not a step backwards.²⁶ In September 2025, there were still 1 900 people on the waiting list. The Belgian State still regularly refuses to implement court decisions ordering it to provide accommodation to asylum seekers.²⁷ In addition, amendments to the Reception Law adopted in July 2025 further restrict accommodation options, in particular for people who have been granted refugee status in another EU country. The amendments have also done away with the possibility for asylum seekers to receive social assistance instead of being accommodated in a Fedasil centre. In a ruling dated 26 February 2026, the Constitutional Court suspended these amendments and referred the matter to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for a preliminary ruling.²⁸ GRETA notes that in September 2025, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe expressed concern about these developments and invited the Belgian authorities "to use, as soon as possible, all possible means to find a lasting solution to the reception crisis, so as to be able to enforce all judicial decisions, and to provide a sufficient budget and a precise timetable for this purpose".²⁹

40. GRETA visited a reception centre for asylum seekers operated by Fedasil in Ghent (Flanders). 146 people were staying there, in particular single individuals (77%) and families (23%). The centre has places for vulnerable people, including LGBTI persons and persons with special medical needs. The average duration of stay at the centre is one and a half to two years. The centre has 29 employees, including four social workers responsible for providing individual support to those staying there. The staff have not received specific training on THB. They indicated that a case had been submitted to the Flemish labour inspectorate, with the help of the NGO Fair Work, concerning several residents who had been working for a company but had not been paid. According to information gathered by GRETA, the case did not result in criminal prosecution, and the victims will have to file a civil claim to recover their unpaid wages. GRETA was impressed by the very high standard of the reception conditions at the centre and by the dedication of the staff in providing personalised support to the residents. It is aware, however, that the situation at this centre is not representative of the reality of reception conditions across Belgium as a whole.

41. Measures are being taken to raise awareness among asylum seekers of the risks of THB and exploitation. According to the Belgian authorities, during their stay in a reception facility, general information on trafficking is provided, including through leaflets. Awareness-raising activities are also organised by the centres in co-operation with the NGO Fair Work to inform those receiving assistance about labour law and the risks of economic exploitation. In addition, there are day centres, such as Fedasil's "Point Info" in Brussels, where people who are not staying in a reception centre, as well as people in transit or in an irregular situation, can go to obtain information about their rights. Furthermore, Fedasil has set up mobile "Reach Out" teams in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia to make contact with migrants who are more difficult to reach, through outreach work or visits to centres for homeless people. These teams are responsible for informing migrants about their rights in Belgium, reception options,

²⁵ A further judgment finding a violation was delivered by the European Court of Human Rights on 9 April 2026, in the case of *M.V. and Others v. Belgium* (application no. 52836/22 and 3 others).

²⁶ <https://www.myria.be/fr/publications/crise-de-laccueil-myria-et-linstitut-federal-des-droits-humains-alertent-sur-un-recul-des-droits>

²⁷ For example, in October 2025, a Brussels court ruled against the Belgian State for refusing to provide accommodation to a family of asylum seekers from Afghanistan (two adults and three children) who had been living on the streets for several months, on the ground that they had already been granted asylum in Greece. The court found that the State had failed to examine the personal circumstances of the family members and had not taken account of their vulnerability. The State had refused to implement an earlier court decision ordering it to accommodate the family. Source: <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/67617/belgique--le-gouvernement-condamne-pour-ne-pas-avoir-heberge-une-famille-afghane-demandant-lasile>.

²⁸ Constitutional Court, judgment of 26 February 2026, No. 23/2026. <https://mail.statik.be/t/r-i-tkujljc-l-k/>.

²⁹ [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#f{%22execidentfier%22:\[%22CM/Del/Dec\(2025\)1537/H46-06E%22\]}](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#f{%22execidentfier%22:[%22CM/Del/Dec(2025)1537/H46-06E%22]})

access to social assistance, international protection procedures and options for returning to their country of origin.³⁰

42. In 2022, following the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, Belgium took in 61 975 refugees from Ukraine. By the end of 2025, there were 89 072 in the country.³¹ Belgium applies the European temporary protection regime and grants refugees from Ukraine a residence permit that is currently valid until 27 March 2027. After registering with the Immigration Office, refugees from Ukraine automatically have access to various rights, including housing, medical insurance, social assistance and the right to work. Since individuals from Ukraine have a residence permit, responsibility for looking after them lies with the local authorities (cities, municipalities and CPAS). Significant co-ordination has been put in place between the federal government and the federated entities to facilitate this process.

43. In their reply to GRETA's questionnaire, the Belgian authorities highlighted various initiatives implemented by the federated entities to reduce vulnerabilities among refugees from Ukraine. The Walloon government has set up a temporary mobile team to facilitate access to healthcare and address the bio-psycho-social needs of such persons. Communication materials and guides on the rights of refugees from Ukraine, THB and other forms of abuse have been distributed. In the German-speaking Community, an awareness-raising campaign on THB has also been launched, targeting refugees from Ukraine. According to the information gathered during the visit, no cases of THB have been detected among refugees from Ukraine.

44. GRETA is deeply concerned about the vulnerability of asylum seekers to THB in Belgium, especially those who are denied support in violation of Belgian law and repeated decisions by the domestic courts. The individuals in question end up destitute and are forced to develop survival strategies, making them particularly vulnerable to all kinds of abuse, including THB. Despite the fact that the number of applications for international protection in Belgium remains high, the federal government has announced its intention to further reduce Fedasil's capacity and budget. This decision is difficult to comprehend and risks further exacerbating vulnerabilities.

45. In order to reduce vulnerabilities to THB among asylum seekers, GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that all asylum seekers have access to decent housing and appropriate support and to increase the number of places available under the Fedasil reception system.

46. In addition, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps to reduce the risk of THB among asylum seekers, and in particular:

- **continue to develop the training and tools on assessing and responding to vulnerabilities for all staff involved in the protection of asylum seekers;**
- **continue to inform asylum seekers about their rights and the risks of THB.**

³⁰ For further information: <https://www.fedasil.be/fr/reach-out-donner-des-informations-aux-migrants-difficilement-accessibles#:~:text=Depuis%20d%C3%A9but%202020%2C%20le%20team,souvent%20dans%20des%20conditions%20pr%C3%A9caires>.

³¹ Source: HCR, Refugee Data Finder.

ii. *Children and young people*

47. The vulnerability of children and young people to THB in Belgium has already been addressed by GRETA in its previous reports, in particular with regard to victims of “loverboys” and unaccompanied children.³²

48. The number of detected cases of child sexual exploitation has increased in recent years. In 2025, the NGO, Child Focus, opened 151 cases involving suspected exploitation of children in prostitution,³³ as against 94 in 2024 and 10 in 2014, and these are only the tip of the iceberg. In these cases, the vast majority of victims were girls and nearly half were under the age of 16. In more than half of the cases, the victim was living in a youth care facility (*aide à la jeunesse*).³⁴ Suspicions cannot always be confirmed due to a lack of evidence. The NGO does not have any information on the number of cases that have led to investigations into human trafficking by the authorities. Other studies show that among the victims detected in Belgium in recent years are young foreign girls recruited and exploited by networks in eastern Europe and Nigeria, as well as a growing number of Belgian victims.³⁵

49. For many years, the Belgian authorities have been paying close attention to preventing and combating child sexual exploitation. Flanders led the way with an initial exploratory study on the subject commissioned in 2016,³⁶ after which it devised a specific action plan. A steering group on the exploitation of teenagers in prostitution was also set up, bringing together stakeholders in Flanders.³⁷ According to the authorities, a similar group has been set up in the French Community. A more recent study was commissioned from academics to examine the profile of pimps.³⁸ In Brussels, an exploratory study was conducted in 2020³⁹ and in Wallonia in 2023.⁴⁰

50. A website dedicated to the issue of exploitation of teenagers in prostitution is available in Dutch and French. Operated by Child Focus and funded by the Flemish government, it provides information and resources for children and their parents, as well as for professionals.⁴¹ Child Focus also offers online training on the sexual exploitation of adolescents for all professionals who come into contact with the phenomenon. In February 2026, Child Focus and the specialised centre, Payoke, signed a co-operation agreement to improve the identification, support and protection of child victims of sexual exploitation.⁴² In Flanders, the Justice and Enforcement Agency (*Agentschap Justitie en Handhaving*) has recently launched an online training course for staff at Flemish probation services and community institutions (*gemeenschapsinstellingen*) on “child pimps” (lover boys). This series of lessons provides an overview of the profile and methods of pimps, as well as warning signs. Furthermore, given that the sexual exploitation of children is facilitated by new technologies, numerous measures have been taken by the Communities to raise awareness among children and their parents about online safety issues (see paragraph 195).

51. GRETA welcomes the measures taken by the Belgian authorities to prevent and combat the sexual exploitation of minors, but notes that challenges remain. According to available studies, there is a gap between the extent of the phenomenon and the resources deployed to address it. The number of cases of sexual exploitation involving children and young people in youth care institutions is constantly rising.

³² See GRETA's second report on Belgium, paragraphs 65-72; GRETA's third report, paragraph 198.

³³ In Belgium, the sexual exploitation of children is referred to as the phenomenon of “pimps of teenagers”.

³⁴ Child Focus, *Annual report 2024*, p. 8, Child Focus, *Annual report 2025*, p. 9.

³⁵ Child Focus, *Les victimes de proxénètes d'adolescents à Bruxelles*, 2020; ECPAT, *Panorama de la situation des mineur·es victimes d'exploitation sexuelle en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, 2023.

³⁶ Child Focus, *Etudes sur les proxénètes d'adolescents en Flandre*, 2016.

³⁷ Judiciary, Federal Public Service for Justice, Flemish probation services (*maisons de justice*), police, *Agence Opgroeien, Agence Justitie en Handhaving* and Child Focus.

³⁸ De Malo Melgaço and Enhus, *Research into the profile and approach of teenage pimps*, 2023.

³⁹ Child Focus, *Les victimes de proxénètes d'adolescents à Bruxelles*, 2020.

⁴⁰ ECPAT, *Panorama de la situation des mineur·es victimes d'exploitation sexuelle en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, 2023.

⁴¹ <https://stopproxenetes-ados.be/>. See also GRETA's second report on Belgium, paragraph 67.

⁴² <https://childfocus.be/fr-be/A-propos/Actualite/Nouvelles/Post/15318/Hausse-du-nombre-de-signalements-d-exploitation-sexuelle-des-mineur-e-s-Child-Focus-et-Payoke-renforcent-leur-collaboration>.

The vulnerability of these children and young people, combined with their tendency to run away repeatedly, makes them prime targets for human traffickers; however, professionals in youth care feel powerless to deal with this, particularly as victims very rarely recognise themselves as such. Generally speaking, the youth care sector faces a shortage of qualified staff and resources, which undermines efforts to prevent and respond to cases of exploitation. NGOs also emphasise the need to improve co-ordination and information sharing between the relevant agencies, to develop training for professionals and awareness raising among minors, and to better protect runaway and migrant children, given their particular vulnerability.⁴³ In their comments on the draft report, the Belgian authorities stressed that significant training efforts had been made in the youth care sector within the French Community, through general training and also specialised modules on sexual exploitation and honour-related violence in 2023-2024. Efforts are currently continuing as part of a joint project between Belgium and France (the PEPS project) funded by the European Union, which aims to strengthen the detection and support capacities of professionals working with young people who may be victims of sexual exploitation.⁴⁴

52. THB convictions were handed down in two cases involving young men recruited abroad to play football in Belgium and who ended up being exploited. In the first case, a young Nigerian man was recruited in 2014 by a couple who ran a football club in Brussels. He was housed by his recruiters, who had confiscated his passport. He received only a small portion of his salary and was not declared to the authorities.⁴⁵ In another case, which took place between 2016 and 2019, a young man from Côte d'Ivoire had travelled to Belgium on a student visa to train with football clubs in Brussels and Charleroi. When his student status came to an end, a fake player agent arranged for him to sign a professional contract with a club in Sweden. Once there, the young man was never provided with accommodation as stipulated in the contract and received only a small portion of his salary, and eventually none at all.⁴⁶ Other football-related investigations have been opened but have not led to convictions for trafficking. No specific prevention measures concerning the risks of trafficking in sport have been taken by the Belgian authorities.

53. Belgium has a significant number of unaccompanied minors (5 665 reports in 2021, 7 412 in 2022, 4 984 in 2023 and 3 981 in 2024). The main nationalities concerned in 2024 were Eritrea, Morocco, Syria, Algeria and Afghanistan.⁴⁷ These data relate only to formal reports and do not include children in transit or children living in conditions of vagrancy (see paragraph 59) who do not wish to make themselves known to the authorities. Unaccompanied foreign minors are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation because of their isolation and the absence of adults to protect them, as well as the shortcomings of the system for protecting this group in Belgium.

54. The primary responsibility for looking after unaccompanied foreign minors lies with the federal authorities, in particular Fedasil and the Guardianship Service (Federal Public Service for Justice). When an unaccompanied minor is detected on Belgian territory, the frontline service must contact the Guardianship Service so that a guardian can be appointed. GRETA was informed that there were not enough guardians, however. Many children have to wait several months for arrangements to be put in place, thereby preventing them from starting any administrative procedures, including applying for international protection or accommodation. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities stressed that a guardian is appointed as a matter of priority if there is a risk of the young person being exploited.

⁴³ Child Focus, *Les victimes de proxénètes d'adolescents à Bruxelles*, 2020; ECPAT, *Panorama de la situation des mineur·es victimes d'exploitation sexuelle en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, 2023.

⁴⁴ PEPS Project – Joint project to eliminate the sexual exploitation of children through prevention, detection and support for victims.

⁴⁵ Brussels Court of Appeal, 27 June 2022 (first instance: Brussels Criminal Court, 4 November 2019).

⁴⁶ French-speaking Brussels Criminal Court, 30 June 2023.

⁴⁷ See the annual statistics provided by the Immigration Office: <https://dofi.ibz.be/fr/figures/vulnerable-persons/mineurs-etranangers-non-accompagnes-mena>.

55. As stated in paragraphs 38-39, Fedasil has been experiencing a reception crisis for several years, which also affects unaccompanied children. The children are initially looked after in one of the two observation centres run by Fedasil for a maximum period of 30 days (1st reception phase). The minors are then referred to a reception facility run by Fedasil or its partners, or to youth care facilities if they have not applied for international protection (2nd reception phase). The number of centres/places dedicated to unaccompanied children is limited, however, and there have been cases of unaccompanied children being placed in facilities with adults, potentially exposing them to abuse. In the youth care sector, the waiting time for a place can be several months, in particular for children over the age of 15.

56. Noting a decrease in the number of unaccompanied minors (see paragraph 53), the federal government decided to reduce Fedasil's reception capacity for minors from September 2025 (274 fewer places out of a total of 3 000).⁴⁸ During the visit, GRETA was informed that the government also wished to abolish the third phase of the reception process, during which young people whose application for international protection has been accepted can be given support to prepare them for living independently. During this phase, the children are looked after by local reception initiatives (ILAs) in individual flats and continue to receive social, legal, medical and psychological support. However, according to the authorities' comments on GRETA's draft report, it appears that the government has abandoned the proposal to abolish the third phase.

57. According to official data, more than 770 unaccompanied minors disappeared in Belgium in 2024. While 246 of these children were found, more than 500 remained missing. Around 100 disappearances were considered to be of particular concern because of the age of the minors, urgent medical needs or indications of serious danger. According to Child Focus, these figures underestimate the scale of the problem. NGOs point to failures in the reception system for unaccompanied minors and delays in assigning guardians, which prevent the identification of vulnerable young people and the implementation of protection measures.⁴⁹

58. The methods used to assess the age of unaccompanied minors have not changed since the previous evaluation. The assessment is based on a triple bone test rather than a holistic or multidisciplinary approach, as recommended by Council of Europe standards.⁵⁰ Once declared adults, young people no longer have access to protection mechanisms and often find themselves on the streets. In 2025, in *F.B. v. Belgium*, the European Court of Human Rights held that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, taking the view that the decision to terminate the applicant's entitlement to support following an age assessment which had found him to be an adult had not been surrounded by sufficient safeguards.⁵¹ The Council of State subsequently delivered another similar judgment concerning a different person.⁵²

59. For several years, Belgium has had to deal with a growing number of unaccompanied children and young people who are vagrant and living on the streets (hereafter "children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy"). They are mainly boys or young men from the Maghreb and Afghanistan. Some have already spent several years roaming the streets in other European countries (France, Spain, etc.). The young people in question find it difficult to regularise their status because they do not meet the conditions for international protection or regularisation on humanitarian grounds (see paragraph 87). This also applies to Afghan minors who, since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, are no longer eligible for subsidiary protection in Belgium.⁵³ However, according to the authorities, other protection procedures are available to these young people, and their guardians play a key role in discussing with them which

⁴⁸ <https://www.fedasil.be/fr/actualites/accueil-des-demandeurs-dasile/reduction-de-la-capacite-mena#:~:text=Si%20le%20r%C3%A9seau%20d'accueil,besoins%20sont%20diff%C3%A9rents%20aujourd'hui.>

⁴⁹ [Belgique : plus de 770 mineurs isolés étrangers portés disparus en 2024 - InfoMigrants](#)

⁵⁰ Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)22 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration, adopted on 14 December 2022.

⁵¹ Case of *F.B v. Belgium*, No. 47 836/21, judgment of 6 March 2025.

⁵² Council of State – Judgment No. 265 234 of 18 December 2025.

⁵³ [https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/49286/cest-la-pire-des-politiques--en-belgique-des-milliers-de-mineurs-afghans-ne-sont-plus-protégés.](https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/49286/cest-la-pire-des-politiques--en-belgique-des-milliers-de-mineurs-afghans-ne-sont-plus-protégés)

procedure is most appropriate, but establishing dialogue with them can take time. There are no precise data on the number of children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy, but it is estimated that there are over 300 of them in Brussels. The fact that they are living in conditions of vagrancy and extreme precariousness makes them prime targets for, in some cases very violent, criminal networks, which exploit them, notably in drug trafficking and other crimes.⁵⁴ These young people frequently suffer from psychological disorders and drug addiction, which traffickers take advantage of.

60. A case involving a large-scale Afghan migrant smuggling network that sexually exploited unaccompanied Afghan youths and minors was tried in Antwerp in 2024. The victims had been subjected to violence, intimidation and sexual abuse both along their migration route and once they arrived in Belgium. The violence and sexual abuse were filmed and shared privately and on social media in order to extort and control the victims. The crimes were uncovered by the federal police, including through research on social media and other digital investigation methods. Convictions were handed down for aggravated human smuggling, but not for trafficking. Four victims filed civil claims and were awarded compensation.

