

#TimesUp for sex buyers, pimps and traffickers

Urgent call on Government to implement laws to tackle Ireland's violent sex trade

In launching its [Annual Report for 2017](#) today, [Ruhama](#), Ireland's only dedicated national frontline service for those **affected by prostitution and sex trafficking**, reveals that they **supported 304 women, transgender people and men during the last year alone**. The organisation says that more must be done to address the serious harms of Ireland's commercial sex trade.

In 2017 Ruhama provided wide ranging, individually tailored supports to **39 different nationalities** from across the globe, including **109 victims of sex trafficking** from four continents. The vast majority of those seeking support were women, reflecting the highly gendered nature of the sex trade. During 2017 victims and survivors of prostitution in Ireland and across the world called for inclusion in the **#MeToo movement**, given that prostitution and trafficking constitute some of the worst forms of sexual harassment and abuse of women and girls in existence.

Sarah Benson, CEO of Ruhama, said: "The critical need for dedicated support services for those affected by prostitution and trafficking is highlighted not just by the demand for our services – with over **3000 face-to-face meetings** and more than **23,000 telephone contacts** undertaken last year by our frontline team – but also through the human stories of the women themselves. The women we support face many challenging life circumstances and lack of opportunities that are so often causal factors for women's vulnerability to entering prostitution or being trafficked in the first place. These vulnerabilities are compounded by **levels of violence and exploitation** experienced within the Irish sex trade that many would find hard to even imagine."

Sarah Benson continued: "Women tell us of many incidences of physical violence, rape and sexual assault, which they have experienced at the hands of **sex buyers, pimps, traffickers and opportunistic criminals** alike. The long-term physical and psychological consequences of such attacks cannot be underestimated. Yet every day we are struck by women's capacity to overcome trauma, to assert their human rights, and to fight for justice. In 2017, we supported **dozens of women** to formally report crimes committed against them to An Garda Síochána, and a number of others to more informally share information about assaults and other offences against them.

Sarah Benson added: "These women took this brave step because they wished to see the perpetrators held accountable and to protect others who are similarly vulnerable within a very violent trade. Tackling this harm was a key objective of new sexual offences legislation that came into force in March of 2017. It was designed to erode Ireland's sex trade by criminalising the purchase of sex, thereby reducing demand, while also decriminalising those in prostitution as vulnerable persons who should not be criminally targeted. We are deeply disappointed that **no convictions against sex buyers** have been secured under this legislation to date. The law cannot therefore be said to have been fully implemented. This means that the trade continues to have a customer base operating with impunity, and therefore continues to thrive, as do the **organised criminal gangs** profiting from the sexual exploitation of women.

Sarah Benson concluded: "While Ruhama welcomes the increased efforts being made by some Garda units to support those in prostitution to safely report crimes against them, this is not enough.

We need swift and decisive action from An Garda Síochána to effectively target both sex buyers and prostitution organisers using this important legislation that they now have at their disposal. The Government must also raise public awareness that it is now a crime to purchase sex in Ireland.

Prostituted women are calling #TimesUp on those who exploit them, now it's time for the State to do the same.

- ENDS -

Ruhama urges anyone who finds themselves in a difficult situation in Ireland's sex trade, or who is concerned about someone they know, to contact them for support on (01) 836 0292, or text the word REACH for free to 50100.

Notes to editor

1. Download our **2017 Annual Report** and read the stories of women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking in Ireland here: <https://goo.gl/AYfzTB>
2. Since March of 2017 it has been illegal to pay for sex in Ireland under the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017*. No convictions have been secured to date.
3. Key statistics highlighting the demand for Ruhama's services during 2017:

Total number supported	304
Number	Type of support
62	Received street outreach support
943	Staff and volunteer hours of street outreach were delivered over 121 nights
244*	Received casework support, of whom:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 135 received general casework support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 109 received casework support as victims of trafficking
91	Accessed Ruhama's services for the first time, of whom:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 65 received general casework support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 received casework support as victims of trafficking
3,022	Face-to-face contacts**
10,615	Telephone contacts***
13,406	SMS contacts***
50	Benefited from our dedicated Housing & Welfare service
81	Received Education & Development support
	* 2 service users accessed both street outreach and casework support
	** This includes face-to-face contacts provided via casework, street outreach and

	<i>our Education and Development Programme</i>
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**** Phone contacts to and on behalf of service users*

Media contacts:

Ruth Breslin, Ruhama Policy and Communications Manager: 086 259 1247

Sarah Benson, Ruhama CEO: 086 600 3115

About Ruhama

[Ruhama](#) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a registered charity, which works on a nationwide basis with women, including transgender women, affected by prostitution and sex trafficking. Ruhama offers **free and confidential** support and assistance to women who:

- Are actively involved in prostitution
- Are seeking to exit (leave) prostitution
- Are victims of sex trafficking
- Have a past experience of prostitution/sex trafficking.

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Ruhama
25 Cork Street
Dublin 8.

Tel: +353 1 836 0292

Website: www.ruhama.ie

Facebook: www.facebook.com/RuhamaIreland

Twitter: [@Ruhamaagency](https://twitter.com/Ruhamaagency)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ruhama>