

# INTRODUCTION

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Myria is the title of Myria's 2019 annual report on the trafficking and smuggling of human beings. As the Belgian independent rapporteur on human trafficking, Myria fulfils its legal mandate by compiling an independent and public report.

The fight against human trafficking and smuggling is assessed and the phenomena are examined in detail.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Belgium embarked on the fight against human trafficking. It has played a pioneering role. Innovative fieldwork with exploited sex workers, a landmark book by a passionate investigative journalist, the commitment of the Royal Family and the well-structured work of a parliamentary committee of inquiry undeniably played a role in creating this impetus.

There have been numerous occasions – and there will be more in the coming years – to review a quarter century of fighting human trafficking. But if we look at what is happening around us, it is clear that this fight is threatened by stagnation.

Several factors explain this situation. The fight against human trafficking is no longer really a priority. The specialised centres for victims have been fighting in vain for many years to obtain structural funding and the various stakeholders – either together or separately – haven't succeeded in developing an overall picture of the phenomenon of human trafficking.

For the past ten years or so, this annual report has been gathering key figures from the six stakeholders. The data is reliable and offers a relatively faithful picture of the evolution of the official response to the phenomenon, but that is all. What you see, is what we get. Myria is often questioned about the indications and data concerning many at-risk groups and phenomena in the context of human trafficking, but it is generally difficult to give an answer.

The development of comparable data, and the expansion and intensification of the analytical capacity to better grasp and interpret the phenomenon of human trafficking are major challenges, without being a priority on today's political agenda.

To the extent possible, Myria aims to provide an accurate image of the phenomena of human trafficking and smuggling, thanks to the unique and proven manner in which this report is constructed.

It involves a combination of three work methods:

- Myria is constantly listening to what is happening in practice, to the men and women who lead the battle every day;
- Myria carefully examines every case for which it is involved in judicial proceedings;
- Myria follows the development of the legal instruments with a critical and very attentive eye. This is the keystone.

This approach leads us to focus once again on the issue of victims. Myria endeavours to demonstrate to what extent the right to legal assistance, participation in criminal proceedings and the right to protection are closely linked. The battle for justice for victims is far from won.

For those who wish to have an idea of how human trafficking works and the implications of an approach that protects, helps and delivers justice to the victims, please refer to the case mentioned on page 74 of this annual report. It concerns a case of labour exploitation in a pallet company and covers all the aspects: the obligation to provide information, the role of victim support centres, participation in criminal proceedings, the right to protection and compensation, as well as the time factor. All in all, a long and complex procedure that must also empower victims.

And it is precisely this empowerment of victims that Myria wishes to contribute to through this annual report.

I wish you a stimulating and enlightening read,

*Koen Dewulf,*  
Acting director