61. The Belgian authorities have great difficulty in dealing with foreign children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy, as most professionals are not equipped to deal with this group, who often refuse help and need time for trust to develop. There is also a tendency to view them as offenders rather than as victims in need of protection. After a few months in a closed youth protection institution, they are released without appropriate protection, support and integration, meaning that it is very easy for them to fall back into the hands of the criminals. Few of these children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy have been identified as victims of trafficking (see paragraph 128).

62. Samusocial has opened two shelters in Brussels, the first for minors in transit in Belgium and the second, since April 2025, for minors living in conditions of vagrancy. The shelters are supported by the authorities, notably Fedasil, several municipalities and other associations. The centre for young people living in conditions of vagrancy can accommodate up to 12 people for a period ranging from a few nights to six months. Eighteen workers trained to help young people are on hand to provide psychological and medico-social support. Addiction treatment is also offered.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the SHIELD project was launched in April 2026 for a period of 18 months, with funding from the European Commission. Implemented by the IOM in partnership with various organisations, including youth care services in the French Community and Child Focus, the project seeks to strengthen the protection of young people living on the streets against the risks of violence, disappearance, trafficking and exploitation by developing training for frontline professionals and improving awareness-raising and support for the young people concerned. GRETA welcomes the implementation of these initiatives.

63. The Belgian authorities provided detailed information about THB training for professionals who come into contact with minors.⁵⁶ At the federal level, guardians receive specific training and a handbook on how to deal with complex situations, including a section dedicated to trafficking. In the French Community, training and awareness raising have been provided to staff in the youth care services (SAJ), youth protection services (SPJ), higher education institutions and public youth protection institutions (IPPJ). In the Flemish Region/Community, tailor-made training is provided by staff working in specialised centres. In the German-speaking Community, education, youth and social work professionals receive training on protecting children and young people from neglect, violence and sexual abuse, but not specifically on trafficking. In the Brussels-Capital Region, one-off training on trafficking issues is available for various professionals.

⁵⁴ <https://www.rtb.be/article/trafic-de-drogues-le-cauchemar-de-300-enfants-a-bruxelles-11392744>.

⁵⁵ <https://samusocial.be/un-point-dancrage-pour-echapper-a-la-durete-de-la-rue-et-recreer-du-lien-le-samusocial-ouvre-un-centre-dedie-aux-mena-en-errance/>.

⁵⁶ See the Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, pages 27-30.

64. GRETA is concerned about the situation as regards unaccompanied children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy in Belgium, who are highly vulnerable to THB. It also regrets the lack of specific efforts to address the exploitation of minors and young people other than sexual exploitation, in particular exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities, exploitation through begging or economic exploitation. Several people emphasised the need to improve co-operation at local level on this issue. In their comments on the draft report, the Belgian authorities highlighted the working/steering groups that exist in the French Community and Flanders dealing with the issue of the exploitation of young people. The abovementioned European projects, SHIELD and PEPS, also provide a framework for strengthening co-ordination, including at local level.

65. **GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to increase their efforts to prevent the trafficking of children and young people, and in particular to:**

- **ensure that unaccompanied children are immediately given proper support by providing them with safe and suitable accommodation and living conditions allowing them to meet their own needs and by appointing a guardian without delay;**
- **ensure that age assessment is conducted in line with international standards, in particular Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)22 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration, in order to prevent children from being wrongly classified as adults and deprived of appropriate protection and support;**
- **develop specific protection measures for unaccompanied children and young people in transit or living in conditions of vagrancy, in co-operation with the voluntary sector, and ensure that these children and young people can be identified and supported as victims of human trafficking, where appropriate;**
- **reduce the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people supported by youth care services, in particular by improving training and the tools available to professionals, by increasing the capacity and resources of these services, and by raising awareness among the children and young people they support.**

66. **GRETA also considers that the Belgian authorities should continue their efforts to:**

- **provide frontline professionals (youth care and youth protection services; local police; social workers; education staff; municipal services, etc.) with training on trafficking in children and young people, whatever the forms of exploitation;**
- **strengthen efforts to prevent human trafficking in sport (in particular football) through targeted training and awareness-raising initiatives;**
- **strengthen mechanisms for co-ordination between the relevant services at regional and local level on trafficking in minors and young people for all forms of exploitation, and pay particular attention to exploitation for the commission of crimes or offences.**

iii. *Foreign workers*

67. According to Myria's 2023 annual report, there has been an increase in the number of cases of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation detected in Belgium, which can be explained by the rise in the number of people in vulnerable situations and at risk of exploitation. In many cases, employers have taken advantage of workers' vulnerability, in particular their lack of residence permits.⁵⁷ Some cases have also highlighted the involvement of criminal organisations that exploit migrants economically by forcing them to repay debts related to their journey (debt bondage system). They include cases involving Vietnamese victims exploited through criminal networks in nail salons or in the hospitality sector (hotels, cafés and restaurants) in Belgium before moving on to the United Kingdom.⁵⁸

68. In Belgium, economic affairs and employment are regional matters. The regions develop their own economic migration policy according to the needs of their labour market and the conditions of access to employment for foreign nationals. The procedure for obtaining a work permit (single permit) is the same, however, because of an agreement with the federal government. An application for a work permit must be made by the employer via a one-stop shop.⁵⁹ The competent region is responsible for examining the application and, in particular, for verifying that the employment contract complies with the conditions laid down by Belgian law. In practice, however, these checks do not provide meaningful protection against exploitation. For example, when applying, some employers provide employment contracts that differ from the ones entered into with the migrant workers.

69. In Wallonia, steps have been taken to improve the conditions of employment of migrant workers. Since a decree issued on 6 June 2024, employers are required to cover travel expenses to Belgium and to provide medical and pharmaceutical assistance until the employee has access to social security. In the Brussels-Capital Region, as of 1 October 2024, benefits granted to workers by their employer (such as the provision of accommodation) can no longer be included in the calculation of the basic salary, except in the case of highly skilled workers.

70. In Flanders, a reform concerning the employment of migrant workers came into force on 1 January 2026. It restricts the granting of work permits to skilled and semi-skilled workers on the list of shortage occupations. Low-skilled workers are excluded from legal pathways to economic migration, with the exception of seasonal work. In addition, the fees for applying for and renewing a residence permit have been increased to EUR 200. There are concerns that this reform will increase the risk of illegal recruitment of foreign workers and postings from EU countries, which are difficult to monitor.

71. Information on labour rights and the protection of migrant workers is available in several languages on various platforms managed by the federal and federated authorities. GRETA found that the information was fragmented and difficult to understand, however. The NGO Fair Work Belgium receives public funding to develop communication, information and awareness-raising initiatives on the risks of economic exploitation among the most vulnerable groups. In addition, the Office for Foreign Nationals conducted prevention campaigns in Vietnam in 2023 and 2024, in co-operation with NGOs, to prevent irregular migration and raise awareness of the risks involved, including THB.

72. According to the authorities, migrant workers can change employers. In practice, however, the conditions imposed by legislation (federal or regional) make this difficult. It is usually necessary to obtain a new work permit: the deadlines are tight and the procedure is entirely in the hands of the employer who submits the application, provides the necessary documents and acts as the sole point of contact for the authorities, placing workers in a position of dependency and potentially forcing them to accept abusive

⁵⁷ Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 13-14.

⁵⁸ This modus operandi was particularly evident in the "Essex tragedy", in which the bodies of 39 Vietnamese nationals were found in a refrigerated lorry. The migrants had been brought to the United Kingdom unlawfully, having been exploited in nail salons in Belgium.

⁵⁹ www.workinginbelgium.be

conditions of employment. Employees can now access the platform to track the progress of their application and view the documents provided by their employer.

73. As stated in previous GRETA reports, the National Social Security Office (ONSS) and the Monitoring of Social Legislation Department (CLS) are the only bodies with a specific mandate on human trafficking and the power to investigate such cases. The ONSS has a central thematic directorate on THB and 10 provincial teams dedicated to this issue (ECOSOC). The CLS has teams specialising in posted workers but not in THB.

74. In its previous report on Belgium, GRETA expressed concern about the reduction in the ONSS's human and budgetary resources and urged the Belgian authorities to allocate sufficient human and financial resources to labour inspectors.⁶⁰ At the end of 2022, the federal government allocated a specific budget to the ONSS to hire 10 additional inspectors to be assigned to the ECOSOC teams, bringing the number of staff specifically dedicated to trafficking to 52. GRETA welcomes the increase in the number of ECOSOC team members. As part of the action plan to combat labour fraud, the government has allocated a specific budget to step up the fight against labour fraud (including trafficking), hiring 377 people to be spread across various departments (police, justice, finance, inspectorates). According to information gathered during the visit, there are plans to allocate 34 staff to the ONSS, but this would simply replace staff who have retired.

75. Although the regional inspectorates do not have specific responsibility for matters relating to THB,⁶¹ they are tasked with enforcing employment regulations and, in principle, participate in the prevention of trafficking and the detection of possible victims. Their involvement is limited in practice, however. Only the Brussels-Capital Inspectorate has implemented specific prevention measures in relation to the employment of au pairs (see paragraph 80). The regional inspectorates focus mainly on monitoring foreign labour and pay little attention to detecting indicators of trafficking. Their staff do not have specific tools or training on THB.

76. In its 2023 annual report on trafficking, Myria pointed out that people working in the domestic sector are more vulnerable than workers in other sectors because of their isolation, their dependence on the employer for their housing, and difficulties in carrying out inspections in private homes. Home visits⁶² are possible in cases of suspected illegal employment of foreign nationals, either with the consent of the occupants or with the authorisation of the investigating judge. However, if there is suspicion of trafficking, a search warrant must be obtained. According to the authorities, the CLS has conducted 13 investigations related to domestic work since 2022 and 35 were ongoing at the time of GRETA's visit. In order to facilitate the detection of domestic workers who are being exploited, informal awareness-raising for local police officers in Brussels was carried out at the quarterly meeting of those working on the ground to combat trafficking.

77. For many years, special attention has been paid to the situation of domestic staff working for diplomats accredited in Belgium. As stated in previous GRETA reports, specific procedures and obligations have been established by the Protocol Department of the Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs for the granting of "private domestic worker" visas.⁶³ According to the Belgian authorities, no complaints from domestic staff against diplomats were recorded in 2021-2024. There have been a few suspected cases of economic exploitation, which the Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs referred to the Commission of

⁶⁰ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 177.

⁶¹ *Vlaamse Sociale Inspectie in Flanders*; Inspection du Service Public Economie Emploi Recherche in Wallonia; Inspection Régionale de l'Emploi in Brussels-Capital.

⁶² With home visits, it is possible to gain access to a person's home but not to carry out searches, which come under a different procedure.

⁶³ "Private domestic worker" visas are available only to heads of mission (ambassadors and consuls). An employment contract must be signed between the employee and the head of mission, in accordance with Belgian legislation and the minimum wage requirements for domestic work, and the employee must be affiliated to a social security scheme. The employee is invited to an interview with the Protocol Department (Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs) when they take up their duties and every time they apply for a visa renewal. See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraphs 173-174.

Good Offices, responsible for settling disputes between domestic staff and diplomats. While the requirements for “private domestic worker” visas are useful, they have limited impact in practice because some diplomats circumvent the procedure by bringing in their domestic staff on tourist visas or diplomatic staff visas. Protocol Department staff have not received specific training on THB.

78. In June 2023, a Kuwaiti diplomat and his wife were convicted of THB for the purpose of economic exploitation. The victim, originally from Ethiopia, had been brought to Belgium on a tourist visa and was working as a domestic worker in exploitative conditions. The court found that the offence of trafficking had been committed and that the couple could no longer claim diplomatic immunity as they had returned to Kuwait. They were also ordered to pay compensation to the victim (EUR 33 330 for pecuniary damage and EUR 5 000 for non-pecuniary damage).⁶⁴

79. No information was provided to GRETA concerning measures taken to prevent cases of trafficking involving staff of the European institutions, although one case has been identified in recent years (see paragraph 161).

80. To prevent abuse and exploitation of au pairs, the Brussels-Capital Region has put in place a specific procedure for processing work permit applications. Before the young person arrives, staff from the Regional Inspectorate visit the family’s home to remind them of the rules on working hours, wages and other obligations. Subsequently, a questionnaire is sent to the family and the au pair is invited to an interview with the inspectorate to verify their employment conditions and check for signs of abuse. GRETA welcomes the measures taken by the Brussels-Capital Region to reduce the risk of au pairs being exploited.

81. Myria notes that economic exploitation is becoming more professionalised, with exploiters developing highly complex schemes to avoid responsibility, such as cascade subcontracting, posted worker schemes, “letterbox” companies, bogus self-employment, etc.⁶⁵ The Boréal case provides an illustration of this. In July 2022 labour inspectors found 174 migrants working in exploitative conditions on the site of a Boréal factory in Kallo (Flanders). The victims, who were from the Philippines, Bangladesh and Türkiye, were employed in precarious conditions. They had to work six days a week and were paid EUR 650 per month. Some were in the country irregularly, others had residence permits, but most had been legally posted from Portugal and Italy by Boréal subcontractors.⁶⁶

82. Following the Boréal case, the authorities took steps to limit certain subcontracting chains. Since the enactment of legislation on 15 May 2024 amending labour criminal law and various employment law provisions, subcontractors have been prohibited from subcontracting the entirety of the tasks entrusted to them and cannot limit their involvement to co-ordination alone. The prohibition applies to the construction, meat and removal sectors. In addition, in the removal sector, the subcontracting chain may not exceed three levels. Joint and several liability for the payment of the subcontractor’s wage and social security debts has also been introduced (previously this applied only to the construction sector). However, there is still no due diligence obligation in supply chains. A bill introducing a duty of care was tabled in 2021 but never adopted. GRETA notes, however, that in Flanders, since the reform that came into force on 1 January 2026 (see paragraph 70), a minimum duty of care in supply chains has been introduced. Companies are required to request certain documents and data from their direct subcontractors and failure to do so may result in criminal liability. These obligations currently apply only to certain high-risk sectors.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 118; Dutch-speaking Brussels Criminal Court, 22 June 2022, ch. 25N (upheld on appeal).

⁶⁵ See Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 13.

⁶⁶ Amy Weatherburn and Elise Blanpain, *La lutte contre l’exploitation économique en Belgique : leçons de l’affaire Boréal et des pistes de réforme pour une meilleure protection des travailleurs migrants*, Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale, 2025.

⁶⁷ Construction work, including the cleaning sector; delivery of ready-mixed concrete; companies engaged in certain activities in the meat sector.

83. GRETA notes that the Special Parliamentary Commission recommended creating a separate offence of aggravated economic exploitation and putting in place a protection procedure for the victims. According to the Committee, there is a "grey area" in which cases of exploitation go beyond labour fraud but cannot be classified as trafficking. In the absence of an intermediate offence, the criminal penalties incurred are low and fail to deter employers from exploiting workers. In their comments on GRETA's draft report, the Belgian authorities indicated that a bill proposed by members of parliament containing a similar provision had already been introduced during the previous parliamentary term but had not been passed.⁶⁸ The Federal Public Service for Justice had taken the view that defining such an intermediate offence would be difficult, given that the offence of trafficking under Belgian law was already broad, and there was a risk of cases of trafficking being incorrectly classified under this offence because it was easier to prove.⁶⁹

84. **Referring to its Guidance Note on combating trafficking for labour exploitation⁷⁰ and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation to member States CM/Rec(2022)21 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation,⁷¹ GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of migrant workers and in particular:**

- **reduce migrant workers' dependency on their employers and make it easier to change employers. This should include the possibility for migrant workers to retain their residence permit in the event of job loss and to apply for a new permit when changing employers through a simplified administrative procedure;⁷²**
- **continue their efforts to reduce the risks of trafficking in subcontracting chains and other complex legal constructs and introduce due diligence obligations in supply chains;**
- **provide the federal and regional inspectorates with the human, technical and financial resources they need to perform all their tasks properly;**
- **strengthen the training of regional inspectorate staff on trafficking and their role in preventing trafficking and detecting victims;**
- **strengthen information and awareness raising among migrant workers on the risks of trafficking and the rights of victims of trafficking, as well as on workers' rights. For example, a central information platform on employment conditions in Belgium and the rights of migrant workers, available in several languages, could be set up.**

iv. Foreign nationals in an irregular situation

85. The number of foreign nationals residing irregularly in Belgium is difficult to establish, but a university study estimated it at 112 000 in 2023.⁷³ The group includes various categories such as rejected asylum seekers, persons who entered the country without a visa or have stayed on with an expired visa, migrant workers whose residence permits have not been renewed, and persons transiting Belgium irregularly with a view to reaching another country.

⁶⁸ Bill 3661 amending the Social Criminal Code and the Law of 15 December 1980 on the Entry, Residence, Settlement and Removal of Foreign Nationals to protect foreign nationals who are exploited for the purposes of illegal labour or services.

⁶⁹ The Council of State also issued a negative opinion on the draft bill. <https://www.dekamer.be/FLWB/PDF/55/3661/55K3661003.pdf>.

⁷⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-preventing-and-combating-trafficking-in-human-beings-/1680a1060c>.

⁷¹ <https://rm.coe.int/booklet-preventing-and-combating-trafficking-in-human-beings-for-the-p/1680aa08ef>.

⁷² See the Explanatory Memorandum of Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)21, paragraph 16.

⁷³ <https://emnbelgium.be/fr/nouvelles/il-y-112000-personnes-sans-titre-de-sejour-en-belgique-selon-une-nouvelle-etude-de-la>.

86. People in an irregular situation have no rights in Belgium, except for access to emergency medical care and education for children. Many find themselves on the streets and emergency accommodation options are very limited. Administrative, economic and social precariousness increases people's vulnerability to trafficking for various forms of exploitation, in particular economic exploitation, by forcing them to accept underpaid jobs and work in poor conditions. In addition, fear of arrest or deportation deters them from reporting abuse to the authorities. Myria's annual reports frequently mention cases of trafficking in which the victims are people in an irregular situation.

87. The avenues to regularisation are very limited. People who have been exploited in Belgium can obtain a residence permit under the procedure for victims of THB. For others, regularisation through work is not an option. A residence permit to work in Belgium must be applied for from the country of origin. In theory, it is possible to apply for regularisation in Belgium on the grounds of "exceptional circumstances"⁷⁴ by showing that it is impossible, or very difficult, to return to the country of origin or another country. According to data from the Immigration Office, out of 4 861 applications, only 2 501 positive regularisation decisions were issued in 2024. Large numbers of people reside in Belgium irregularly while working in economic sectors with high labour demand.

88. The Belgian authorities wish to introduce more robust controls and penalties for employers in cases of illegal employment and to step up deportations of foreign nationals. GRETA is concerned that such a policy, if not coupled with effective regularisation mechanisms, risks exacerbating the vulnerabilities of people in an irregular situation.

89. GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take steps to reduce vulnerabilities to THB among migrants in an irregular situation, in particular by improving effective access to regularisation procedures.

v. Persons engaging in prostitution/sex work⁷⁵

90. Every year, Myria's reports on trafficking describe numerous cases of trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in prostitution. The 2024 report focused on "Latin American sex work" in Belgium and the increase in cases of trafficking within this sector. According to the report, the victims are mainly women, cisgender or transgender, from Brazil and Colombia. They are generally recruited in their country of origin via the internet and by highly structured organisations that arrange their travel (notably via Spain and Portugal) and their exploitation in prostitution in Belgium.⁷⁶ Victims are forced to hand over a significant portion of their income to the traffickers, who use coercion and control techniques, as well as more subtle practices such as debt bondage.

91. The number of people engaging in prostitution/sex work in Belgium is difficult to estimate but it is believed that the majority are foreign nationals. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, prostitution/sex work facilitated by technology or in private (massage parlours, bars, hotels, temporary apartment rentals, etc.) has become the most common form. Despite the creation of an employment status for sex workers in Belgium (see paragraph 93), GRETA was informed that few people are covered by the new arrangements.

92. Since the 2022 reform of Belgium's criminal law governing sexual offences, adult prostitution has been decriminalised and it is possible to engage in sex work legally on a self-employed basis. Organising and facilitating the prostitution of others remains prohibited, except in cases provided for by law and on condition that no undue advantage (economic or otherwise) is gained. A penalty for aggravated abuse of prostitution has been introduced for cases where the offence of pimping is committed against a vulnerable

⁷⁴ Law of 15 December 1980 on the Entry, Residence, Settlement and Removal of Foreign Nationals, Articles 9bis (regularisation on humanitarian grounds) and 9ter (regularisation on medical grounds).

⁷⁵ The term "sex work" refers to situations covered by Belgian legislation on sex work.

⁷⁶ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*.

adult.⁷⁷ Advertising sexual services remains prohibited, but the reform of the criminal law governing sexual offences allows for exceptions, particularly on internet platforms (see paragraph 187).

93. Furthermore, the law of 3 May 2024 introducing provisions relating to sex work under an employment contract allows sex workers to enter into an employment contract and enjoy social rights such as paid leave, social security, unemployment benefit, severance pay, etc. The law lays down several conditions, in particular the requirement for the employer to be a legal entity accredited by ministerial decree. The employment contract must be concluded in writing, the sex worker remains free to consent or refuse to consent to a sexual act at any time, and it is not possible to perform sex work in the form of home-based work.⁷⁸ As at 16 April 2026, nine companies had received this accreditation. There are no data on the number of sex work contracts concluded since the law came into force. In its 2024 annual report, Myria questioned the consequences of the legislation for people who are not covered by the new status (irregular migrants and individuals who are being exploited) and who risk being driven further underground. Myria also raised the question of the resources that would be allocated to monitoring compliance with the new provisions. GRETA notes that the legislation is currently being challenged in the Constitutional Court by a group of associations.⁷⁹

94. Labour inspections must be carried out in all licensed sex work establishments within six months of them obtaining their licence. Should a potential case of human trafficking be detected within these establishments, the inspectors must apply the multidisciplinary circular on human trafficking. Furthermore, where instances of illegal prostitution (i.e. outside a licensed establishment) are detected by social inspectors, the latter must inform the public prosecutor's office.

95. A multidisciplinary review of the provisions of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Reform Law on abuse of prostitution and pimping was to be carried out by Parliament two years after its entry into force, i.e. in June 2024, and thereafter every four years. No review has yet been conducted, however. Nevertheless, a study on the law was carried out by universities,⁸⁰ and the circular from the Board of Public Prosecutors concerning the application of the law (COL 05/2022) was also reviewed and updated. Another review concerning the law on sex work contracts is to be conducted in 2026, this time by the government. In their comments on the draft report, the Belgian authorities stated that the proceedings currently before the Constitutional Court (see above) are complicating the review process.

96. According to several associations supporting sex workers, the decriminalisation of prostitution and the introduction of employment status for sex workers have been a major step forward in granting them legal and social protection and in combating exploitation in sex work. The majority of sex workers are not covered by this new status, however, owing to the fact that they are in Belgium irregularly and because of the limited number of accredited employers. From the information currently available, moreover, it is not yet possible to assess the impact on efforts to prevent and combat THB.

97. Associations also indicate that the risks of exploitation persist for several reasons. First, victims are unaware that they are being exploited because their situation is better than it was in their country of origin and traffickers take advantage of this. The protective status of THB victim apparently has little appeal because of the eligibility requirements (see paragraphs 118-121). Other difficulties relate to the manner in which police checks and labour inspections are carried out (see paragraph 154). In general, associations supporting sex workers would like the authorities to co-operate more with them on the issue of THB. GRETA stresses the importance of co-operation with organisations supporting people involved in

⁷⁷ See Articles 76 and 79 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Reform Law, which introduced Articles 433 quater/1 and 433 quater/4 of the Criminal Code. See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 15.

⁷⁸ Home-based sex work refers to work carried out in the home of the worker or client.

⁷⁹ Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 64-65.

⁸⁰ Stef Andriaenssens et al., *La prostitution et le travail du sexe en Belgique après la décriminalisation. Opportunité et défis*, KU Leuven, May 2024. <https://iqvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/documentation/la-prostitution-et-le-travail-du-sexe-en-belgique-apres-la-decriminalisation>.

prostitution or sex work in order to better prevent and combat trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

98. There is little information available on programmes to integrate people who wish to leave prostitution and/or exploitative conditions in prostitution, in particular for the many people who do not have sex worker status or are not recognised as victims of trafficking. The 2020-2024 Intra-Francophone Plan to Combat Violence Against Women includes support for associations that develop voluntary exit pathways and reintegration programmes for people engaging in prostitution. GRETA emphasises that preventing trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in prostitution requires the development of programmes to exit prostitution, even in countries that have legalised sex work, as many people do not have sex worker status and/or continue to suffer exploitation or to be at risk of exploitation without being recognised as victims of THB.⁸¹

99. **GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps to reduce the risks of trafficking for persons engaging in prostitution/sex work, and in particular:**

- **conduct a review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Reform Law and the law on employment contracts governing sex work and of their impact on preventing and combating THB;**
- **inform persons engaging in prostitution/sex work of their rights, the statutory conditions for engaging in sex work and the risks of trafficking;**
- **develop measures to facilitate the integration of persons wishing to leave prostitution and/or exploitative conditions in prostitution, and provide information about the existence of these programmes.**

vi. Gender-related vulnerabilities

100. The 2021-2025 National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan recognises that there is a gender-equality dimension to trafficking that requires a gender-sensitive approach. It emphasises the need to address the root causes of trafficking in women and girls and to respond to their gender-specific needs. The plan accordingly provides for the gender dimension of trafficking to be incorporated into the training of professionals. The plan also includes training for gynaecology services, as they may have to deal with forced abortions in cases involving sexual exploitation.

101. In recent years, the authorities have been paying increasing attention to honour-related violence, in particular child, early or forced marriages. There has been an increase in the number of victims of this type receiving assistance from centres for minors (see paragraph 137). The phenomenon reportedly affects mainly girls and young women from Turkish, Moroccan, Serbian, Chechen, Roma or Afghan ethnic minorities, although there has been no recent study on the subject.⁸² GRETA emphasises that child marriages and forced marriages can be used as vehicles to facilitate trafficking, in particular for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but also for economic exploitation or domestic work.⁸³

102. Forced marriage is criminalised in Article 391sexies et seq. of the Criminal Code. A joint circular from the Minister of Justice and the College of Public Prosecutors sets out criminal policy on gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

⁸¹ See also the comment made by the Commissioner for Human Rights in April 2024 on protecting the human rights of sex workers which emphasises the need to adapt measures supporting access to employment to the sex worker's specific needs and situation, and to provide them with specific financial support and access to training. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/protecting-the-human-rights-of-sex-workers>.

⁸² The last Myria report on victims of child, early and forced marriage dates from 2015.

⁸³ ICAT, *Addressing trafficking in persons through the lens of child marriage and forced marriage*, Issue Brief, 2025.

103. In the Brussels-Capital Region, training on forced marriage is provided for municipal registrars, social workers and the local police. In the French Community, a guide to good practice on forced marriage and honour-related violence against minors was adopted in 2024 for youth care staff and associations. A website and a helpline have been set up with public funding. In the German-speaking Community, a working group on forced marriage, bringing together various authorities and associations, has been tasked with examining the phenomenon and making proposals for action.⁸⁴ As regards Flanders, at the end of 2025, the Flemish Government approved the Flemish Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence. The plan focuses on combating honour-related violence, in particular by developing expertise within the "Safe Houses" (*Veilige Huizen*), training their staff and establishing a multi-agency network co-ordinated by the GAMS (*Groep voor de afschaffing van Vrouwelijke Genitale Verminkingen*).

104. GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to continue their efforts to address gender-related vulnerability in measures to combat THB.

vii. LGBTI persons

105. GRETA emphasises that, in general, LGBTI people are at an increased risk of becoming victims of trafficking, particularly because they are often marginalised in society and excluded from their families, making them ideal targets for traffickers looking for people with less protection. They also face difficulties in accessing the labour market, as employment opportunities are scarce for those who identify outside the traditional gender binary, leading them to work more in the informal economy (including prostitution) or even to accept abusive job offers. In addition, LGBTI people are often over-represented among children in street situations and can be victims of discrimination by the authorities and services, making them less likely to file a complaint or ask for help.⁸⁵

106. There are no data on the number of LGBTI persons among victims of trafficking in Belgium. Only Myria's 2023 report mentions among the victims supported by specialised centres one victim of sexual exploitation of gender "X" (non-binary person).⁸⁶ According to Myria's 2024 report, Latin American victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation include transgender persons,⁸⁷ mainly from Brazil and Colombia. The report notes that they constitute a particularly vulnerable group.⁸⁸ According to Myria, there is still very little understanding among the various actors of the issue of trafficking in Latin American transgender persons. Raising awareness among the police, the judiciary and specialised centres about Latin American transgender victims would be helpful in drawing more attention to the issue and building victims' trust in the authorities.⁸⁹ GRETA welcomes the efforts made by Myria and specialised centres to develop data and knowledge on LGBTI victims of trafficking.

107. A federal action plan entitled "Towards an LGBTQI+ friendly Belgium" was published in June 2024. It includes 133 measures in various areas to strengthen the rights of LGBTI persons, including training for professionals (in the asylum services, the justice system, foreign affairs, the federal police, the Federal Public Service for Employment, etc.), research and data collection. It also emphasises the protection of LGBTI persons seeking international protection.⁹⁰ In the Belgian Communities, awareness-raising activities are carried out in schools on the rights of LGBTI persons.

⁸⁴ See the Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, pages 11-18.

⁸⁵ See ILGA, *Intersections: The LGBTI II Survey – Homelessness Analysis*, 2023; <https://lac.iom.int/en/blogs/lgbtqi-victims-human-trafficking>; <https://2017-2021.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/272968.pdf>.

⁸⁶ As stated by Myria in its 2024 report (footnote 24), since 2023, it has been possible to choose between legal gender and perceived gender in the MyEldo system. That was not possible in previous years, however, and there is no clear directive regarding the entry of trans people in the MyEldo system.

⁸⁷ A trans person is defined as any person who identifies differently from the gender they were assigned at birth, regardless of any process of physical transition that person may undergo.

⁸⁸ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 15-16.

⁸⁹ Ibid. page 36.

⁹⁰ <https://equal.belgium.be/sites/default/files/actieplannen/Plan%20d'action%20FR%20avec%20toutes%20les%20mesures.pdf>.

108. GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to take further steps to reduce the vulnerability of LGBTI persons to THB, in particular through training and awareness raising for law enforcement agencies, in close co-operation with civil society organisations.

viii. Persons from disadvantaged ethnic communities

109. No data have been collected on the ethnic origin of victims of THB. In 2016, Myria devoted its annual report to trafficking for the purpose of exploitation through begging and also to the Roma, who were considered vulnerable to this form of exploitation. There has been no new study on the subject, but it is recognised that, because of their marginalisation and precarious situation, Roma people remain vulnerable to trafficking for various forms of exploitation. Several cases tried in recent years involved Roma victims. They include a case of economic exploitation in the demolition and waste management sector that came to trial in 2024,⁹¹ and another case tried in 2022 concerning trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation on a livestock farm.⁹² In addition, several Roma children have been supported by the Esperanto centre following incidents involving exploitation through begging and domestic work.⁹³ There have also been cases of trafficking for the purpose of child or forced marriage (see paragraph 101).⁹⁴

110. According to estimates, there are approximately 30 000 Roma in Belgium,⁹⁵ including 12 000 in Brussels.⁹⁶ In 2020, Belgium adopted its second National Roma Integration Strategy 2020-2030. Developed by the federal authorities in co-operation with the federated entities and associations, it focuses on health, education, employment and housing. The strategy does not include any measures specifically related to trafficking.

111. During the visit, the German-speaking Community reported on measures taken to improve Roma inclusion, in particular in terms of access to schools. There have been instances of young Roma girls leaving school as a result of early pregnancy or a child marriage. In such cases, the Kaleido association works with families to encourage the girls to return to school, but this is not always easy as the association does not have an intercultural mediator. In the Brussels Region, the association Le Foyer has a Roma Service which is the reference point for Roma-related issues. It provides intercultural mediation services and supports Roma people in matters relating to employment, training, housing and education. Schools and other bodies can turn to it for advice, information or mediation. The French Community funds the Mediation Centre for Travellers and Roma with the aim of combating anti-Roma and anti-Traveller racism and promoting social cohesion. This project includes initiatives to develop educational resources, train professionals and raise public awareness. A policy providing free school supplies is also being rolled out to remove financial barriers to schooling. The Flemish authorities have indicated that there are no specific measures for Roma at the regional/Community level, but that schemes exist in Ghent and Antwerp.

112. GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to take further steps to prevent the trafficking of Roma, in particular by developing research on and knowledge of the phenomenon, by raising awareness among Roma of the risks of trafficking and child, early or forced marriages, and by continuing efforts to improve their access to education, housing and decent work.

⁹¹ Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 72-78.

⁹² Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 88-91.

⁹³ Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 169.

⁹⁴ Myria, *2015 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 15-30; Antwerp Court of Appeal, 23 December 2021.

⁹⁵ Source: National Roma Integration Strategy 2020-2030.

The Roma in Belgium mainly originate from Romania, Bulgaria, Syria (Doms), Slovakia, Moldova, Ukraine and the former Yugoslavia.

⁹⁶ Source: <https://www.foyer.be/roma-travellers/?lang=en>.

2. Measures to protect and promote the rights of victims of trafficking

113. Chapter III of the Convention provides for a series of measures to protect and promote the rights of victims. In the first place, it is of paramount importance to identify victims of trafficking correctly as identification enables them to benefit from the other measures and rights contained in the Convention. Pursuant to Article 10 of the Convention, States Parties shall ensure that the authorities competent to identify victims of trafficking have persons trained and qualified to perform the identification, and that these authorities collaborate with relevant support organisations in the identification process. Further, Article 12 of the Convention sets out the assistance measures which States Parties must provide to trafficking victims. Paragraph 7 of this article requires Parties to ensure that services are provided taking due account of the special needs of persons in a vulnerable position as well as the rights of children. Given the relevance of victim identification and assistance to the thematic focus of the fourth evaluation round of the Convention, this part of the report examines the application of these two provisions. Other provisions of Chapter III of the Convention, which have been examined in detail by GRETA during the previous evaluation rounds, are discussed in the chapter of the report entitled "Follow-up issues".

a. Identification of victims of THB and recovery and reflection period

114. In its third report on Belgium, GRETA considered that the authorities should improve the identification of victims, in particular by enhancing the training provided to frontline services and ensuring that foreign victims benefit from a recovery and reflection period and are identified regardless of their willingness to co-operate and the outcome of the criminal proceedings.⁹⁷

115. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) continues to be governed by the circular of 23 December 2016 relating to the implementation of multi-agency co-operation concerning victims of trafficking in human beings and/or certain aggravated forms of human smuggling (known as the "multi-agency circular"). When frontline services detect a suspected victim, they must inform the public prosecutor's office, contact one of the three specialised centres and, if the victim is a foreign national, inform the Immigration Office and, if the victim is an unaccompanied child, the Guardianship Service. Detection is followed by formal identification by the prosecutor's office or the *auditorat du travail*. In practice, the decision by the public prosecutor's office or *auditorat* to grant victim status is taken in consultation with the specialised centres and the relevant investigation department.

116. The 2021-2025 anti-trafficking plan provided for the revision of the multi-agency circular in order to enshrine the role of the Communities in the implementation of the various stages of the NRM for child victims. Work has been undertaken by the Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit, but the text has still not been adopted. At the time of GRETA's visit, the text had been finalised but was awaiting adoption. In their comments on the draft report, the Belgian authorities said that the revised circular had been finalised but that its signing had been postponed until September 2026, in order to align it with the entry into force of the new Criminal Code and to make any adjustments necessary to implement the revised European Directive on trafficking. **GRETA would like to be kept informed of the publication of the revised multi-agency circular.**

117. The Special Parliamentary Commission recommended setting up a National Co-ordination Centre for Combating Human Trafficking and Smuggling, whose tasks would include co-ordinating the implementation of the NRM, by receiving all reports and referring presumed victims to specialised centres. Such an arrangement is also provided for in the federal coalition agreement. The Inter-departmental Unit, Myria and the specialised centres have, however, expressed reservations about the recommendation, arguing that it would add an extra step and could delay the provision of care and support to victims. Parliament is to request an opinion from the Court of Auditors.

⁹⁷ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 187.

118. In the absence of a review of the NRM, the conditions for accessing the protection procedure remain unchanged.⁹⁸ The victim, whether a child or an adult, must: (1) break off contact with the traffickers, (2) agree to be supported by a specialised reception centre, and (3) co-operate with the judicial authorities by making statements or filing a complaint against the traffickers. This last condition does not apply during the recovery and reflection period (45 days for adults, 3 months for children). The other two conditions are mandatory, however, in order to benefit from this period. It is still impossible for Belgian victims exploited abroad, as well as foreign victims exploited abroad but residing in Belgium, to enter the NRM.

119. GRETA points out that, unlike European Union law,⁹⁹ the Convention contains no grounds for withdrawing entitlement to the recovery and reflection period from victims who have actively, voluntarily and on their own initiative renewed contact with the traffickers. As highlighted in GRETA's Guidance Note on Article 13 of the Convention published in September 2024, there are various reasons why victims may renew contact with traffickers, including because they know each other or because the victim is dependent on the perpetrator (e.g., the "loverboy" phenomenon or intra-family trafficking). If, in such cases, the authorities decided not to grant the recovery and reflection period or to terminate it, this would undermine the very essence of Article 13, as the objective of protecting the victim would become null and void. GRETA considers that states should be cautious about ending the recovery and reflection period if victims renew contact with the traffickers and should proceed on a case-by-case basis.¹⁰⁰ As regards the requirement to agree to be supported by specialised centres, GRETA notes that this is not one of the conditions set out in Article 13 of the Convention.

120. With regard to the requirement to co-operate in the judicial proceedings at the end of the recovery and reflection period, the Belgian authorities reiterated that victims are not required to file a complaint, a simple statement being sufficient. Under the terms of the multi-agency circular, the public prosecutor or *auditorat* must be mindful of the particular vulnerability of child victims, an obligation that is used by some public prosecutor's offices or *auditorats* to avoid requiring child victims to make statements or file complaints. This is not a uniform practice throughout the country, however.

121. GRETA was informed that, in practice, the conditions requiring victims to break off contact with the traffickers and to co-operate in the judicial process are the ones that most often discourage victims from entering the NRM procedure. This is particularly true of minors, when the traffickers are parents or relatives, victims recruited using the "loverboy" technique, and victims of sexual exploitation who are heavily financially dependent on the traffickers. Victims who are exploited by criminal organisations are likewise afraid to make statements because of the risk of reprisals against themselves and/or their families.

122. Associations supporting sex workers have emphasised that the condition concerning the cessation of contact with the traffickers would be construed broadly in the case of victims of sexual exploitation, requiring them to stop engaging in prostitution/sex work, thereby depriving them of their main source of income and deterring them from entering the NRM. On this point, there is a difference of opinion with the specialised centres, which have pointed out that, as prostitution has been decriminalised, victims of THB can in theory continue to engage in sex work under the conditions provided for by law. The Belgian authorities agree with the specialised centres but nevertheless stress that, in practice, one must ask whether it is appropriate for a victim to return to work directly in the environment that originally led to their exploitation.

⁹⁸ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 181.

⁹⁹ Council Directive 2004/81/EC of 29 April 2004 on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings or who have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, who co-operate with the competent authorities.

¹⁰⁰ See GRETA, Guidance Note on the recovery and reflection period, THB-GRETA(2024)14, paragraph 58. <https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-recovery-and-reflection-period-group-of-experts-on-ac/1680b1a3ca>.

123. Since March 2023, the “My Eldo” app used by specialised centres has provided data on victims’ journey through the NRM. It was developed with funding from the Federal Public Service for Justice. According to data for 2024, nearly a third (29%) of reports filed with specialised centres are made by the victims themselves. The next largest number of reports comes from private individuals (13%), the juvenile sector (13%), the police (12%), the social welfare sector (12%), asylum and immigration services (4%) and inspectorates (3%). If we consider only victims receiving support for the first time, however, the statistics are rather different: support is mainly initiated following a report by the police (27%), the victim themselves (14%), the social sector (9%), inspectorates (9%), private individuals (7%) and the juvenile sector (7%). GRETA welcomes the efforts made to improve data on victims of trafficking in Belgium and their journey through the NRM. However, there are still no clear data on presumed victims or formally identified victims. Nor are there any data on the number of victims who are denied access to the NRM because they do not meet the conditions.¹⁰¹

124. In order to improve information on THB and the detection of victims, a central online contact point has been set up by the Federal Public Service for Justice in co-operation with the specialised centres.¹⁰² Available in 14 languages, this website provides information on trafficking, allows users to report cases and puts them in touch with specialised centres. In addition, a new single telephone number for trafficking (078 055 800) was launched in 2023 and is linked to the central online contact point. The centres’ own helplines are still available. GRETA commends the efforts made by the authorities, in co-operation with specialised centres, to develop information on human trafficking and self-identification of victims.

125. According to Myria’s last annual report, very few new cases of victim support are initiated in response to reports filed by the asylum and migration services (1%), even though this sector is on the front line when it comes to detecting possible victims.¹⁰³ This figure might be explained by the lack of systematic data collection on the number of victims detected by the Immigration Office. The authorities stress that staff are alert to the indicators and regularly refer potential victims. As stated in paragraph 36, staff at the Immigration Office, Fedasil and its partners need more training on detecting vulnerable persons, including victims of THB. The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA) has taken steps to improve the detection of victims of THB. Guidelines on trafficking and the detection of signs of trafficking when processing asylum applications were developed in 2024. According to data provided during the visit, CGRA staff detected 62 persons with indications of trafficking in 2022, 83 in 2023, 47 in 2024 and 23 in 2025. Once detected, the CGRA is careful to take account of the procedural needs of possible victims, and a brochure on trafficking is provided with the contact details of specialised centres. Because the majority of these victims were exploited before they arrived in Belgium, however, they are not eligible for the NRM or help from specialised centres.

126. When it comes to detecting victims of THB in closed centres for irregular migrants, the Belgian authorities stated that staff look for signs of trafficking when individuals arrive and during their detention, as well as during the psychosocial support they receive to prepare them for being sent back to other countries. Specialised centres do not have regular access to closed facilities, but are contacted by staff in cases of suspected trafficking. They may also request access if a suspected case has been publicised in the media.

127. According to several people met during the visit, when foreign nationals are detected during a police operation, the focus is on treating them as irregular migrants rather than identifying them as possible victims of THB. The manner in which checks are carried out can be harsh and does not encourage victims to report exploitation. For example, a few days before GRETA’s visit, a major operation was carried out by the police, in co-operation with the Immigration Office and the Regional Inspectorate of Flanders, in a building registered as student accommodation and used by a prostitution ring.¹⁰⁴ Several Colombian

¹⁰¹ Myria’s data show a significant disparity between reports filed with centres and new support cases initiated, but this could be explained by several reasons, such as the fact that there were insufficient indicators of trafficking.

¹⁰² www.stophumantrafficking.be/fr

¹⁰³ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 38-39.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.brusselstimes.com/1819481/flemish-police-uncovers-suspected-prostitution-ring-in-student-housing>

and Brazilian women in an irregular situation were arrested on the spot and transferred to a closed centre, even though there were suspicions of trafficking according to the sex worker support groups helping them. In its 2025 report, Myria recommended raising awareness among the police about the importance of ticking the “human trafficking” box in the administrative report for checking foreign nationals in order to ensure that victims of THB are identified and referred to centres, and to prevent them from being ordered to leave the country and placed in a closed centre.¹⁰⁵ According to the Belgian authorities, the firmness sometimes required during police checks is linked to the complex environment in which the police operate, but checks are always carried out in accordance with the legal framework. They stress that, regardless of the classification used in the administrative reports, it is always possible for a person to be identified as a victim of trafficking while in a closed centre. Staff at these centres receive ongoing training in detecting vulnerabilities, are familiar with the procedure for identifying victims of trafficking and ensure that indicators of trafficking are monitored throughout periods of detention. However, referral to the protection procedure remains a voluntary step for the victim.

128. As stated in paragraph 11, the number of minor THB victims detected in Belgium remains low. Compared with previous years, associations involved in supporting children who are victims of trafficking or at risk of trafficking (Esperanto and Minor Ndako) have noted a significant decrease in the number of identified victims who are unaccompanied minors or who belong to the Roma community. Besides the fact that some children are unable to enter the NRM procedure because of restrictive conditions (see paragraphs 118-120), under-detection is an issue. Despite visible signs of exploitation, as in the case of unaccompanied children and young people living in conditions of vagrancy (see paragraph 59), they are often treated as offenders rather than victims of THB by frontline services, including the local police. GRETA was informed that in Brussels, where most of these young people living in conditions of vagrancy are found, basic training for local police does not cover THB. The federal police wishes to raise awareness among local police departments about trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities and recommends initiating proceedings for trafficking in parallel with proceedings for drug trafficking or theft, for example. Such practices are still rare, however.

129. GRETA acknowledges that significant efforts have been made by specialised investigation services (federal police and ONSS) to proactively detect victims of THB. It is concerned, however, that frontline services, which are the ones most likely to come into contact with possible victims of trafficking, play a lesser role in victim detection because of insufficient awareness and training. It also regrets that the conditions for accessing the protection procedure continue to prevent a number of victims from receiving appropriate assistance (see paragraphs 141-144).

130. GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that all victims of trafficking who are in an irregular or precarious administrative situation have access to a recovery and reflection period in accordance with Article 13 of the Convention and to apply on a case-by-case basis, with a focus on victim protection, the requirement to have broken off contacts with the traffickers.¹⁰⁶

131. In addition, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further measures to improve the identification of victims of trafficking and in particular:

- **enhance the training, tools and guidance for frontline services (local police, regional inspectorates, asylum and immigration staff, staff at closed centres, youth care workers, prison staff) on human trafficking, the detection of victims of trafficking and the implementation of the multi-agency circular;**¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 164.

¹⁰⁶ See GRETA's Guidance Note on the recovery and reflection period, THB-GRETA(2024)14, <https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-recovery-and-reflection-period-group-of-experts-on-ac/1680b1a3ca>

- **strengthen the proactive detection of child victims and victims of THB for the purpose not only of sexual or economic exploitation but also exploitation in criminal activities and exploitation for begging (see paragraph 66);**
- **continue their efforts to improve data collection on presumed and formally identified victims of THB.**

b. Assistance to victims of trafficking

132. In its third report, GRETA urged the Belgian authorities to fulfil their obligations under Article 12 of the Convention, and in particular to ensure that assistance is not made conditional on the victim's willingness to co-operate in criminal proceedings, ensure that all presumed and identified victims of trafficking in Belgium can receive assistance, and ensure that specialised centres have sufficient human and financial resources. GRETA likewise considered that the authorities should improve the assistance to victims who are unaccompanied foreign children and recognise the Esperanto centre as a specialised reception centre.¹⁰⁷

133. As stated in previous GRETA reports,¹⁰⁸ assistance to victims of trafficking is provided by three specialised centres for the reception of victims of THB and/or aggravated human smuggling, run by the NGOs PAG-ASA (in Brussels), Payoke (in Flanders) and Sürya (in Wallonia), which are accredited and funded by the Belgian authorities.¹⁰⁹ Their accreditation was renewed for five years in 2023. The centres provide comprehensive support to victims, including secure accommodation (in shelters and apartments) but they also help victims on a non-residential basis. They offer tailor-made support, geared to the complex needs of victims, and create a safe environment in which victims can rebuild their lives. Supporting victims in this way also provides encouragement for them to participate in criminal proceedings (see paragraph 153).¹¹⁰

134. Annual funding from the federal government (Federal Public Service for Justice) has increased, from EUR 279 000 per centre in 2021 to EUR 460 000 since 2023. The increase is intended to cover the centres' functions as part of the central contact point (see paragraph 124) as well as other tasks. Funding from the federated entities varies from centre to centre, but Sürya appears to have the most stable funding from the French Community. While welcoming the increase in annual funding for the centres, GRETA notes that it is still not sufficient to enable them to perform all their tasks properly, such as providing legal support to victims who are not eligible for free legal aid (see paragraph 200).

135. The centres do not have enough capacity to deal with the increase in first-time requests for support and also exceptional situations where a large number of victims are detected. As indicated by Myria in its 2023 annual report, the Boréal case in Flanders (see paragraph 81) led to an "unprecedented reception crisis" at the specialised centres. Payoke is capable of handling 150 cases per year, but the NGO found itself having to provide support to more than 150 people detected during an initial check, and then a further 100 or so people after the investigation opened. Since these numbers far exceeded its capacity, emergency solutions had to be found with the help of other agencies. Four extra staff were drafted in to work at the NGO on a temporary basis. Despite its best efforts, however, some presumed victims could not be assisted.

¹⁰⁷ See GRETA's third report, paragraphs 194 and 209.

¹⁰⁸ See GRETA's third report, paragraph 189; GRETA's second report, paragraphs 108-111.

¹⁰⁹ The specialised centres are financed at federal level as regards dealings with the authorities and legal and administrative issues, and at regional level for matters relating to reception and accommodation.

¹¹⁰ Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*.

136. GRETA recognises that the situation created by the Boréalis case was exceptional. However, it points out that this is not the first time that a large number of victims have been detected in Belgium following a check or inspection,¹¹¹ and that the Belgian authorities need to think about ways to better manage such situations in the future. The Special Parliamentary Commission recommended setting up a centre for presumed victims of THB, where they could stay for up to 45 days (the duration of the recovery and reflection period), and also developing a crisis prevention and management plan including buffer places to be activated if the reception network reaches saturation point.¹¹² The Bureau of the Co-ordination Unit is more in favour of increasing each centre's capacity by ten or so places in order to cope with the growing demand for support and small-scale crisis situations. It points out that ad hoc solutions can be put in place during certain scheduled checks by freeing up places in other facilities, as has already been done with Fedasil and the Red Cross. Also, work is reportedly under way at the Bureau to develop a crisis management plan. According to the authorities' comments on the draft report, possible reception arrangements in the event of a crisis have been assessed along with the associated costs, and the formalisation of a procedure is currently under discussion.

137. As stated in previous GRETA reports, since the specialised centres do not have places for minor victims, they are referred to the NGOs Esperanto (Wallonia) and Minor Ndako/Meza centre (Flanders) which provide them with accommodation. Certain aspects of their care, such as administrative and legal matters, continue to be provided by the specialised centres, however. The centres for minors also take in victims who have not been formally identified under the NRM, as well as victims of honour-related violence outside the context of trafficking. Myria's 2024 report provides, for the first time, accurate data on the victims supported by Esperanto and Minor Ndako. In the case of Esperanto, the data show an increase in support for victims of honour-related violence and a decrease in support for victims of THB.¹¹³ The THB victims supported by Esperanto were mainly from Serbia, Vietnam, Belgium and Romania and had been sexually exploited or exploited in criminal activities. Few had official victim-of-trafficking status.

138. The Meza centre, which GRETA visited, was opened in March 2022 by the NGO Minor Ndako. Funded by the Flemish authorities, the Meza centre has six places. It is intended to accommodate girls aged 14 to 18, mainly victims of sexual exploitation, but it has also taken in boys on an ad hoc basis in certain circumstances (e.g. an Afghan boy who was a victim of aggravated human smuggling and sexual abuse). In 2022-2023, Meza took in 26 people, including 21 victims of trafficking, mainly from Romania and Belgium. At the time of GRETA's visit, four female victims were staying at the Meza centre (one Belgian girl who was a victim of sexual exploitation, one Guinean girl who was a victim of economic exploitation and two Afghan girls who were victims of honour-related violence). GRETA was impressed by the staff's commitment and their approach to supporting the children in question. However, it noted that the centre was under-used by victims of trafficking due to a lack of referrals from frontline professionals.

139. The centres for minors face several difficulties. When children have been exploited by the same network, it is very difficult to accommodate them together. Yet there are no other facilities that could take them in. Also, there are still no dedicated specialised centres for male victims of THB in Flanders, so ad hoc solutions are constantly having to be found for this group. In addition, while the Esperanto and Meza centres are not meant to accommodate victims for extended periods because of restrictive reception conditions, it is very difficult to find a place in youth care facilities because they are at full capacity and do not have specialised accommodation for victims of THB.

¹¹¹ Amy Weatherburn and Elise Blanplain, *La lutte contre l'exploitation économique en Belgique : leçons de l'affaire Boréalis et des pistes de réforme pour une meilleure protection des travailleurs migrants*, 2025, page 4.

¹¹² See the Special Parliamentary Commission's report, recommendations 43 and 44.

¹¹³ See Myria's 2024 annual report (page 166), Esperanto provided support to 11 (presumed) victims of THB/aggravated smuggling and 4 victims of honour-based violence; 8 victims of THB/smuggling and 10 victims of honour-based violence in 2021; 13 victims of trafficking/smuggling and 11 victims of honour-based violence in 2022; 13 victims of THB/smuggling and 13 victims of honour-based violence in 2023.

140. Esperanto and the Meza centre are not recognised as specialised centres. As a result, they cannot directly take over victims of THB, who must be referred to them by the specialised centres, and the centres cannot apply for residence permits in the victims' name. Nor can the centres for minors participate as full members in the work of the Bureau of the Interdepartmental Unit and are instead invited to take part on an occasional basis. During the visit, GRETA was informed that granting specialised centre status to the centres for minors would mean that they would no longer be able to take in victims who do not meet the conditions for access to the NRM. If it is not possible for Esperanto and Meza to be recognised as specialised centres, GRETA stresses that, at the very least, interim solutions must be found to integrate them fully into the NRM. In their comments on the draft report, the Belgian authorities stated that the revised multi-agency circular, which has not yet been published (see paragraph 116), includes a specific appendix on Meza and Esperanto, thereby ensuring their formal recognition within the NRM while enabling them to retain the flexibility needed for their operation. GRETA welcomes this formalisation of the role of the centres for minors in the multi-agency circular.

141. As stated in paragraph 118, the conditions for access to and continued participation in the NRM have not changed. They continue to prevent large numbers of victims of THB from accessing support from specialised centres, in particular victims who do not co-operate with the judicial authorities after the recovery and reflection period. This is in breach of Article 12, paragraph 6 of the Convention. Several people met by GRETA emphasised that the Belgian model of victim protection places considerable demands on victims who need time to recover and make decisions.

142. GRETA was informed that once support has been triggered, cases of withdrawal of THB victim status for non-compliance with the NRM's conditions, and hence early termination of assistance from specialised centres, are rare. For foreign victims exploited by diplomats and who are unable to initiate criminal proceedings because of diplomatic immunity, the multi-agency circular provides that the public prosecutor may issue a favourable opinion recognising the reality of the THB victims' situation, thereby enabling them to obtain a residence permit and continue receiving support from a specialised centre.

143. As highlighted in paragraph 118, access to the NRM and hence to specialised centres is not possible for Belgian victims exploited abroad, or foreign victims exploited abroad but residing in Belgium. Accordingly, an asylum seeker who has been a victim of trafficking during their migration journey will not be able to access a specialised centre even if the trafficking took place shortly before their arrival in Belgium and they need specialised assistance to overcome their trauma. Although the protection of such persons is in principle the responsibility of the federated entities or Fedasil, as the case may be, none of these entities has specialised places or services for supporting victims of THB. In the absence of specialised support, such victims do not receive the assistance they need to overcome their trauma and reintegrate into society, thereby increasing their vulnerability and putting them at high risk of re-victimisation.

144. According to the Belgian authorities, it is difficult to know how many Belgian victims are exploited abroad because they do not report to the authorities on their return to Belgium. GRETA was informed, however, that the IOM Office had provided assistance to several Belgian victims on their return and had encountered significant difficulties. In particular, a Belgian woman had been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Germany but was unable to access accommodation on her return to Belgium. In total, IOM worked for nearly a year to find her housing. During GRETA's visit, the authorities stated that discussions were under way to allow Belgian victims access to the NRM, in co-operation with IOM and the Communities. It seems, however, that there are currently no plans concerning foreign nationals exploited abroad, such as asylum seekers, even though there is a significant number of possible victims in this group.

145. **GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to take further steps to fulfil their obligations under Article 12 of the Convention, in particular to:**

- **ensure that assistance is not made conditional on the victim's willingness to co-operate with the competent authorities in criminal investigations and prosecutions;**
- **ensure that all presumed and identified victims on Belgian territory can receive adequate support and assistance, having regard to their individual needs, irrespective of the country of exploitation;**
- **provide sufficient funding to specialised centres and increase their reception capacity;**
- **provide specialised care for boy victims of THB in Flanders.**

146. **In addition, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should:**

- **adopt a crisis management plan in the event of exceptionally high demand in the reception network;**
- **increase the capacity of youth care facilities to take in child victims of trafficking, in particular for child victims who have completed their support programme at the centres for minors.**

3. Substantive criminal law and procedural law

147. The Convention places on States Parties a series of obligations aimed at enabling the effective prosecution of traffickers and ensuring that they are punished in a proportionate and dissuasive manner. As the implementation of these provisions of the Convention was examined in detail by GRETA during the preceding evaluation rounds, given the focus of the fourth round, particular attention is paid to the notion of "abuse of a position of vulnerability" and its application in case law. Further, GRETA has decided to examine as part of the fourth evaluation round the application of Article 19 of the Convention on the criminalisation of the use of services of victims of trafficking.

a. Notion of "abuse of a position of vulnerability"

148. Abuse of a position of vulnerability is an integral part of the international legal definition of trafficking in human beings and is central to any understanding of trafficking.¹¹⁴ It is one of the means by which trafficking acts are committed and is relevant to all forms of trafficking and all exploitative purposes. Abuse of a position of vulnerability occurs when "an individual's personal, situational or circumstantial vulnerability is intentionally used or otherwise taken advantage of, to recruit, transport, transfer, harbour or receive that person for the purpose of exploiting him or her, such that the person believes that submitting to the will of the abuser is the only real or acceptable option available to him or her, and that belief is reasonable in light of the victim's situation".¹¹⁵

149. As described in GRETA's previous reports, the offence of trafficking in human beings set out in Article 433quinquies of the Criminal Code is based on two constituent elements: the act and the purpose of exploitation, with the means regarded as an aggravating circumstance. Article 433septies of the Criminal Code provides that trafficking in human beings is aggravated, in particular, when committed "by

¹¹⁴ See UNODC Issue Paper *Abuse of a position of vulnerability and other "means" within the definition of trafficking in persons*, United Nations, April 2013, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ UNODC [Guidance Note](#) on "abuse of a position of vulnerability" as a means of trafficking in persons in Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

abusing the position of vulnerability in which a person finds themselves on account of their illegal or precarious administrative status, precarious social situation, age, pregnancy, illness, impairment or mental or physical deficiency, such that the person had no real and acceptable choice but to submit to this abuse". According to the relevant explanatory report, the list of circumstances is not exhaustive and judges have broad discretion to determine what constitutes a position of vulnerability.

150. The new offence of aggravated trafficking in human beings, which will enter into force on 1 September 2026 (see paragraph 14), sets out this aggravating circumstance again in the same terms in the new Article 260, paragraph 2, of the Criminal Code. It also includes another aggravating circumstance, namely when the offence has been committed against a minor or "a person in a vulnerable position", the latter being defined as "any person whose position of vulnerability due to their age, pregnancy, illness or a physical or mental impairment was apparent or known to the perpetrator". While there appears to be some redundancy between these two aggravating circumstances (the abuse of a position of vulnerability or of a person in a position of vulnerability), Article 260, paragraph 2, enables the age of the victim to be covered, i.e. both minors and the elderly. It is also a more objective circumstance: it is sufficient to demonstrate that the position of vulnerability was apparent.

151. The aggravating circumstance of abuse of a position of vulnerability is very frequently relied on by Belgian courts in convictions for trafficking, in particular the abuse of victims' illegal or precarious administrative status or precarious social situation. In a 2023 case of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation involving several Venezuelan victims recruited using the "loverboy" method, the court reiterated that "the absence of any real and acceptable choice but to submit to this abuse" does not in itself constitute a constituent element of the aggravating circumstance of abuse of vulnerability. The victim's vulnerable position necessarily results in a lack of such choice.¹¹⁶ In a 2020 conviction for trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities and other offences, the court found that the defendants had taken advantage of the victim's vulnerability and social isolation to systematically extort all his money from him, leaving him destitute. They had incited him to shoplift for their own profit and forced him to live in inhuman conditions.¹¹⁷

152. GRETA welcomes the broad interpretation of situations of vulnerability under Belgian criminal law and the acknowledgement by courts of the aggravating circumstance of abuse of a position of vulnerability in victims of trafficking.

b. Investigation, prosecution and sanctions

153. In its 2025 annual report, Myria analysed the measures implemented by the Belgian authorities to take the vulnerabilities of victims into account at the various stages of criminal proceedings. When victims are detected by the police or inspectorates, specialised reception centres are very quickly called in to establish initial contact with victims and explain their rights and the NRM procedure. Staff from the specialised centres are usually present when victims are interviewed to put them at ease and encourage them to speak. However, it is rare for a lawyer to be present to represent and advise the victim (see paragraph 203). Investigators give victims time, allowing them to take breaks to ease the emotional strain. The courts also take the vulnerability of victims into account. In several cases, judges have accepted contradictory victim statements by placing them in the context of exploitation and/or attempts by defendants to intimidate victims.

154. GRETA welcomes the steps taken by the Belgian authorities to consider victims' vulnerable position during criminal proceedings. Such an approach helps to protect victims, build their confidence in the justice system and encourage their co-operation in proceedings against traffickers. GRETA stresses that the initial contact between victims and the authorities is often the most pivotal moment. In this regard, it is concerned by reports from several associations about the harsh way in which police checks or labour

¹¹⁶ See Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 105.

¹¹⁷ See Myria, *2021 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 77-79.

inspections are sometimes carried out without interpreters present, and the fact that undetected trafficking victims are placed in closed centres with a view to their deportation (see paragraph 127). Such treatment can have serious psychological consequences for victims and may discourage them from coming forward to testify against traffickers in future.

155. In its third report, GRETA urged the Belgian authorities to allocate sufficient human and budgetary resources to the police to enable them to conduct proactive and effective investigations into THB. In their November 2024 report to the Committee of the Parties to the Convention, the authorities emphasised the need to first establish an accurate picture of the number of police officers assigned to combating trafficking. No such mapping has yet been conducted, and it appears that the number of officers assigned to trafficking continues to decline. Those whom GRETA met once again criticised the falling level of specialisation among the police in trafficking issues. Staff turnover is high, and the number of police units dedicated exclusively to trafficking has decreased, except in large judicial districts. In other districts, the remit of specialised units has been expanded to include issues such as combating terrorism or drug trafficking, which are of far greater political importance.

156. The lack of resources dedicated to combating trafficking also affects the judicial authorities. Given the complexity of the cases to be dealt with, the number of lead prosecutors for THB and human smuggling (in public prosecutors' offices and *auditorats*) is insufficient. Depending on the judicial district, these prosecutors may be dedicated exclusively to cases of trafficking in and smuggling of human beings, or may have a broader remit. As highlighted in paragraph 18, lead prosecutors must organise co-ordination meetings with the various stakeholders in the judicial district, including the specialised reception centres. These meetings are deemed very important as they serve to mobilise the services involved and enable them to exchange information on trafficking in the district, or even discuss specific cases. However, GRETA was informed that such co-ordination meetings were no longer being held in some judicial districts.

157. In West Flanders, co-operation between investigation services on cases of economic exploitation is highly integrated. The police and the ONSS carry out joint checks, systematically conducting a simultaneous assessment under both anti-trafficking legislation and labour criminal law. In addition, the investigation services regard both the public prosecutor and *auditorats* as their points of contact in a case involving economic exploitation. This multidisciplinary approach enables frontline services to examine various options depending on the indicators present.¹¹⁸ Moreover, although in principle, judges – whether investigating judges or trial judges – do not specialise in dealing with trafficking in human beings, a specialised division has been set up in West Flanders to investigate and try all cases of THB, smuggling of human beings and related offences under labour criminal law. The model developed in West Flanders is considered by many as a good practice, as it improves procedural efficiency and professional specialisation. The Special Parliamentary Commission has recommended that the model be rolled out across Belgium.

158. The data in Appendix 1 to this report suggests that the number of trafficking offences detected by the federal police is considerable (382 in 2022, 398 in 2023, 369 in 2024 and 183 in the first half of 2025).¹¹⁹ There has been a steady increase in cases of sexual exploitation, while the number of cases of economic exploitation has remained stable or even decreased. The majority of THB cases concern the Brussels-Capital region and the cities of Antwerp, Liège, Charleroi and Ghent. ECOSOC teams from the ONSS completed 181 investigations into trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation in 2022, 181 in 2023, 189 in 2024 and 235 in 2025.¹²⁰ While the Monitoring of Social Legislation Department (CLS) is also competent to investigate trafficking, data on its investigations have not been communicated, in spite of a request by GRETA, and it seems that the CLS is not very active in this field.

¹¹⁸ See Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 52.

¹¹⁹ Source: Federal Police. Compared with 364 in 2019, 301 in 2020 and 341 in 2021.

¹²⁰ Source: Myria 2024 and 2025 annual reports, external input from the ONSS. The authorities provided the data for 2025 in their comments on the draft report.

159. The number of human trafficking cases brought before public prosecutors' offices (including the Federal Prosecution Service) is also sizable and has remained relatively stable (on average 350 per year). Most concern trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (between 67% and 75%, depending on the year), followed by trafficking for economic exploitation (between 22% and 28%).¹²¹ A significant proportion of cases are not proceeded with (38% between 2021 and 2024) for technical reasons (lack of evidence or unknown identity of the perpetrators) or on grounds of prosecutorial discretion (in the light of criminal justice policy or investigative capacity); some are also transferred to another prosecutor's office or authority for reasons of jurisdiction (25% in 2021-2024). Only 10% of trafficking cases referred to public prosecutors' offices in 2021-2024 resulted in defendants being summoned to appear in court.¹²² According to the prosecutors whom GRETA met, this proportion is not low and is similar to that observed in other criminal cases. The number of new cases of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation received by *auditorats* had fallen but seems to be rising again (272 in 2022, 253 in 2023, 213 in 2024 and 243 in 2025). Of these, between 20 and 30 cases per year were not proceeded with. There are no data on the number of cases handled by *auditorats* that were referred to court.

160. There were 124 final convictions for trafficking in human beings in 2021, 131 in 2022, 104 in 2023 and 71 in 2024.¹²³ In most cases, an immediate custodial sentence or a full or partial suspended sentence was imposed. Prison sentences were mostly between one and five years. Most convictions were for trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (between 60% and 80%), followed by economic exploitation (between 15% and 35%).

161. Confiscation orders were made in the majority of convictions for trafficking handed down between 2021 and 2023. For example, in a 2022 case involving a senior European Commission official who exploited a domestic worker, the court confiscated the perpetrator's property on the grounds that the offence had been committed there and ruled that the proceeds from the sale should go to the victim. Confiscation by equivalent value is possible, and Myria's analysis of judgments shows that this measure is sometimes employed. Financial investigation is essential to facilitate confiscation. In large-scale trafficking cases, the police division responsible for identifying criminal assets (the "*plukteam*") is systematically involved, and letters rogatory are issued to request the seizure of foreign assets. For investigations that are not large-scale, i.e. the majority of trafficking cases, financial investigations are more limited, particularly in cases other than economic exploitation. GRETA was informed that the financial aspect of THB cases receives insufficient police resources due to a lack of capacity.

162. Few proceedings are initiated in cases of trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities or exploitation through begging. In January 2026, the first case of trafficking of minors for the purpose of exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities was tried in Namur. Among the defendants was a father who had exploited his own son, his nephew and a third boy by forcing them to sell drugs. The investigation revealed a system of intra-family exploitation. The victims, one of whom was only 12 years old, were moved from squat to squat, beaten and under constant pressure to sell cocaine. Seven of the defendants were sentenced to between 20 months and seven years in prison, while one was acquitted. Most of the defendants were sentenced in absentia because they were not in Belgium. Compensation for the victims was deferred to a later stage.

¹²¹ These are new cases brought before public prosecutors following an initial police interview report or a complaint accompanied by an application to join the proceedings as a civil party. They do not concern offences committed by minors. There is a risk that cases may be counted twice if they are transferred to another district or division within the same district. Source: Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 129. According to the authorities, in 2025, 383 cases of trafficking in human beings were referred to the prosecution service, including 213 for sexual exploitation of adults, 72 for sexual exploitation of minors and 24 for labour exploitation.

¹²² See the Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, page 87. In 2025, the figure was 14%.

¹²³ Source: Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, Appendix 9. The authorities provided the data for 2024 in their comments on the draft report.

By way of comparison, there were 126 convictions for trafficking in 2017, 138 in 2018, 119 in 2020 and 111 in 2021.

163. GRETA was informed that distinguishing instances of THB from other offences remains challenging, which increases the risk of incorrect classification or reclassification. In particular, in cases of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation, it is not easy to prove the existence of “conditions contrary to human dignity” (which is a constituent element of this form of trafficking) and the interpretation of the concept varies from one judicial district to another. As noted in GRETA’s first report on Belgium, information on the interpretation of the concept is available in the explanatory memorandum to the Law,¹²⁴ as well as in the Joint Circular on trafficking issued by the College of Public Prosecutors and the Minister of Justice. The subject is also covered in training for magistrates on trafficking.

164. In addition, since the 2022 reform of the Belgian Criminal Code with regard to sexual offences, distinguishing between trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and aggravated abuse of prostitution has also proven difficult.¹²⁵ As GRETA noted in its previous report, failing to classify an offence as trafficking in human beings puts victims at a significant disadvantage, as they will not be able to benefit from access to specialised centres (or will have to leave them), a recovery and reflection period or a residence permit. There are also cases that are classified as aggravated smuggling of human beings, but in these cases, victims have access to the NRM.

165. The authorities provided information on the various anti-trafficking training sessions held for the police, inspectorates and the judiciary.¹²⁶ The training on these issues provided by the Federal Police Academy has been updated. The ONSS organised numerous training sessions for new inspectors, but only one session was held for the CLS. Specific training has been provided for prosecutors in juvenile divisions to raise awareness of the need to protect minors who are victims of trafficking, and to create synergies between the relevant actors in order to improve victim care. The Judicial Training Institute (IFJ) has also developed shared basic training on combating trafficking for all future judges and prosecutors in their first year of training, but it is also open to those already serving. The course was held for the first time in May 2026 and will be repeated every year.

166. GRETA welcomes the significant number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions in trafficking cases in Belgium, particularly for THB for the purpose of sexual or economic exploitation. However, it notes that the number of proceedings initiated for other forms of exploitation remains low. Many of the people met during GRETA’s visit stressed that more could be done if sufficient resources were allocated to investigation services and judicial authorities. In this regard, GRETA is concerned that the reallocation of resources and capacities to other priorities (terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal immigration) is undermining the criminal justice response to THB. This is all the more worrying given that the challenges posed by traffickers’ use of new technologies require increased human and technical resources (see paragraphs 190-191).

167. **GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should:**

- **allocate sufficient human, financial and technical resources to investigation services, public prosecutor’s offices and the courts so as to ensure that the fight against trafficking in human beings remains a priority for the criminal justice system;**
- **develop proactive investigation of cases of trafficking for the purposes of exploitation in criminal activities or begging;**

¹²⁴ See GRETA’s first report on Belgium, paragraph 55.

¹²⁵ Under Article 268 of the Criminal Code, abuse of prostitution is aggravated where the offence of pimping is committed against a person in a position of vulnerability due to their illegal or precarious administrative status, precarious social situation, age, pregnancy, illness, mental or physical impairment. Although the penalties are the same as those for trafficking offences, victims do not have access to the THB victim protection system.

¹²⁶ See the Belgian authorities’ reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, pages 77-78 and Appendix 3.

- **ensure that THB offences are prosecuted as such every time the circumstances of a case allow this;**
- **strengthen financial investigation in cases of trafficking for the purpose of any form of exploitation in order to facilitate future compensation for victims;**
- **continue to enhance training and tools for investigation services and judicial authorities on combating THB, including on the interpretation of the notion of a “violation of human dignity” to ensure consistent interpretation in cases of economic exploitation.**

c. Protection of victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings

168. Measures to protect victims and witnesses in cases of trafficking in human beings have been described at length in previous GRETA reports.¹²⁷

169. Video recording of interviews involving victims or witnesses who are minors or vulnerable adults is mandatory for certain offences, including sexual assault or exploitation. For other offences (e.g. other forms of trafficking) and other victims (non-vulnerable adults), the use of video recording may be ordered. Interviews of this type are conducted by specially trained investigators. GRETA was informed that, in practice, this measure is always taken for child victims of trafficking, but rarely for adult victims.¹²⁸

170. As an example of good practice, Myria’s 2025 annual report highlights the setting up of EVA (Emergency Victim Assistance) units in Brussels police districts to conduct initial interviews with victims of sexual exploitation. The interviews are carried out by specially trained investigators, with the aim of preventing secondary victimisation and improving the quality of victims’ testimony to ensure the interviews are as thorough as possible.

171. According to several people met during the visit, it is very rare for defendants and victims to be brought face-to-face during the investigation. However, GRETA was informed of a 2022 case of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation involving the loverboy method in which the victim was brought face-to-face with some of the defendants on several occasions. Myria emphasises the importance of ensuring that investigating judges are aware of this issue and do not grant defence motions without due consideration.¹²⁹

172. At the trial stage, victims are not required to be present and may be represented by their lawyers. It is also very rare for victims to be called to testify at the hearing. Judges mainly rely on official records of interviews from the investigation or preliminary inquiry. According to the prosecutors met by GRETA, in a case where the victim had to be heard at the hearing, the accused was excluded from the courtroom and was represented by their lawyer.

173. The federal coalition agreement sets out plans to roll out EVA units throughout the country, strengthen psychological support for victims during criminal proceedings and equip all court buildings with rooms specially dedicated to receiving victims.

¹²⁷ See GRETA’s third report on Belgium, paragraphs 199-201; second report, paragraphs 125-28; and first report, paragraphs 229-231.

¹²⁸ For further information: <https://www.rtbf.be/article/auditions-filmees-de-mineurs-pour-plus-de-respect-de-la-parole-de-l-enfant-11157562>.

¹²⁹ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 33.

174. **While welcoming the steps taken to protect victims of trafficking in criminal proceedings, GRETA reiterates its previous recommendation¹³⁰ and considers that the Belgian authorities should make full use of the applicable legislation and ensure the effective implementation of available protection measures for all THB victims or witnesses, regardless of the form of exploitation or the victim's age, including by using video recordings of hearings and not bringing victims or witnesses into direct contact with defendants or the accused.**

d. Non-punishment provision

175. As noted in GRETA's third report on Belgium,¹³¹ a provision on the non-punishment of victims of trafficking was enshrined in Article 433quinquies, paragraph 5, of the Criminal Code by a 2019 law, whereby "[a] victim of trafficking in human beings who participates in any offences as a direct consequence of their exploitation shall not incur any penalty in respect of these offences".

176. The new Criminal Code, which will come into force on 1 September 2026, includes a non-punishment provision in a dedicated article (the new Article 264), but offences punishable by more than 20 years' imprisonment are no longer covered. According to the explanatory memorandum to the reform, in such cases, the defence of coercion (irresistible force), set out in Article 22 of the new Criminal Code, may be applied.¹³² The explanatory memorandum also states that the non-punishment provision applies to offences set out in the Criminal Code, the Labour Criminal Code and specific statutes (e.g. the sale of narcotics and offences under the law on foreign nationals).

177. GRETA points out that, under Article 26 of the Convention, it should be possible for the non-punishment provision to be applied to all offences that victims were compelled to commit. Human traffickers may force their victims to commit all kinds of offences, including very serious crimes, and victims, because of their age, vulnerable position or the means of coercion used, may feel they have no choice but to submit.¹³³ GRETA understands the Belgian authorities' argument that the defence of irresistible force may apply to the most serious offences. It will be important to monitor how this defence is applied to victims of trafficking.

178. Myria's annual reports refer to several cases where the non-punishment provision was applied. In 2023, a Vietnamese person was convicted of growing and selling cannabis but was acquitted on appeal. The court based its decision on the individual's status as a victim of trafficking and the non-punishment provision. In another case from 2021, a young Belgian teenager was acquitted of the offence of trafficking.¹³⁴ A victim of the "loverboy" method herself, she had been forced to adopt the role of a "lovergirl" to recruit other teenage victims.¹³⁵

179. While GRETA welcomes these examples of the application of the non-punishment provision, it points out that its effective implementation presupposes that the person has been correctly identified as a victim of trafficking. As noted in paragraph 128, however, victims of trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in criminal or unlawful activities are under-detected by frontline police. Those met by GRETA also pointed out that lawyers rarely rely on the non-punishment provision in their arguments.

¹³⁰ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 131.

¹³¹ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 115.

¹³² Article 22 of the new Criminal Code (irresistible force): "A person shall not be criminally liable if they acted under the influence of physical or psychological force which they could not resist."

¹³³ See also the Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, *Implementation of the non-punishment principle*, May 2021, paragraphs 37-38.

¹³⁴ See Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 96 and 120.

¹³⁵ See Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 92 and 103.

180. GRETA was informed of cases in which the non-punishment provision was not applied to victims of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation who had been employed under bogus self-employment arrangements. They are forced by INASTI (National Social Insurance Institute for Self-Employed Workers) to repay arrears of social security contributions accrued during their exploitation. GRETA points out that the principle of non-punishment applies to all unlawful acts committed by victims, including tax offences. The 2021-2025 Action Plan provided for the appointment of a contact person at INASTI and limiting the social security debts of victims of trafficking. In spite of a request by GRETA, no information has been provided about the implementation of this measure.

181. GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to take further measures to write off social security debts for victims of trafficking employed under bogus self-employment arrangements, pursuant to the non-punishment provision set out in Article 26 of the Convention.

182. Furthermore, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should continue their efforts to ensure that the non-punishment provision is implemented, and in particular to strengthen the training and tools available to law enforcement agencies, labour inspectorates, the judiciary and lawyers in relation to this provision.

e. Criminalisation of the use of services of a victim

183. Belgian law does not establish any specific offence of knowing use of the services of a trafficking victim, as provided for in Article 19 of the Convention. However, the authorities have indicated that under the new EU directive on trafficking in human beings (2024/1712), such a provision will have to be adopted.

184. GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should enact legislation making it an offence to use any service involving exploitation, within the meaning of Article 4 of the Convention, where it is established that the person concerned is a victim of trafficking in human beings.

IV. Addressing human trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT)

185. Countries monitored by GRETA have reported an increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) for recruiting and controlling victims of trafficking. In 2022, GRETA conducted a study to assess the extent to which technology impacts trafficking and explore the operational and legal challenges that states face in detecting, investigating and prosecuting online and ICT-facilitated trafficking.¹³⁶ As highlighted by the study, the impact of technology is particularly acute in relation to the recruitment and exploitation of victims, including their control throughout the different stages of the trafficking process. This study highlighted a number of challenges to the identification, investigation and prosecution of THB cases due to the high volume of online activities and the associated high volume of digital evidence, the use of encrypted communications, nicknames and aliases, and the time-consuming process of acquiring evidence from private companies and/or other jurisdictions. At the same time, anti-trafficking stakeholders are using technological innovations to prevent human trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers. It is therefore essential to invest in human capital and technological tools to harness the potential of ICT for effectively combating human trafficking.

¹³⁶ Paolo Campana, Online and Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe: <https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings-full-rep/1680a73e49>, published in April 2022.

186. According to the Belgian authorities, traffickers are increasingly using new technologies to recruit, control and exploit victims, as well as to organise their criminal activities. Trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology has intensified since the Covid-19 pandemic. This phenomenon has been particularly evident in cases of sexual exploitation, with victims recruited on social media and/or whose sexual services are offered on digital platforms. This is especially true in cases of sexual exploitation of minors involving the “loverboy” method. Furthermore, in its 2024 annual report, Myria noted that the use of new technology was very prevalent in cases of sexual exploitation of Latin American victims.¹³⁷ However, trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology affects all forms of exploitation. In an April 2024 judgment, two people were convicted of trafficking for the purposes of forced crime (fraud). They had posted fake profiles on online dating apps in order to seduce and scam women. To do so, they had recruited a Mauritian man in Mauritius under false pretences and exploited him to make the fictitious profiles more life-like.¹³⁸

187. As stated in paragraph 92, the 2022 reform of the criminal law governing sexual offences retained the general principle of prohibition of sex-related advertising but allowed for exceptions, particularly for online platforms, provided that they take measures to protect sex workers and prevent the abuse of prostitution and trafficking in human beings by immediately reporting any cases to the police and judicial authorities (Article 433quater/2 of the Criminal Code). The decree of 18 May 2024 specified the terms of this exception and set out the obligations for platforms advertising sexual services. In particular, they must provide those advertising services with the contact details of specialised support centres for victims of THB as well as associations providing assistance to sex workers, and must prominently display the contact details of the Belgian contact point for trafficking (see paragraph 124). Such platforms must also raise awareness on abuse of prostitution and trafficking in human beings among those responsible for managing adverts. Lastly, they must designate a contact point for the law enforcement and judicial authorities.¹³⁹

188. According to many interlocutors met by GRETA, there is very good co-operation with Quartier Rouge, a platform advertising sexual services with a unit dedicated to working with the authorities and headed by a former police officer. The site systematically identifies those placing adverts and the content of advertisements published online, and informs the police if trafficking is suspected. It also co-operates fully with requests from the judicial authorities. Co-operation with other types of digital platforms (such as temporary accommodation rental platforms or social media) varies and can be challenging, especially when the service provider is based abroad and the use of international judicial co-operation mechanisms is required. In its 2024 annual report, Myria recommended strengthening collaboration with online platforms to improve detection, identification and evidence gathering, and extending the existing model of collaboration with Quartier Rouge to other such platforms.¹⁴⁰

189. Belgium has been a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime since 2012. It is part of the 24/7 Network set up under this convention, which enables accelerated international co-operation on cybercrime and electronic evidence. Belgium signed the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence in May 2022, but has not yet ratified it.

190. The federal police regularly carry out digital investigations in cases of trafficking in human beings and exploitation, in particular by conducting open-source intelligence (OSINT) searches on the internet or using web crawling and web scraping bots and other digital investigation techniques. It has a cybercrime investigation unit (Federal Computer Crime Unit) which carries out independent investigations but can also support other investigative services such as anti-trafficking units. However, the systematic

¹³⁷ See Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 37.

¹³⁸ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 113-14.

¹³⁹ See the Royal Decree of 18 May 2024 implementing Article 433quater/2 of the Criminal Code.

¹⁴⁰ See Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 188.

use of encrypted communication applications by traffickers means that it is necessary to have the technical skills and tools to decrypt them – which is not always straightforward.¹⁴¹

191. The ONSS's ECOSOC teams also conduct digital investigations, but their use of new technologies is more limited.¹⁴² Although they have the same powers as the police to investigate human trafficking, the ECOSOC teams lack the legal grounds to use certain online search techniques, such as web scrapers.¹⁴³

192. To proactively detect trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation online, police checks are regularly carried out on platforms for advertising sexual services. For example, in a case of sexual exploitation of transgender victims tried in February 2023, the investigation was launched following a routine check of advertisements on the Redlights website by the Ostend police department.¹⁴⁴ The federal police also ran a pilot project in 2024 using a web crawler to detect suspicious online adverts for sexual services. Just over 1.7 million advertisements for sexual services were identified, involving approximately 17 000 individuals, and 112 cases of minors exploited in prostitution were detected. However, very few investigations into trafficking were opened as a result of this pilot scheme and the exact number cannot be ascertained. During the visit, GRETA was informed that the pilot project was to be relaunched with a new digital tool to be acquired soon.

193. There is no specific training on trafficking facilitated by new technology, but training is available on cybercrime. Many of the people GRETA met acknowledged that there is a lack of high-performance digital tools, and also a lack of staff to conduct effective digital investigations and proactively detect cases of online trafficking. The resources dedicated to the criminal justice response to THB have decreased (see paragraphs 155-156), yet combating trafficking facilitated by new technology poses a real challenge. In its 2024 annual report, Myria recommended providing the police with the necessary investigative tools adapted to the digital sphere.¹⁴⁵

194. With regard to raising awareness of the risks of online exploitation and trafficking, the NGO Child Focus is particularly active among children, young people, parents and professionals working with young people. It has made available online safety resources that are suitable for children aged eight and over, as well as for children with autism or intellectual disabilities. Awareness-raising activities in the form of workshops and debates are also offered to parents. Child Focus is also part of the consortium of organisations behind the Belgian Centre for a Safer Internet (Betternet); it runs a helpline for issues related to online safety and acts as a contact point for reporting child sexual abuse material.

195. The federated entities reported a significant number of initiatives to raise awareness of cyber security and the risks of online child exploitation. In the French Community, a €2-million budget was allocated in 2025 to fund numerous activities promoting media literacy among children and young people. Efforts have also been made to integrate digital skills into school curricula from primary age onwards. In Flanders, several initiatives have been developed in co-operation with Child Focus to raise awareness among young people, their parents and professionals working with children about loverboys (see paragraph 50). In the German-speaking Community, awareness-raising initiatives for children, parents and young people are being carried out on various topics such as responsible use of online media, cyberbullying and sexting.

¹⁴¹ See the Belgian authorities' reply to GRETA's questionnaire on trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology (2021) (not public).

¹⁴² See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 158-59.

¹⁴³ See the Belgian authorities' reply to the GRETA questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round, page 50.

¹⁴⁴ See Myria, *2023 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, pages 100-101.

¹⁴⁵ See Myria, *2024 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 186.

196. **While welcoming the steps taken to promote online safety for children and young people, strengthen the obligations of platforms advertising sexual services and carry out digital investigations in THB cases, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take additional measures to prevent and combat all forms of ICT-facilitated trafficking. In particular, the authorities should:**

- **further raise public awareness of the risks of ICT-facilitated trafficking and exploitation, also targeting at-risk groups (children, migrant workers, persons engaging in prostitution, asylum seekers, etc.);**
- **further invest in capacity building and the digital tools required by investigation services to proactively investigate cases of ICT-facilitated trafficking and gather electronic evidence;**
- **enhance co-operation with internet service providers, social media and online platforms and introduce data-sharing procedures with companies holding relevant online data.**

197. **GRETA also invites the Belgian authorities to ratify the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence.**

V. Follow-up topics specific to Belgium

1. Legal assistance and free legal aid

198. In its third report on Belgium, GRETA urged the Belgian authorities to revise the eligibility criteria for free legal aid ("second-line legal assistance" in Belgian law) to enable victims to benefit from it independently of proof of their lack of means and changes in their financial situation, encourage the specialised centres to refer victims to a lawyer promptly and guarantee sufficient funding for centres to represent victims who are not eligible for legal aid in court. GRETA also considered that the authorities should raise awareness among bar associations about the need to encourage training and specialisation of lawyers on trafficking.¹⁴⁶

199. The conditions and procedure for accessing free legal aid have remained unchanged.¹⁴⁷ It is means-tested, except for minors. The monthly income thresholds were raised several times during the reporting period as they are indexed to the consumer price index each year. Since September 2025, the threshold for a single person has been EUR 1 615 net for full free legal aid and EUR 1 920 net for partial free legal aid.¹⁴⁸

200. The barriers to accessing free legal aid outlined in the previous GRETA report persist, and, in practice, only a limited number of victims of trafficking are assisted by a lawyer.¹⁴⁹ For the means test, victims must provide evidence of insufficient resources by disclosing all their assets, including those abroad, as well as the financial resources of the person providing accommodation, if applicable. A new application for legal aid must be made at each stage of the proceedings, which can be difficult if the victim has returned to their country of origin. Above all, victims must continue to meet the eligibility criteria throughout the proceedings. Victims who reach the age of majority lose their entitlement to free legal aid. So may victims who find employment (as the income threshold is lower than the statutory minimum wage),

¹⁴⁶ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraphs 59-60.

¹⁴⁷ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraphs 49-51.

¹⁴⁸ For a person in a couple or with dependants, the thresholds are EUR 1 920 net for full legal aid and EUR 2 226 net for partial legal aid, to which must be added EUR 355.21 per dependent person.

¹⁴⁹ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 52.

even though their income is generally insufficient to retain a lawyer at their own expense. Although funding for specialised centres has increased (see paragraph 134), this increase was not intended to cover victims' legal fees.

201. In December 2024, a draft law was initiated by members of Parliament that would introduce free legal aid for victims of trafficking without means testing.¹⁵⁰ However, it is not supported by the Federal Public Service for Justice, which reiterated its position that introducing free legal aid specifically for victims of trafficking could contravene the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. Nevertheless, the Federal Public Service for Justice is open to introducing a rebuttable presumption of lack of resources for victims of trafficking, which would allow them to receive free legal aid without having to prove their lack of resources. That presumption could, however, be rebutted. At the time of the adoption of GRETA's report, however, no progress had been made on the introduction of this presumption.

202. The lawyers met by GRETA once again stated that the fees provided under the free legal aid scheme are insufficient given the complexity and length of human trafficking cases. They are also difficult to recover. Fees are only paid at the end of proceedings, provided that an attempt has first been made to obtain reimbursement of legal costs from the opposing party. This process can take several years and requires the services of a bailiff, at the victim's or lawyer's expense. As a result, very few lawyers agree to assist victims of trafficking under the free legal aid scheme. Of the lawyers willing to accept, few actually specialise in trafficking, forcing specialised centres to work with a small number of professionals who are unable to handle all the requests. Bar associations still do not offer any training or specialisation in trafficking in human beings.

203. During their interviews with the police or inspectorates, victims of THB are rarely assisted by a lawyer. Those receiving support from specialised centres are usually accompanied by a member of the centre's staff (see paragraph 153).¹⁵¹ These centres offer the assistance of a lawyer when the case is in its final stages and the question of joining the proceedings as a civil party arises. There are various reasons for this, including the difficulties in finding a lawyer who specialises in this area of law (see paragraph 202). Victims not receiving support from specialised centres are not offered legal assistance during interviews.

204. GRETA's reports highlight the value of a lawyer being appointed as soon as there are reasonable grounds for believing that a person is a victim of trafficking, before the person makes an official statement and/or decides whether to co-operate with the authorities. The lawyer may also protect the victim's rights in the event of proceedings being terminated early, for example if the public prosecutor's office or *auditorat* deems that it is not a case of trafficking. In its 2025 report, Myria recommended providing victims of trafficking with free legal assistance from the start of the investigation and through all stages of the proceedings.¹⁵² Under the federal coalition agreement, victims of serious offences violating their bodily or sexual integrity may request the assistance of a lawyer before and during questioning through a duty lawyer system. According to the authorities' comments on the draft report, the introduction of such a duty system (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) is currently being discussed with the Flemish Bar Association (OVb) and the French- and German-speaking Bar Association (OBFG). However, no information was given as to whether victims of trafficking will benefit from the scheme.

205. GRETA welcomes the ongoing and planned initiatives to improve access to free legal aid for victims of trafficking, in particular the introduction of a rebuttable presumption of lack of resources, but regrets that none of these initiatives were implemented during the reporting period.

¹⁵⁰ Draft law of 21 October 2024 amending the Judicial Code as regards the provision of free legal assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings or certain aggravated forms of human smuggling.

¹⁵¹ See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 34.

¹⁵² See Myria, *2025 Annual report Trafficking and smuggling of human beings*, page 163.

206. **GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to revise the eligibility criteria for free legal aid to enable victims to benefit from it throughout the proceedings and independently of proof of their lack of means and changes in their financial situation.**

207. **In addition, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should:**

- **ensure that a lawyer is provided as soon as there are reasonable grounds for believing that a person is a victim of trafficking, before the person makes an official statement and/or decides whether to co-operate with the authorities;**
- **guarantee sufficient funding for legal assistance and free legal aid, including when these services are provided by lawyers from specialised centres or lawyers appointed under the free legal aid scheme and facilitate the reimbursement of lawyers' fees charged to the opposing party;**
- **raise awareness among bar associations of the need to develop the training and specialisation of lawyers in providing legal assistance to trafficking victims, and ensure that trafficking victims are systematically assigned a specialised lawyer.**

2. Compensation

208. In its third report on Belgium, GRETA urged the Belgian authorities to guarantee victims of trafficking effective access to compensation, both from traffickers and from the Financial Aid Fund for Victims of Intentional Acts of Violence (state compensation).¹⁵³

209. The legal framework for compensation of victims of THB by traffickers remains unchanged. Victims may participate as a civil party in criminal proceedings to seek compensation.¹⁵⁴ They may also initiate separate proceedings before the civil courts (including the employment tribunal for the payment of arrears of wages). In addition, specialised centres and Myria may act as civil claimants and regularly do so.

210. Myria's annual reports highlight the significant number of criminal court rulings that require traffickers to compensate their victims. The amount of compensation varies greatly, ranging from a token sum of one euro – awarded when the judge lacked objective evidence to determine the amount (which remains rare) – to almost EUR 100 000. Compensation is generally higher in cases of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation, as pecuniary damage is easier to quantify, as noted in the previous report. Prosecutors met by GRETA emphasised that the introduction of employment status for sex workers (see paragraph 92) could help overcome difficulties in calculating compensation for adult victims of sexual exploitation. The amount of compensation awarded for non-pecuniary damage is usually low.

211. To facilitate victims' access to compensation, an information brochure has been produced by the Federal Public Service for Justice in collaboration with the reception centres.¹⁵⁵ Available in 24 languages, it explains in simple terms the different stages of proceedings for compensation. It is handed out to victims and is also used by staff at the specialised centres as part of the personalised support they provide.

212. In practice, victims seldom receive compensation from traffickers. A lawyer reported that out of 45 cases where she was able to secure a favourable compensation outcome for victims, only 12 victims received compensation, and even then, it was only partial. This is due in particular to traffickers deliberately engineering their own insolvency. Greater efforts must be made to conduct effective financial investigations in cases of trafficking for purposes other than economic exploitation (see paragraph 161).

¹⁵³ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 92.

¹⁵⁴ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraphs 76-81 and second report, paragraphs 150-56.

¹⁵⁵ https://www.stophumantrafficking.be/sites/default/files/2024-06/BRO_INDEMNISATION_SO_TEH_FR.pdf.

In addition, a bailiff is required to enforce the compensation decision, at a cost that may be covered by legal aid, but few victims are eligible at this stage of the proceedings (see paragraph 200).

213. With regard to compensation from the state, there has been no change to the conditions for applying to the Commission for Financial Aid for Victims of Intentional Acts of Violence ("the Commission").¹⁵⁶ As trafficking is not deemed to be a violent offence in itself, victims must show that an intentional act of violence was committed against them. They must also have suffered physical or mental harm. In practice, victims of trafficking for the purpose of economic exploitation and/or those who have suffered psychological harm find it difficult to provide evidence of violence.¹⁵⁷ Victims of economic exploitation may apply to the Business Closure Fund (FME) for payment of unpaid wages only in the event of the employer's bankruptcy.

214. The Federal Public Service for Justice emphasised that no legislative changes are planned with regard to the conditions for accessing financial aid. As with free legal aid, it considers that the introduction of specific rules for victims of trafficking would violate the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. Nevertheless, it would like the Commission's interpretation of the concept of intentional acts of violence to evolve. It also wishes to improve the Commission's understanding of the situation of victims of economic exploitation. It is therefore considering appointing a representative of the Federal Public Service for Justice to participate in certain hearings before the Commission, as already permitted by law.

215. In practice, only a limited number of victims of trafficking seek financial aid from the Commission. They are only able to do so after several years of legal proceedings, by which time victims are anxious to move on or have already returned to their country of origin.¹⁵⁸ According to information provided by the Belgian authorities, at least three of the 1 170 applications submitted to the Commission in 2022 were from victims of trafficking; in 2024, it was eight out of 1 530; and in 2025, no applications were submitted by victims of trafficking. Each year, the Commission issues around 1 500 decisions. Although the number of decisions concerning victims of trafficking is low,¹⁵⁹ in practice it would appear that the Commission awards financial aid in full or at least in part.¹⁶⁰ The Belgian authorities informed GRETA of nine decisions concerning victims of trafficking issued by the Commission between 2022 and 2025. In all cases, financial aid was awarded to the victims, who were almost exclusively victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including minors. There was one case of economic exploitation. The perpetrators were acquitted of trafficking in human beings but convicted of other offences and the victim was awarded EUR 10 250 in compensation.

216. The federal government agreement provides for extending the SECAL (Maintenance Claims Service) model to victims of all offences. This would enable compensation to be paid to victims and then recovered from the perpetrators or their insurance companies. This is also one of the recommendations of the Special Parliamentary Commission on Trafficking. However, no concrete measures have yet been taken.

217. GRETA welcomes the significant number of court decisions in favour of victims. However, it regrets that few victims of trafficking actually receive compensation from perpetrators. In these circumstances, it is crucial to implement an effective and efficient state compensation mechanism. Under current Belgian law, however, the restrictive conditions for access to the Commission for Financial Aid for Victims of

¹⁵⁶ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraphs 85-86.

¹⁵⁷ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 90.

¹⁵⁸ See GRETA's third report on Belgium, paragraph 89.

¹⁵⁹ According to the Belgian authorities' reply to GRETA's questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round (Appendix 7), four decisions were handed down in cases concerning victims of trafficking in 2022, two in 2023 and nine in 2024. The total amount of financial aid awarded stood at EUR 51 625 in 2022, EUR 50 000 in 2023 and EUR 111 275 in 2024.

¹⁶⁰ These data do not accurately reflect the actual situation. It is not possible to obtain reliable statistics on claims submitted to the Commission by victims of trafficking, or on decisions in their favour, because the Commission's database cannot be searched by offence.

Intentional Acts of Violence preclude many victims of trafficking from exercising their right to state compensation.

218. GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to review the criteria for access to state compensation in order to ensure that all victims of trafficking can access it, regardless of the type of exploitation.

219. In addition, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take additional measures to guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of trafficking from traffickers and in particular to make full use of legislation on the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets and international co-operation to ensure that victims receive compensation.

VI. Conclusions

220. Since the publication of GRETA's third report on Belgium on 20 October 2022, progress has been made in a number of the areas it addressed.

221. The Special Commission set up by the Federal Parliament to evaluate legislation and policy on THB and human smuggling issued a report in June 2023 setting out 100 recommendations, some of which have been accepted by the Federal Government. In order to improve information on THB and self-identification of victims, a central online contact point has been set up by the Federal Public Service for Justice in co-operation with the specialised support centres for trafficking victims. Funding from the Federal Public Service for Justice for specialised centres has been increased, and specific funding has enabled the development of a tool to provide data on victims' pathways within the National Referral Mechanism. In addition, staffing levels in the ECOSOC (National Social Security Office) teams specifically dedicated to investigating THB have been increased, and measures have been taken to reduce the risks of trafficking in subcontracting chains in certain high-risk sectors. Lastly, numerous court rulings have been handed down awarding compensation for victims of trafficking and several rulings have applied the provision on non-punishment.

222. GRETA welcomes these positive developments in Belgium. However, despite the progress achieved, some issues continue to give cause for concern. Some recommendations made repeatedly by GRETA in previous reports have not been implemented or have been only partially implemented. In this report, GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to take action in the following areas:

- **Assistance to victims** (Article 12 of the Convention). The Belgian authorities should ensure that assistance is not made conditional on the victim's willingness to co-operate with the competent authorities in criminal investigations and proceedings and that all presumed and identified victims of trafficking in Belgium can receive adequate support and assistance, irrespective of the country of exploitation. The authorities should also provide sufficient funding to specialised centres.
- **Compensation** (Article 15 of the Convention). The Belgian authorities should review the criteria for access to state compensation in order to ensure that all victims of trafficking can access it, regardless of the type of exploitation.

223. Given that these recommendations have been made repeatedly, it is requested that they be implemented as a matter of priority; their follow-up will be examined as part of the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention.

224. As regards the thematic focus of the fourth evaluation round, which is on **vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings**, the Belgian authorities consider that the categories of people most vulnerable to THB are migrants in precarious situations, in particular asylum seekers and irregular migrants; unaccompanied children; women from disadvantaged backgrounds; homeless and unemployed persons; and children who are estranged from their families. To reduce vulnerabilities to trafficking, the 2021-2025 National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan focuses on training and awareness raising for professionals, measures to reduce demand such as due diligence, and informing the general public.

225. While welcoming the measures taken by the Belgian authorities to prevent trafficking through measures designed to help vulnerable groups, GRETA has identified a number of areas of concern which require further action. The following issues should be addressed as a matter of priority:

- reduce vulnerabilities to THB among **asylum seekers**, by ensuring that they have access to decent housing and appropriate support and increasing the number of places available under the Fedasil reception system;

- increase efforts to prevent the trafficking of **children and young people**, in particular by ensuring that unaccompanied children are immediately given proper support, developing specific protection measures for unaccompanied children and young people in transit or living in conditions of vagrancy and reducing the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people supported by youth care services;
- take further steps to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of **migrant workers**, in particular by reducing their dependency on employers.

226. GRETA also calls on the Belgian authorities to ensure that all victims of trafficking who are in an irregular or precarious administrative situation have access to a **recovery and reflection period** in accordance with Article 13 of the Convention and to apply on a case-by-case basis, with a focus on victim protection, the requirement to have broken off contacts with the traffickers. The authorities should also revise the eligibility criteria for **free legal aid** to enable trafficking victims to benefit from it throughout the proceedings and independently of proof of their lack of means and changes in their financial situation. Measures should also be taken to write off social security debts for victims of trafficking employed under bogus self-employment arrangements, pursuant to the **non-punishment provision** set out in Article 26 of the Convention.

227. GRETA welcomes the steps taken by the Belgian authorities to promote online safety for children and young people, strengthen the obligations of platforms advertising sexual services and carry out digital investigations in THB cases. In order to address the **routine use of ICT** to recruit and exploit victims of trafficking, the authorities should raise public awareness of the risks of ICT-facilitated trafficking and exploitation, invest more in capacity building and developing the digital tools required by investigation services and enhance co-operation with internet service providers, social media and online platforms.

228. GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to keep it regularly informed of developments as regards the implementation of the Convention. It trusts that there will continue to be a political commitment in Belgium to sustaining the efforts to combat all forms of human trafficking by following the human-rights based approach of the Convention and looks forward to continuing the dialogue with the Belgian authorities and civil society.

Appendix 1

Table with statistics on victims and cases of THB in Belgium in 2022-2025

The figures below are not directly comparable from one State Party to another because data collection methods differ.

Indicator		Years			
		2022	2023	2024	2025
Reports of presumed victims of THB and/or smuggling sent to specialised centres		1 409	1 549	1 558	n.a.
New cases of THB victim support provided by specialised centres		229	160	145	n.a.
Gender and age group ¹	Women	45	56	63	n.a.
	Men	170	87	70	n.a.
	Girls	9	14	14	n.a.
	Boys	4	4	3	n.a.
	X	1	0	0	n.a.
Type of exploitation	Economic	180	103	77	n.a.
	Sexual	45	55	50	n.a.
	Criminal	4	2	6	n.a.
	Multiple	0	0	10	n.a.
	Other or unknown ²	0	0	2	n.a.
Nationality	Morocco	30	21	29	n.a.
	Philippines	67	4	1	n.a.
	Brazil	13	14	14	n.a.
	Belgium	1	14	23	n.a.
	Bangladesh	31	0	0	n.a.
	Afghanistan	14	8	8	n.a.
	Colombia	1	13	11	n.a.
	Romania	8	8	7	n.a.
	Other	64	78	52	n.a.
THB cases detected by the police		382	398	369	183 (first half)
Type of exploitation	Economic	164	166	124	60
	Sexual*	203	217	227	120
	Criminal	11	11	17	2
	Begging	4	4	0	1
	Trafficking in human organs	0	0	1	0
Investigations for trafficking (economic exploitation) closed by ECOSOC labour inspectorate teams		181	181	189	235
Cases of THB brought before prosecutor's offices		320	380	355	383
Type of exploitation	Economic	90	107	86	84
	Sexual	217	255	249	285
	Criminal activities	9	13	17	10
	Begging	4	5	1	2
	Trafficking in human organs	0	0	1	2

Cases of THB brought before <i>auditorats du travail</i>		276	259	214	243
Type of exploitation	Economic	272	253	213	242
	Sexual	2	3	1	1
	Criminal activities	0	3	0	0
	Begging	1	0	0	0
	Trafficking in human organs	1	0	0	0
Final convictions for trafficking in human beings**		131	104	71	n.a.
Type of exploitation	Sexual	76	57	35	n.a.
	Economic	26	15	21	n.a.
	Criminal activities	1	1	0	n.a.
	Begging	3	1	3	n.a.
	Multiple	1	1	0	n.a.

n.a. = not available.

Sources: Myria annual reports on trafficking and smuggling of human beings; Belgian authorities' reply to GRETA's questionnaire for the fourth evaluation round (and appendices). Data on offences detected by the police were provided by the Federal Police.

* Data on offences relating to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation include those relating to exploitation for the production or distribution of child sexual abuse or exploitation material.

** Because of flaws in the data collection process, the total number of final convictions does not correspond to the total number of convictions by type of exploitation.

Appendix 2

List of GRETA's conclusions and proposals for action

The position of the proposals for action in the text of the report is shown in parentheses.

Topics related to the fourth evaluation round of the Convention

Prevention of trafficking in human beings

- GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to set up a human trafficking survivors' advisory council (paragraph 31).

Measures to prevent the vulnerability of specific groups to trafficking in human beings

Asylum seekers

- In order to reduce vulnerabilities to THB among asylum seekers, GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that all asylum seekers have access to decent housing and appropriate support and to increase the number of places available under the Fedasil reception system (paragraph 45);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps to reduce the risk of THB among asylum seekers, and in particular:
 - continue to develop the training and tools on assessing and responding to vulnerabilities for all staff involved in the protection of asylum seekers;
 - continue to inform asylum seekers about their rights and the risks of THB (paragraph 46).

Children and young people

- GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to increase their efforts to prevent the trafficking of children and young people, and in particular to:
 - ensure that unaccompanied children are immediately given proper support by providing them with safe and suitable accommodation and living conditions allowing them to meet their own needs and by appointing a guardian without delay;
 - ensure that age assessment is conducted in line with international standards, in particular Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)22 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration, in order to prevent children from being wrongly classified as adults and deprived of appropriate protection and support;
 - develop specific protection measures for unaccompanied children and young people in transit or living in conditions of vagrancy, in co-operation with the voluntary sector, and ensure that these children and young people can be identified and supported as victims of human trafficking, where appropriate;

- reduce the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people supported by youth care services, in particular by improving training and the tools available to professionals, by increasing the capacity and resources of these services, and by raising awareness among the children and young people they support (paragraph 65);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should continue their efforts to:
 - provide frontline professionals (youth care and youth protection services; local police; social workers; education staff; municipal services, etc.) with training on trafficking in minors and young people, whatever the forms of exploitation;
 - strengthen efforts to prevent human trafficking in sport (in particular football) through targeted training and awareness-raising initiatives;
 - strengthen mechanisms for co-ordination between the relevant services at regional and local level on trafficking in children and young people for all forms of exploitation, and pay particular attention to exploitation for the commission of crimes or offences (paragraph 66).

Foreign workers

- Referring to its Guidance Note on combating trafficking for labour exploitation and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation to member States CM/Rec(2022)21 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of migrant workers and in particular:
 - reduce migrant workers' dependency on their employers and make it easier to change employers. This should include the possibility for migrant workers to retain their residence permit in the event of job loss and to apply for a new permit when changing employers through a simplified administrative procedure;
 - continue their efforts to reduce the risks of trafficking in subcontracting chains and other complex legal constructs and introduce due diligence obligations in supply chains;
 - provide the federal and regional inspectorates with the human, technical and financial resources they need to perform all their tasks properly;
 - strengthen the training of regional inspectorate staff on trafficking and their role in preventing trafficking and detecting victims;
 - strengthen information and awareness raising among migrant workers on the risks of trafficking and the rights of victims of trafficking, as well as on workers' rights. For example, a central information platform on employment conditions in Belgium and the rights of migrant workers, available in several languages, could be set up (paragraph 84).

Foreign nationals in an irregular situation

- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take steps to reduce vulnerabilities to THB among migrants in an irregular situation, in particular by improving effective access to regularisation procedures (paragraph 89).

Persons engaging in prostitution/sex work

- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further steps to reduce the risks of trafficking for persons engaging in prostitution/sex work, and in particular:
 - conduct a review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Reform Law and the law on employment contracts governing sex work and of their impact on preventing and combating THB;
 - inform persons engaging in prostitution/sex work of their rights, the statutory conditions for engaging in sex work and the risks of trafficking;
 - develop measures to facilitate the integration of persons wishing to leave prostitution and/or exploitative conditions in prostitution, and provide information about the existence of these programmes (paragraph 99).

Gender-related vulnerabilities

- GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to continue their efforts to address gender-related vulnerability in measures to combat THB (paragraph 104).

LGBTI persons

- GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to take further steps to reduce the vulnerability of LGBTI persons to THB, in particular through training and awareness raising for law enforcement agencies, in close co-operation with civil society organisations (paragraph 108).

Persons from disadvantaged ethnic communities

- GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to take further steps to prevent the trafficking of Roma, in particular by developing research on and knowledge of the phenomenon, by raising awareness among Roma of the risks of trafficking and child, early or forced marriages, and by continuing efforts to improve their access to education, housing and decent work (paragraph 112).

Identification of victims of THB and recovery and reflection period

- GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to ensure that all victims of trafficking who are in an irregular or precarious administrative situation have access to a recovery and reflection period in accordance with Article 13 of the Convention and to apply on a case-by-case basis, with a focus on victim protection, the requirement to have broken off contacts with the traffickers (paragraph 130);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take further measures to improve the identification of victims of trafficking and in particular:
 - enhance the training, tools and guidance for frontline services (local police, regional inspectorates, asylum and immigration staff, staff at closed centres, youth care workers, prison staff) on human trafficking, the detection of victims of trafficking and the implementation of the multi-agency circular;
 - strengthen the proactive detection of child victims and victims of THB for the purpose not only of sexual or economic exploitation but also exploitation for the commission of crimes or offences and exploitation for begging (see paragraph 66);
 - continue their efforts to improve data collection on presumed and formally identified victims of THB (paragraph 131).

Assistance to victims of trafficking

- GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to take further steps to fulfil their obligations under Article 12 of the Convention, in particular to:
 - ensure that assistance is not made conditional on the victim's willingness to co-operate with the competent authorities in criminal investigations and prosecutions;
 - ensure that all presumed and identified victims on Belgian territory can receive adequate support and assistance, having regard to their individual needs, irrespective of the country of exploitation;
 - provide sufficient funding to specialised centres and increase their reception capacity;
 - provide specialised care for boy victims of THB in Flanders (paragraph 145);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should:
 - adopt a crisis management plan in the event of exceptionally high demand in the reception network;
 - increase the capacity of youth care facilities to take in child victims of trafficking, in particular for child victims who have completed their support programme at the centres for minors (paragraph 146).

Notion of "abuse of a position of vulnerability"

- GRETA welcomes the broad interpretation of situations of vulnerability under Belgian criminal law and the acknowledgement by courts of the aggravating circumstance of abuse of a position of vulnerability in victims of trafficking (paragraph 152).

Investigation, prosecution and sanctions

- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should:
 - allocate sufficient human, financial and technical resources to investigation services, public prosecutor's offices and the courts so as to ensure that the fight against trafficking in human beings remains a priority for the criminal justice system;
 - develop proactive investigation of cases of trafficking for the purposes of exploitation in criminal activities or begging;
 - ensure that THB offences are prosecuted as such every time the circumstances of a case allow this;
 - strengthen financial investigation in cases of trafficking for the purpose of any form of exploitation in order to facilitate future compensation for victims;
 - continue to enhance training and tools for investigation services and judicial authorities on combating THB, including on the interpretation of the notion of a "violation of human dignity" to ensure consistent interpretation in cases of economic exploitation (paragraph 167).

Protection of victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings

- While welcoming the steps taken to protect victims of trafficking in criminal proceedings, GRETA reiterates its previous recommendation and considers that the Belgian authorities should make full use of the applicable legislation and ensure the effective implementation of available protection measures for all THB victims or witnesses, regardless of the form of exploitation or the victim's age, including by using video recordings of hearings and not bringing victims or witnesses into direct contact with defendants or the accused (paragraph 174).

Non-punishment provision

- GRETA urges the Belgian authorities to take further measures to write off social security debts for victims of trafficking employed under bogus self-employment arrangements, pursuant to the non-punishment provision set out in Article 26 of the Convention (paragraph 181);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should continue their efforts to ensure that the non-punishment provision is implemented, and in particular to strengthen the training and tools available to law enforcement agencies, labour inspectorates, the judiciary and lawyers in relation to this provision (paragraph 182).

Criminalisation of the use of services of a victim

- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should enact legislation making it an offence to use any service involving exploitation, within the meaning of Article 4 of the Convention, where it is established that the person concerned is a victim of trafficking in human beings (paragraph 184).

Addressing human trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT)

- While welcoming the steps taken to promote online safety for children and young people, strengthen the obligations of platforms advertising sexual services and carry out digital investigations in THB cases, GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take additional measures to prevent and combat all forms of ICT-facilitated trafficking. In particular, the authorities should:
 - further raise public awareness of the risks of ICT-facilitated trafficking and exploitation, also targeting at-risk groups (children, migrant workers, persons engaging in prostitution, asylum seekers, etc.);
 - further invest in capacity building and the digital tools required by investigation services to proactively investigate cases of ICT-facilitated trafficking and gather electronic evidence;
 - enhance co-operation with internet service providers, social media and online platforms and introduce data-sharing procedures with companies holding relevant online data (paragraph 196);
- GRETA invites the Belgian authorities to ratify the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence (paragraph 197).

Follow-up topics specific to Belgium***Overview of trends and changes in the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against human trafficking***

- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should continue their efforts to improve the co-ordination of policies and activities to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings (paragraph 25).

Legal assistance and free legal aid

- GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to revise the eligibility criteria for free legal aid to enable victims to benefit from it throughout the proceedings and independently of proof of their lack of means and changes in their financial situation (paragraph 206);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should:
 - ensure that a lawyer is provided as soon as there are reasonable grounds for believing that a person is a victim of trafficking, before the person makes an official statement and/or decides whether to co-operate with the authorities;
 - guarantee sufficient funding for legal assistance and free legal aid, including when these services are provided by lawyers from specialised centres or lawyers appointed under the free legal aid scheme and facilitate the reimbursement of lawyers' fees charged to the opposing party;
 - raise awareness among bar associations of the need to develop the training and specialisation of lawyers in providing legal assistance to trafficking victims, and ensure that trafficking victims are systematically assigned a specialised lawyer (paragraph 207).

Compensation

- GRETA once again urges the Belgian authorities to review the criteria for access to state compensation in order to ensure that all victims of trafficking can access it, regardless of the type of exploitation (paragraph 218);
- GRETA considers that the Belgian authorities should take additional measures to guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of trafficking from traffickers and in particular to make full use of legislation on the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets and international co-operation to ensure that victims receive compensation (paragraph 219).

Appendix 3

List of public bodies, intergovernmental organisations and civil society organisations with which GRETA held consultations

Public bodies

- Federal Public Service for Justice
 - o Directorate General of Legislation, Freedoms and Fundamental Rights
 - o Inter-departmental Co-ordination Unit for Action against Trafficking in and Smuggling of Human Beings
 - o Guardianship Service
- Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs
- Federal Public Service for Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue
 - o Supervision of Social Legislation
- National Social Security Office
- Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil)
- Commission for Financial Aid for Victims of Intentional Acts of Violence
- Federal Police
- Board of Prosecutors General
- Federal Prosecution Service
- Federal Parliament
- Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons
- Federal Migration Centre (Myria) (independent national rapporteur)
- Flemish Community and Region (Flanders)
- French-speaking Community
- German-speaking Community
- Walloon Region
- Brussels-Capital Region
- General Delegate for Children's Rights (French Community)
- Children's Rights Commissioner (Flanders) (*Kinderrechtencommissaris*)
- Genk Centre for Asylum Seekers
- Judges/prosecutors, police service and inspectorate, Genk

International organisations

- International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Civil society organisations

- Casa legal
- Child focus
- ECPAT/DEI
- Espace P
- Esperanto
- Fair Work Belgium
- Minor Ndako
- Pag-asa
- Payoke
- Samilia
- Sürya
- Violett

Government's comments

The following comments do not form part of GRETA's analysis concerning the situation in Belgium

GRETA engaged in a dialogue with the Belgian authorities on a first draft of the report. A number of the authorities' comments were taken on board and integrated into the report's final version.

The Convention requires that "the report and conclusions of GRETA shall be made public as from their adoption, together with eventual comments by the Party concerned." GRETA transmitted its final report to the Belgian authorities on 9 July 2026 and invited them to submit any final comments. The comments of the authorities, submitted on 3 September 2026 (in French only), are reproduced hereafter.



De

Nom : J.-F. Minet

référence GRETA – 2026 – rapport final

Statut de la note Validé: -

**À MADAME PETYA
NESTOROVA**

Secrétaire exécutive de la Convention
du Conseil de l'Europe sur la lutte
contre la traite des êtres humains

Conseil de l'Europe



Réponse des autorités belges au projet de rapport final du GRETA – 4^{ème} cycle d'évaluation

Les autorités belges tiennent à exprimer leurs remerciements au GRETA, et plus particulièrement à sa délégation — M. Thomas Ahlstrand, Mme Ulrike Haberl-Schwarz et Mme Parvine Ghadami — pour le sérieux et la rigueur du travail d'évaluation réalisé durant ce quatrième cycle. La visite organisée en novembre 2025, de même que les échanges directs avec l'ensemble des instances fédérales et fédérées, ont permis des discussions de fond, extrêmement constructives, sur les vulnérabilités liées à la traite des êtres humains et sur la réponse apportée par la Belgique.

Le pays tient aussi à souligner la fluidité de la coopération avec le GRETA tout au long du processus, qu'il s'agisse de documenter le questionnaire, de planifier la visite sur place ou d'assurer le suivi des échanges. Le projet de rapport, avec ses conclusions, ses points forts et ses recommandations, a été examiné avec la plus grande attention. Les autorités belges entendent analyser ces pistes de travail avec tout le soin nécessaire, dans le prolongement direct du dialogue constructif installé depuis plusieurs cycles maintenant.

À ce stade, les autorités belges souhaitent formuler les commentaires et précisions finales qui suivent sur des points ciblés du rapport :

Paragraphe 12 — Données disponibles sur les victimes formellement reconnues

L'affirmation selon laquelle il ne serait pas possible d'obtenir des chiffres sur la confirmation du statut de victime par les magistrats appelle une nuance. Une fois la victime formellement reconnue par le magistrat comme victime de traite (ou de forme aggravée de trafic), elle reçoit un certificat d'inscription au registre des étrangers de six mois, renouvelable jusqu'à l'issue de la procédure judiciaire, puis, en cas de condamnation, un titre de séjour à durée indéterminée. Ces titres sont enregistrés dans les bases de données de l'Office des étrangers, qui permettent donc en principe d'identifier les victimes formellement reconnues — contrairement à ce qu'affirme le paragraphe.

Par ailleurs, les centres d'accueil enregistrent tous les signalements de victimes présumées. Le problème est qu'une part significative de ces signalements sont des orientations faites par des non-

professionnels et que, dans un certain nombre de cas, après examen, ils concernent des personnes qui ne présentent aucune indication de traite.

Paragraphe 22 — Évaluation de la réforme en matière de prostitution

Le paragraphe semble indiquer que l'évaluation de l'impact de la réforme en matière de prostitution relèverait de la coordination interdépartementale. Les autorités belges signalent que ces évaluations ne relèvent ni du Bureau ni de la Cellule interdépartementale, et qu'aucun mandat n'a à ce stade été donné à ces instances pour y procéder (voir la réponse du 12/06/2026 au sujet des instances concernées par ces évaluations). Le sujet déborde par ailleurs largement de la seule question de la traite des êtres humains.

Paragraphe 25 — Campagne de sensibilisation des mineurs

Afin de répondre aux recommandations du Parlement en matière de prévention et en conformité avec les commentaires du GRETA, le SPF Justice, dans le cadre de ses missions de coordination, a reçu un budget ponctuel (2026) afin de mettre en place une campagne de sensibilisation à destination des mineurs, qui devrait principalement être relayée sur les réseaux sociaux. Le projet couvre tant la question de l'exploitation sexuelle des mineurs que celle de la traite des mineurs aux fins de criminalité forcée.

Paragraphe 40 — Représentativité de la visite du centre Fedasil de Gand

Les autorités belges tiennent à nuancer la dernière phrase de ce paragraphe. Si le constat dressé lors de la visite du centre Fedasil repose sur une observation directe, la réserve qui l'accompagne quant à la représentativité de ces conditions d'accueil dans d'autres centres n'est étayée par aucune donnée comparative ni par la mention d'autres visites effectuées dans ce cycle d'évaluation.

Paragraphe 46 — Formation du personnel de Fedasil

En réponse à l'observation du GRETA, les autorités belges précisent qu'un nouveau cycle de formation, porté par Fedasil et le Bureau de la Cellule interdépartementale TEH, sera organisé au mois d'octobre 2026. Ces journées, consacrées à la traite des êtres humains — l'une en français, l'autre en néerlandais — s'adressent aux personnes de référence TEH et au personnel des centres Fedasil ainsi qu'aux équipes des structures d'accueil (SAMU social, Caritas, Croix-Rouge, ILA, AGAJ, etc.).

Paragraphe 119 — Condition de rupture de contact avec les auteurs présumés

Les autorités belges partagent le constat du GRETA que la reprise de contact avec l'auteur présumé peut répondre à des dynamiques complexes — dépendance affective, lien familial, phénomène d'emprise (« loverboy ») — qui ne traduisent pas nécessairement un abandon du bénéfice de la protection recherchée. Dans la pratique, la condition de rupture de contact n'est pas appliquée de façon linéaire : elle fait l'objet d'une évaluation au cas par cas par le centre spécialisé et les autorités compétentes, la question déterminante n'étant pas le contact en tant que tel, mais le fait de savoir si

celui-ci compromet effectivement l'accompagnement mis en place et l'objectif de protection poursuivi par le délai de rétablissement et de réflexion.

Paragraphe 143 — Victimes exploitées à l'étranger

Les autorités belges souhaitent nuancer ce constat. S'il est exact qu'aucun texte n'organise formellement l'accès des victimes exploitées à l'étranger au mécanisme national d'orientation, il ne l'exclut pas non plus, dans la mesure où les instructions se réfèrent aux victimes de traite des êtres humains en général. Les réglementations n'excluent donc pas tout un signalement entre les structures d'accueil des demandeurs de protection internationale (par exemple) et les centres spécialisés dans le cas d'une personne dont on soupçonnerait qu'une exploitation ait eu lieu lors du parcours migratoire. Un centre Fedasil peut signaler une situation de victime présumée exploitée hors du territoire belge à un centre spécialisé, une concertation pouvant alors s'organiser sur la situation dans les limites inhérentes à un dossier pour lequel les faits ne relèvent pas de la compétence territoriale belge.

Paragraphe 144 — Victimes belges exploitées à l'étranger

Les autorités belges souhaitent apporter la nuance suivante : la circulaire multidisciplinaire du 23 décembre 2016 prévoit explicitement que les victimes de nationalité belge doivent elles aussi être orientées vers un centre d'accueil spécialisé pour bénéficier d'un accompagnement. La difficulté ne réside donc pas dans une exclusion de principe, mais dans un problème de signalement effectif : ces victimes ne se manifestent pas spontanément auprès des autorités belges à leur retour, et ne sont pas systématiquement mises en relation avec un centre d'accueil lors d'un retour organisé depuis l'étranger. Ce constat est renforcé par le fait qu'une part significative de ces victimes est exploitée dans des pays limitrophes, ce qui permet un retour en Belgique sans qu'aucune instance belge n'ait jamais été informée de la situation — contrairement aux cas de rapatriement organisé via l'OIM, où un minimum de coordination existe. Les autorités belges relèvent à cet égard que la directive (UE) 2024/1712 impose la mise en place d'un point de contact centralisé pour ce type de situations, ce qui devrait améliorer la détection. Elles soulignent toutefois que l'efficacité d'un tel point de contact restera nécessairement tributaire de l'information communiquée par les autres États membres ou par les victimes elles-mêmes, la Belgique ne pouvant détecter ce qui ne lui est jamais signalé.

Paragraphe 145 — Révision de la circulaire multidisciplinaire et lecture de l'article 12 de la Convention

Les autorités belges informent le GRETA que la nouvelle version de la circulaire multidisciplinaire est désormais finalisée et est prête pour signature. Elle renforce notamment le mécanisme d'orientation applicable aux mineurs. Les autorités belges relèvent toutefois que la transposition prochaine de la directive (UE) 2024/1712 impliquera vraisemblablement de nouveaux ajustements de ce texte à brève échéance — une situation peu satisfaisante du point de vue de la stabilité du dispositif pour les praticiens de terrain, alors même que la circulaire vient tout juste d'être actualisée ; raisons pour laquelle il est possible que la signature finale n'aura lieu qu'une fois la législation modifiée.

S'agissant du premier point, les autorités belges maintiennent une réserve quant à la lecture faite par le GRETA de l'article 12 de la Convention au regard de la législation belge. Le modèle belge ne

conditionne pas l'assistance de base à la coopération à la procédure pénale : la circulaire prévoit expressément que la condition de coopération ne s'applique pas durant la période de réflexion de 45 jours, l'hébergement, l'accompagnement psychosocial et l'accès à un centre spécialisé étant garantis dès l'identification comme victime présumée, conformément aux articles 12§6 et 13 de la Convention. La condition de rupture de contact avec les auteurs présumés, il est vrai en revanche, s'applique dès cette première phase, au même titre que l'accompagnement par un centre spécialisé (ce qui est logique). Les autorités belges soulignent toutefois que la condition de rupture de contact n'est pas appliquée de façon aveugle : son évaluation se fait au cas par cas, en tenant compte des situations de dépendance ou d'emprise (loverboy, traite intrafamiliale) qui peuvent expliquer une reprise de contact, la question déterminante étant de savoir si celle-ci compromet effectivement l'accompagnement mis en place et l'objectif de protection poursuivi par l'article 13. Ce n'est qu'au stade ultérieur du maintien et du renouvellement du titre de séjour que la coopération proprement dite devient une condition à part entière, ce que l'article 14§1(b) de la Convention reconnaît lui-même comme un fondement légitime.

Paragraphe 167 — Formation des magistrats stagiaires

Concernant ces recommandations, les autorités belges indiquent que depuis 2026, l'Institut de formation judiciaire, à la demande du Bureau de la Cellule interdépartementale de coordination de la lutte contre la TTEH, a mis en place une formation annuelle obligatoire sur la traite des êtres humains pour les magistrats stagiaires, quelle que soit leur orientation future dans l'appareil judiciaire.

Paragraphe 184 — Incrimination de l'utilisation des services d'une victime

Les autorités belges indiquent qu'une disposition visant à sanctionner le client d'un service qui savait ou aurait dû savoir que ce service était fourni par une victime de traite est bien prévue dans l'avant-projet de loi transposant la directive européenne de 2024. La disposition vaut pour les différentes formes d'exploitation et ne se limite pas à l'exploitation sexuelle, en conformité avec la perspective de la directive de l'UE.

Paragraphes 198 à 205 — Aide juridictionnelle gratuite

Concernant la proposition de loi dont il est question, l'orientation envisagée ne paraît pas aller dans le sens de l'ajout de nouvelles présomptions à ce stade.

S'agissant du paragraphe 202, une précision d'ordre technique peut être apportée sans préjudice de la position exprimée par ailleurs au paragraphe 152 quant au système de permanence en cours de discussion. Les indemnités dues aux avocats pour les prestations accomplies dans le cadre de l'aide juridictionnelle de deuxième ligne sont prises en charge par l'État sur la base d'un rapport de clôture, soumis au contrôle du bureau d'aide juridique et des ordres d'avocats. Leur versement n'est donc pas subordonné, en principe, à la récupération préalable des frais auprès de la partie adverse — ce qui nuance l'affirmation selon laquelle ce mécanisme expliquerait la réticence des avocats à accepter des dossiers de traite.

Paragraphe 213 — Nature de l'aide accordée par la Commission pour l'aide financière aux victimes

Les autorités belges souhaitent préciser, à propos de la Commission pour l'aide aux victimes d'actes intentionnels de violence, que celle-ci octroie une aide financière aux victimes, souvent en équité, mais qu'elle n'assure pas, à proprement parler, l'indemnisation de celles-ci. Le texte du rapport fait parfois référence à une « indemnisation », alors qu'il s'agit, dans les faits, d'une aide financière accordée aux victimes.

Par ailleurs, tenant compte des observations du GRETA et du Parlement, les autorités belges souhaitent indiquer que la Commission organisera à l'automne 2026 une réunion avec les présidents de ses chambres afin de discuter de l'aide financière apportée aux victimes de la traite des êtres humains et de favoriser le développement d'une jurisprudence uniforme entre les différentes chambres en la matière.

En conclusion, les autorités belges tiennent à réaffirmer leur volonté de poursuivre le dialogue engagé avec le GRETA et à le tenir informé des développements à venir, notamment de la signature de la circulaire multidisciplinaire révisée et de l'adoption du nouveau plan d'action national de lutte contre la traite des êtres humains.

Nom du collaborateur

Fonction du collaborateur

Annexes

 Enumérez ici vos annexes.